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Cultural Liminality and the Construction of a Space-other in Salman Rushdie's "The Courter"

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Abstract

The Courter, a story from the *East, West* collection (1994) by Anglo-Indian writer Salman Rushdie, problematizes the paradox of both divided and fused migrant identity. The story fictionalizes various cultural misunderstandings, clashes among individuals from different cultures, the stereotyping of migrants (particularly Indian) by the dominant culture, hybridity and negotiations of meanings. The objective of this work is to describe and characterize such cultural dynamics in The Courter through certain constructs proposed by the Indian critic Homi Bhabha, such as hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence and cultural difference. From the analysis carried out, we observe that hybridity, cultural contamination, mixture and difference appear in The Courter in a symbolic key through the game that is established with language. In addition, the migrant characters imitate the English culture and this translation is materialized through cultural intertexts that provide them with alternative frames of reference from which their experiences find meaning. English society is represented as being ordered on the basis of a homogeneous,

dominant, host society that "accommodates" other cultures while it is the diasporic identities that destabilize the achieved socio-cultural order. The story then proposes a space-Other, a third, liminal space in which identities are recreated to give rise to something totally new and hybrid.

Keywords: The Courter- cultural difference-third space

Introduction

Since the last decades of the XX century, a tendency towards hybridization (probably innate to the human condition) has been growing and it has transcended the realm of rhetorical enunciation to the point of permeating almost every stratum of culture. In the field of literature, this process of mixing has contributed to generating a real boom of fictions about migrations and displacements, characterized not only by a transformation in the attitudes of the social and ethnic sectors from which it originates, but also by

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significant changes in the same social, cultural and linguistic structures. This type of literature has become a rallying point for thinking about culture as a construct in constant transformation, and its characteristic elements, as well as its characters, challenge, through their marginality, the hegemonic power of the center, being, at the same time, symbolic edges of that center.

Immigrants, exiles, displaced individuals, for whatever reason, move in time and space between points of departure and arrival and modify in that displacement not only the space they leave but also the space they reach. New spaces of socio-cultural encounter are then created, in which negotiation and confrontation are inevitable, and in which new social relations -fundamentally, power relations-between the social actors who move in those spaces are shaped.

Many post-colonial writers have been interested in the theme of the new spaces of agency that arise from the encounter between cultures; liminal spaces characterized by hybridization and a high degree of immeasurability (Bhabha, 2002). A clear example is the Anglo-Indian writer Salman Rushdie, who in his fictions explores the hybridization of cultural discourses and the rupture of the traditional representation of culture as a homogeneous and rigid unit. In 1994 Rushdie writes *East, West*, an anthology of short stories which is

divided into three main sections: "East", "West", and "East, West". Each section contains stories from their respective geographical areas, while in the "East, West" segment both worlds are influenced by each other. It is to this last section that *The Courter* belongs, a fictionalization of the reality lived in England by immigrants - mainly from the Indian diaspora- inserted into a cultural world strongly determined by a historical colonial trajectory of relations. What kind of cultural space is envisioned in such a story? In what way are diasporic identities constructed in a cultural space that is not the one of origin? Is the dominant culture permeable, does it give rise to the incorporation and emergence of the new? These are some of the questions that drive this analysis, whose main objective is to describe and understand the cultural dynamics and the new spaces of agency and interaction between natives and migrants fictionalized in the short story *The Courter* (Rushdie, 1999).

To answer the questions raised, an interpretative methodological logic is proposed that is based on a hermeneutic and socio-critical paradigm. This paradigm, understood as a type of discourse that privileges the social dimension of texts, their historical weight, and their cultural and ideological significance, allows us to explore the dynamism between the texts and the production of sense of the social that crosses them. This implies working in

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two different but complementary directions: from society as a condition of production, to the literary work, and from the latter, as a second, parallel universe, to society, thus generating a flexibility of analysis forward and backward between the text and its universe of production. In this sense, the literary work is presented in itself as an aesthetic, transdisciplinary and sociodiscursive object that gives an account of the dialogical condition underlying discourse.

