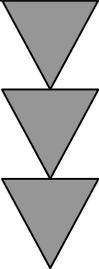


Cultural and Literary Studies



POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITIES. BRITISH – SOUTH-ASIAN NOVELISTS

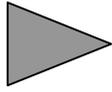


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Abstract

This article analyses the mixed national identity of some British writers of South-Asian origin and their difficult, yet intellectually stimulating, position of being simultaneously insiders and outsiders to both British and South-Asian literatures. This hybrid identity can potentially lead to a controversial attitude towards the Empire and its postcolonial influences; and indeed in today's globalised and multicultural society, this group of authors claim their right to centrality in a multitude of ways. At the same time, the British literary scene acclaims and celebrates their work, and positions them to the forefront of British culture. In this article I look into these difficult relationships and suggest that it is their very complexity that challenges and interests the readers.

Keywords: postcolonial literature, multiculturalism, hybridisation, the Other, Centre, Britishness, globalisation



Postcolonial “British” novelists?

This article investigates some of the stands taken by British novelists of South-Asian origin on their national identity and the impact this had on the process of writing and on the reception of their work. I would like to start the discussion from the very clarification of the term “British”, as all the novelists that I will be referring to write in English and are of South-Asian origin. Starting from this biographical element, we can proceed at further subdivisions. Thus, there are novels by authors who live in Britain, some of them are second generation immigrants, such as Hanif Kureishi, Meera Syal or Hari Kunzru, and novels by authors who came to study or to follow their families and settled there, such as V. S. Naipaul, Atima Srivastava, Monica Ali, or who, after a stop in Britain, crossed the Atlantic to settle in the US, such as Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai, Sara Suleri or Amitav Gosh. There are also novels by authors who, after pursuing their studies in Britain, went back to their countries, such as Arundhati Roy, Vickram Seth or Anita Desai (although the latter is currently leaving in the United States).

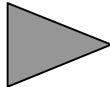
How can we, therefore, place them and their novels all under the heading “British”? What makes them British, as well as Indian, Pakistani or Bengali (or for that matter, universal)? Salman Rushdie accurately raises the issue of the diversity of the Asian immigrants to Britain (coming from different parts of the subcontinent, now different countries entirely, with diverse ethnic, religious, caste, etc. backgrounds) and of the globalisation phenomenon that “Indo-British fiction” is clearly a part of:

England’s Indian writers are by no means all the same type of animal (...). This word ‘Indian’ is going to be a pretty scattered concept. Indian writers in England include political exiles, first-generation migrants, affluent expatriates whose residence here is frequently temporary, naturalized Britons, and people born here who may never have laid eyes on the subcontinent. Clearly, nothing that I can say can apply across all these categories. But one of the interesting things about this diverse community is that, as far as Indo-British fiction is concerned, its existence changes the ball game, because that fiction is in future going to come as much from addresses in London, Birmingham or Yorkshire, as from Delhi or Bombay. (Rushdie 1991: 17)

So, apart from the fact that their work belongs to the same Universal Body of Literature, what singularises these writers, so as to place them all in the category “British” postcolonial literature? First, the fact that they are claimed by the British literary space and celebrated within the larger umbrella of “multicultural”, “postcolonial” and “postimperial” literature. They are published in Britain,

considered for British literary prizes and awards, and given full visibility in the British media and academia. Secondly, although written by people of such different backgrounds, all these novels, in one way or another, deal with the same issues that characterize the British postcolonial context: the dilemmas of national and ethnic identity and survival in the old/new space defined and redefined after the collapse of the Empire, the continuous movement between margin and centre (be it spatially, socially or metaphorically circumscribed), the interpretation and reinterpretation of common history. Also according to Bill Ashcroft in “The Empire writes back: theory and practice in post-colonial literatures”, it is their common colonial history and their present delimitation from the imperial centre that distinguishes them and groups them together:

*We use the term 'post-colonial'... to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. We also suggest that it is most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted. (...). What each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial. (Ashcroft *The Empire Writes Back*)*



***Cultural roots and the migrant status.
“Universal” writers***

All these postcolonial writers have a very complicated biographical relationship both with their country of origin and with their country (or countries) of adoption. They are at the same time insiders and outsiders of the same realities, not quite accepted in the new land and quite disrupted from their old one. Many questions are raised, as Rushdie promptly indicates, some of them revolving around the cultural self and group definition of Indians outside India, in terms of making concessions to the West and embracing their ideas and practices while turning away from their own. Rushdie claims that the existential question to be asked is “How are we to live in the world?” (Rushdie 1991:18)¹

¹ The quotation is as follows:

To be an Indian writer in this society is to face, every day, problems of definition. What does it mean to be ‘Indian’ outside India? How can culture be preserved without becoming ossified? How should we