For the theorization of the analysis of *The Courter* we propose some epistemic categories outlined by post-colonial critic Homi Bhabha, namely hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence and cultural difference. In addition, we frame the hermeneutics of *The Courter* by taking as a starting point a brief synthesis of the British Raj and the migrations from India to Great Britain, as well as of the emergence of a literature of resistance or counter-colonial writing.

The British Raj: Indian Domination and Migration to Britain

Westernist attempts to colonise India began with the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498. Although they managed to occupy and colonize only Goa, Daman and Diu, they imposed themselves during the 16th century as staunch monopolizers of the spice trade. The Portuguese occupation was then followed by attempts from the Netherlands and then

in the seventeenth century, both France and the British Empire began to compete for the colonization of the Southeast Asian country (Preciado Solís, n/d). Finally, around 1757 England took over almost all of the Indian territory which was controlled through the so-called "British East India Company". Later (in 1876) Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India and thus the British Raj began, that is, the direct colonial rule of the British crown over India (O'Reilly, 2004).

Indian culture was subsumed under a political, economic, social, cultural and ethnic transformation imposed by the British Empire, which transformed the order, structure and intrinsic elements that had sustained this millenary society. With the aim of imposing a market economy, the Indian peasant system organized in villages was dismantled by the British Company (Gutman, 2009). Activities that had been fundamental to Indian economy such as handicraft development, the textile industry, and food crops were replaced by plantation crops (cotton, jute) that English industry demanded from the continent. The British Raj also introduced western medicine, displacing Indian epistemologies and ancestral knowledge, such as the Ayurveda medicine of more than 3000 years old (Gutman, 2009). The British Macaulinist educational system was also imposed, which aimed at the "civilization of the natives" through the imposition of the English language, the British literary

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and cultural canon, European history and the Western values of the Enlightenment.

The British Empire focused much of its cultural and symbolic ruling efforts on the Anglicanization of the Indian education system. A large number of schools and universities were established; institutions that –following British standards and the curricula set by Oxford and Cambridge– trained a large percentage of Indian citizens in the liberal arts and laws. In this way, the empire ensured that the public administration was occupied by natives who met British criteria that are, culturally mimicked in terms of Bhabha (2002). Lord Macaulay sought nothing more than to conform a class of people Indian by blood and colour, but English by taste, opinion, morals and intellect (Bhabha, 2002, p. 113). According to Anderson (1991), the deception of Macaulinism was due to the opportunities of social ascent that this system offered the natives, since it allowed them to be part of the empire as teachers, officials, journalists, lawyers, doctors etc., at the cost of the annihilation and Anglicanization of their Indian identity. This system also became the starting point for the migration of the native population throughout the imperial domains as subjects "qualified" by the British Raj.

The first immigrants from India to Britain from the 18th century onwards were crew members working on the ships of the British East India Company (Metcalf,

2003). There were also domestic servants, nannies, teachers and ayahs who accompanied their employing British families when they returned to the United Kingdom. In many cases, Anglo citizens who married Indian women sent their "mixed-race" children to England without their mothers to be educated there (Gutman, 2009). Indian families of the wealthy elite also sent their children to the prestigious English colleges and universities. During the 19th and 20th centuries migration continued, especially after World War II, as Indian workers were recruited to fill the labour shortage caused by the war. Today, the Indian diaspora has become one of the largest ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom.

Indian Counter-Colonial Literature: The Empire Writes Back

The resistance to imperial power and the construction of new national identities by the ex-British colonies produced and continues to produce a large number of literary texts and fictions. Between 1836 and 1921 there was a series of uprisings by the Indian population (especially Muslim sectors) who demonstrated against British imperialism. However, the suffering and discontent of India was materialized not only through popular revolts, but also through discourse (Gupta, 2003). Journalism and literature became vehicles of demand, protest and denunciation of the British imperialist

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violence. Literature channeled the point of view of its fictions into the construction of narrators and characters inspired by the weakest subjects of the imperialist system, "the others" who were silenced and excluded from the hegemonic discourse: peasants, railway workers, domestic servants, etc. An example of this resistance literature is the play *Nil Darpan* (1860) by the Bengali playwright Dinabandhu Mitra. This play dramatizes the 1859 Indigo Revolt in which Bengali peasants refused to harvest their indigo fields as a form of protest against the exploitative agriculture of the British Raj. Another example of such protest literature, but which is closer to the period of Indian pre-independence, is the novel *Untouchable* (1935) by Mulk Raj Anand. The plot revolves around the double oppression suffered by the lower castes called "untouchables" (outcasts) at the hands of the upper castes and the British colonizers. It was a revolutionary novel that spoke out against both European imperialism and the Indian landowning class in collusion with the British political power.

Once India became politically independent from the United Kingdom in 1947, after almost three painful centuries of domination, the Southeast Asian country began a process of liberation also in the cultural field. New writers emerged who were trying to break free from the colonial yoke and whose intention was to explore their own sense of cultural identity.

According to Mexican theorist Anaya Ferreira (2001):

[...] they are people who write in English, but who are neither English nor American. They come from countries that were part of the British Empire and, more recently, the Commonwealth of Nations, although they no longer accept being included in that classification. They are descendants of ancestral cultures, but delegitimized by imperial authority and virtually destroyed. (p. 11)¹

Indian writer Salman Rushdie coined the phrase *The Empire writes back* (1982) to refer to the literature produced by the British colonies both during the colonial yoke and after the periods of emancipation. The semantic and ideological impact of this phrase is given, on the one hand, by the mentioning of the political and economic dimension of the historical phenomenon of imperialism ("The Empire"), and on the other hand, by the inclusion of the textual and discursive dimension ("writes back") that instituted one of the most effective tools for the repression of the colonized countries.

Both from India and from its diaspora, fiction and literary criticism

¹ Author's translation.

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writers have begun to question the cultural, political and moral primacy of Western civilization and the discursive practices formulated from the academic, scientific and literary spheres of Europe and the United States over the rest of the non-Western world. Theorists like Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Amit Chaudhuri and fiction writers like Rasipuram Narayan, Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Arundathi Roy –among others- are some of those who stand out in the arena of Anglo-Indian literature.

Identity and Encounter among Cultures: Some Key Concepts in Homi Bhabha's Theory

The Courter is a story in which there are various cultural misunderstandings, clashes between subjects from different cultures, stereotyping of migrants by the dominant culture, hybridizations and negotiations of meanings. In order to understand such cultural dynamics, we resort to certain concepts proposed by the Indian critic Homi Bhabha, such as hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence and cultural difference.

The notion of hybridity is profusely developed by Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994, 2002) and it implies new forms of subjective construction originated from the colonial encounter, difficult to classify in a single and closed cultural, political or ethnic

category. According to Bhabha (2002), from the encounter between colonizing and colonized, the cultural hybridity would be the most direct and clear effect of the confluence, within that new space of agency, of the ambivalence of colonial discourse and of its inherent mimicry.

Ambivalence is the denial and rejection of difference, but at the same time it constitutes in itself a recognition of it. In order to be able to reject the Other, it is necessary to recognize his existence as different. The identity of both the European and the oppressed native is crossed by ambivalence alternating fantasy and repulsion, aggressiveness and narcissism, desire and hate. For Bhabha (2002), the first protocol to consider in relation to the ambivalence of colonial discourse is the rigidity of the representation of the different Other; immutability that he calls "fixity" or "stereotype". The colonizing identity overcomes the difference of the Other through the use of fixed and immutable stereotypes: a fixed idea (the Other as wild, violent, uncivilized, exotic) that justifies its domination and submission. The stereotype appears in the colonial discourse as a way of configuring subjective identity from ambivalence, denying and recognizing the differences of otherness. It is a mechanism to control and dominate the heterogeneity of the Others.

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The second aspect that Bhabha (2002) highlights of ambivalence is mimicry. Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other as the subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not exactly the same (Bhabha, p. 112). It emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of renegation. Mimicry is then the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which appropriates the Other (Bhabha, p. 112). It is therefore another tool of domination to make the colonized subject similar to the colonizer, who accepts the new imposed customs and does not resist assimilation. However, the mimic native is never a faithful representation of the colonizer; he is similar, but never an identical copy, he is an imitation, a camouflage. It is again the ambivalence of "not being exactly white" (Bhabha, p. 114). Mimicry strips the colonial subject of his identity and provides him with only a few elements of the dominant culture that give him a certain functionality, but does not allow him to become independent.

Bhabha (1990) sees culture as the defining element of identities. The idea of cultural hybridity denies the essentialism of a culture and assumes that all cultures are in a continuous process of change. Hybridity is a "third space" that allows for the emergence and acceptance of other cultural possibilities. Therefore, the third space is a

liminal zone in which cultures meet, interact and hybridize: an interstitial and productive space, of the construction of culture as difference in the spirit of otherness (Bhabha, 1990, p. 211). The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable; a new territory of negotiation of meanings and representations.

The processes of change and negotiation between cultures are possible from the conception of "difference" and not of cultural "diversity" (Bhabha, 1990, p. 207). Many of the democratic and pluralistic societies promote their interest in encouraging and nurturing cultural diversity. However, such societies end up becoming ambivalent essentialist traps, that is, on the one hand they promote diversity, but on the other, they "contain" it. Diversity is then accommodated within the rigid framework of the dominant culture; within an essentialist grid that encloses, dominates and represses difference. The universalism that paradoxically allows diversity masks ethnocentric norms, interests and values (Bhabha, p. 208). Cultural difference implies that difference among cultures cannot be accommodated within a Universalist framework. Different cultures, the difference between cultural practices, the difference in the construction of cultures within diverse groups, give rise to a certain incommensurability that can only

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occur in a third space that makes hybridity possible.

Thematization of the Indian Diaspora in Salman Rushdie's *The Courter*

One of the critical aspects of migration is the issue of the identity - especially cultural- of migrants. In diasporic processes, there occur socio-political and cultural changes that affect the movement of individuals from their place of origin to the new space of exile. These processes and changes involve uprooting, translation and the mixing of cultures, ethnicities, religions and languages. "The space inhabited by migrants also involves a new conceptualization between here and there" (Mardorossian, 2002, p. 16). Likewise, due to their displacement, the identity of migrants suffers transformations that modify their self-perception and result in an ambivalence between their past and their present.

The construction of the cultural identity of Indian migrants in England is one of the issues that Salman Rushdie is concerned with, and which he captures in the short story *The Courter*. This story belongs to the collection *East, West* (1994) and it problematizes the paradox of the migrant identity both divided and merged. It is a story of displacement, of migrants, of cultures that clash and mingle. It is possible to detect in the narrative a "third space", in which hybridity is the core that challenges

monolithic and dichotomous values of culture and identity. Through this space, the story challenges the cultural homogeneity of both the diaspora and the host culture. It also explores how racism and xenophobia arise from societies that preach cultural diversity and mask ethnocentric norms.

The story takes place in London in the early 1960s. It is told from the perspective of an Indian teenager who was sent to a boarding school in the United Kingdom. The now-adult narrator recalls the time during the 1960s when his family (his parents, his three sisters and his ayah) joined him in London and he lived with them at Waverley House. The story explores the microcosm of immigrants at Waverley House, where two Indian maharajahs also live, and the porter, who has migrated from a Slavic country.

In the foreground is the love story between the porter and the narrator's ayah, Mary, who because of her Indian accent cannot pronounce the "p's" and replaces them with "c's". In this way, he transforms the name "porter" into "courter". Both Mary and the porter have to deal with their dislocation, being separated from their respective homes and living in an environment where they have trouble finding their place, which is constantly articulated through language and language barriers. Still, they find a way to communicate with each other through the

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game of chess. The Courter is also the story of the narrator himself, which is intertwined with the love affair of his ayah. The narrator tells us how he deals with his immigrant status, as he feels he belongs neither to India nor to Britain, and how he faces his situation as a hybrid individual.

Textualization of Migrant Identities in Rushdie's fiction

Rushdie's short story *The Courter* fictionalizes the reality of migrants in England who belong to the Indian diaspora, and it questions cultural homogeneity and essentialism, affirming the possibility of an identity that is not homogeneous but mixed, impure and juxtaposed. This challenge can be understood if analyzed from the categories of hybridity, mimicry, cultural difference and third space proposed by Bhabha (1990, 2002).

Hybridity, cultural contamination, mixture and difference appear in *The Courter* as symbolic keys through a sort of game that is established with language. Language is the main site of hybridity and change that is materialized through linguistic creativity in relation to names and nicknames, the mixture of languages (English, Hindi) and the conflicts of the characters with Standard English.

The creation of names, the invention of nicknames, the generation of new words, the association of meanings are all mechanisms that creatively attack the absolutism of the pure and that celebrate

linguistic carnival and hybridization. The ayah calls the porter a "courter" and thus establishes a phonetic and semantic interplay between the terms "porter" and "courtier" through which his identity is transformed: he becomes a doorman that courts the ayah. Likewise, the Slavic porter also resignifies the ayah's name, Mary, which metamorphoses into *Certainly-Mary*, as she always holds the white, red-rimmed sari in front of her and nods with the adverb "certainly". Besides, the porter, who is a Slavic immigrant, is nicknamed "Mixed-up" by Indian children because his real name -Mecir, pronounced "Mishirsh"- "[is] so full of communist consonants, all those double z's and u's walled up together, with no vowels to leave them breathing space" (Rushdie, 1999, p. 152). *Scheherazade*, the name of the narrator's little sister, is derisively transformed into "Scare-zade" by her brothers; the name of the family's old friend, Sir Charles Lutwidge-Dogson (a symbolic name in the British literary canon) is reinterpreted and transformed into "Dodo". Thus, new and unexpected ways of calling and representing the Other emerge from the encounter between the different migrant characters, immersed in a new space of cultural agency. The new names transform and hybridize the identities giving rise to something new.

Linguistic hybridization also seems to be linked to the emergence of new spaces and areas of negotiation of meanings, which

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become unstable, provisional and negotiable. The porter uses the word *ghats* (mountain in Hindi) to describe the stairs as he helps Mary to climb them. The ayah makes it clear that *ghats* also means stairs in her language, as they are a metaphor for mountains. Thus, through their semantic association, the Slavic porter is able to see the world as the Indians represent it through the Hindi language. The name of the narrator's cousin, Chandni, becomes provisional according to the cultural context. When the girl is with her family, she is called by her Indian name "Chandni", but with her English friends she responds to the equivalent or translation "Moonlight". Perhaps the clearest example of hybridity in the story is the presence of the English language reformed, recreated and mixed with other migrant languages:

- "Hai! Allah-tobah!" - cried my mother fussing. "Who hit you? Are you injured? (Rushdie, 1999, p. 183)

- "Khali-pili bommarta!", she objected, and then, for her host's benefit she translated: "For nothing he is shouting, shouting. Bad life! Switch it off!" (Rushdie, 1999, p.189).

- "It is like an adventure baba". - Mary once tried to explain to me. "It is like going with him to his country you know. What a place, baapré!" (Rushdie, 1999, p. 195).

-I, to see Miss Mary, come, am" - said Mixed-up (Rushdie, 1999, p. 184).

New words, syntactic alterations, semantic modifications and code switching are some of the strategies that Rushdie embodies in the language of his migrant characters. The linguistic habits of Hindi appear juxtaposed with English and generate a new form of communication and a new linguistic-cultural reality. These new codes, however, do not find a place within the dominant culture but appear culturally and linguistically orphaned (they are neither Indian nor English), placing themselves in a third space of enunciation.

In addition to representing hybrid linguistic identities, The courter crystallizes the characteristic mimicry of colonial discourse. This protocol is fictionalized as an ambivalent process that hybridizes the hegemonic culture. The characters, who have moved from their native place, imitate the "original" English culture, which is problematized and decentralized, by creating something new. The original culture is presented as incomplete and open to "translation" -in terms of Bhabha (2002)-, that is, the essentialism of the hegemonic culture is weakened by the fact that it can be simulated, imitated, parodied, transformed, turned into simulacrum and cannibalized by an Other-culture that contradicts its authority. In the story, the

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migrant characters imitate the English culture and this translation is materialized in cultural intertexts that provide them with alternative frames of reference from which their experiences find meaning. Such is the case of the teenage narrator who tries to deal with his emotional frustrations in falling in love with a Polish immigrant, through a repertoire of 1960s pop songs that includes Elvis Presley and The Beatles. Or the love affair between Mixed-up and Certainly-Mary that is shaped by the game of chess, metamorphosing from its traditional formalization of war into the symbolic language of love. Likewise, Chandni finds a way to relate to her English friends through the adoption of Western clothes (jeans and sneakers), but at the same time she links to her ancestral roots by taking classes in Indian classical dance. The ayah's nostalgia for its distant India and her Christian Goa² is tempered by the traditional English Christmas celebration in the narrator's family, with the classic tree and carols in Latin: "It was so strange to see a Christmas tree in our house that I realized things must be pretty serious" (Rushdie, 1999, p. 162). These intertexts show that the "original culture" is never finite and pure in itself and that, on the contrary, there are immeasurable forms of cultural translation that encapsulate its difference, take away its power and make it unstable.

²Goan Catholics are Catholics from the former Portuguese colony of Goa, a region on the west coast of India.

On the other hand, The Courter represents an English society ordered on the basis of a homogeneous, dominant, host culture that "accommodates" other cultures. It is the diasporic identities that destabilize the "achieved order"; an order that is based on the accommodation of a supposed cultural diversity but that masks ethnocentric norms and xenophobic values. The English characters in the story, identified as "first Beatle" and "second Beatle", represent what they perceive as essentially British: they dress like the Beatles and speak Standard English. These characters reject the cultural difference personified by Certainly-Mary and Mixed-up, who dress differently, speak "impure" English and have split identities. The Beatles characters, through violence rooted in cultural purity, attempt to restrict the entry of migrants into their society to make it one-dimensional. The rhetoric they use to address the ayah and its Indian employer³ is based on the fixity and stereotype that Bhabha (2002) consider as strategies of the colonial discourse to justify the submission and denial of the difference of the Other:

—"Fucking wogs" —he said—. "You fucking come over here, you don't fucking know how to fucking behave. Why don't you fucking fuck off to

³Both women are confused as being the wives of the Indian maharajas who live in their same building and who are engaged in prostitution.

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fucking Woginstan? Fuck your fucking wogarses. Now then” –he adds in a wuite voice, holding up the knife- “unbutton your blouses”. (Rushdie, 1999, p. 164)

Although the above-mentioned xenophobic incident arises from a case of mistaken identities, the Beatles characters do not consider that there is any confusion at all. This is because they assume that all Indian immigrants are the same (wogs), and that they all behave similarly. The fixation instituted by these characters might be rooted in the belief that immigrants constitute social errors, therefore justifying any kind of mistreatment or attempt of elimination. One of the Beatles holds a knife with which he threatens the Indian women and with which he finally stabs Mixed-up while trying to defend them. The violent stabbing, considered as "an honest mistake" (Rushdie, 1999, p.165) by the Beatles, symbolizes their feelings of superiority and their longing for cultural homogeneity. Furthermore, it suggests "a declaration of their desire to incorporate them into a new kind of empire, a domestic colony, in which immigrants remain subordinate" (Walkowitz, 2006, p.134). Ironically, it is Mixed-up who, with his "broken" English and identity, saves the Indian women, thus embodying the positive aspects of the peaceful message conveyed by the Beatles as a cultural symbol, and

whose philosophy rejected violence and embraced ethno-racial harmony.

The story then proposes a "third space" where identities are recreated to give rise to something totally new, but which is finally annihilated by the host society which does not admit true cultural difference. After the violent incident, the cultural blends and the hybrid language that brighten up the narrative at the beginning, and which figuratively originate in a Third Space, fade away and give rise to a melancholic, hopeless and confusing atmosphere. The ayah returns to Bombay, the Slavic porter disappears, the narrator's Indian family moves to Pakistan. The migrant community that had been created through the hybrid games of language and culture vanishes. However, the narrator's divided identity remains in a liminal positionality that he refuses to relinquish. Born in India, but having migrated during his childhood to England, the narrator feels identified with both cultures. The parliament that closes the story -and also the collection *East, West* (Rushdie, 1999)- becomes a statement of in-between identities:

And the Passport did, in many ways, set me free. It allowed me to come and go, to make choices that were not the ones my father would have wished. But I, too, have ropes around my neck, I have them to this day, pulling me this way and that, East and

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West, the nooses tightening, commanding, *choose, choose.*

I buck, I snort, I whinny, I rear, I kick. Ropes, I do not choose between you. Lassoos, lariats, I choose neither of you, and both. Do you hear? I refuse to choose. (p. 167)

The narrator decides not to choose between East and West; he chooses to remain in an area between the two, in a third space, in which hybridity, cross-breeding and cultural juxtaposition constitute new identities. Through his "impure" identity, the narrator celebrates the erosion of limits and definitions, and in doing so, necessarily rejects the purity of "dogmatic truths that threaten to confine the individual within uniform and totalizing categories" (Sánchez and Carazo, 2004, p. 5).

Final considerations

India's diasporic identities have been shaped by a social, political and cultural history marked by a long-standing colonial experience. The strategy of the British Raj was to produce Anglicanized subjects, culturally mimicked to be like the English, but not completely English. This cultural and identity schism caused by the colonial regime has become a constituting part of Indian identities. Since the 18th century, the eastern bodies that moved from India to Great Britain have had this split inscribed in their cultural fabric. By settling in a new exilic space, feelings of nostalgia,

of not belonging, or of belonging here and there, have caused new fragmentations in identities. Likewise, identity conflicts began to be different for the various diasporic generations, that is, both for migrants at different historical moments and for the children of migrants born on English territory.

Narratives of displacement occupy an important place in the literary arena, since, according to Hall (1994, p. 227) identity is also thought, elaborated and produced through cultural practices and from within representation. Indian diaspora writers, such as Salman Rushdie, write fictions that problematize the issue of migrants' identity, their stories, their silences and their conflicts.

East, West (Rushdie, 1999), the collection of stories to which *The Courter* belongs, already anticipates through the spatiality of the title the problematization of split cultural identities. The comma in the title could then be interpreted as a bridge or a gap between both hemispheres, since the author does not choose to use the conjunction "and". According to Eagleton (1994), the encounter between the East and the West cannot take place through harmony or fusion but through undesirability and aporia. The conflict of the identities of the Indian diaspora in England is presented in the story by the coexistence between different generations

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of Indian migrants, a Slavic immigrant, and the English hegemonic culture; however, it remains an almost unsolvable paradox. The key would seem to lie in the creation of a third space, and yet the violence generated by the host society does not give room to either difference or cultural hybridity.

The Courter rejects the notion of a pure and homogeneous culture in favor of a hybrid, mixed and blended society. The names given to the main characters in the new agency space in which they operate is an indication of this fact: Mixed-up and Certainly-Mary. The Slavic immigrant's name literally indicates that it is an identity constituted from diversity. Both names symbolically represent split identities, in-between subjectivities, by linking both terms with a hyphen. Thus, the creative game that gives rise to the formation of new names and the theme of language hybridity (from the mixture between English and Hindi) are narrative strategies that Rushdie uses to problematize cultural fixity. A new language is created giving rise to new relationships and bonds, which emerge in a new territory of negotiation of meanings. It is a space-Other, a symbolic liminal territory that belongs neither to the English nor to the Indian culture but that is transcultural: a third space in terms of Bhabha (2002).

The theme of stereotyped identities is fictionalized by the encounter between

the foreign characters and the British ones. It is a violent encounter, caused by the xenophobic gaze of the characters called "Beatles", who reject the Indian migrants and a potential redefinition of their English culture. The idea of a third space seems to vanish because of the violent encounter, which ends up annihilating difference and hierarchizing the superiority of one culture over another. However, at the end of the story the narrator recovers the vision of a liminal space between cultures: he decides to live in London, to make choices that do not respond to what his father would have wanted, and to travel to his native India as well. However, it is a space that does not cease to be painful and paradoxical (and perhaps utopian) as his identity remains fragmented between East and West.

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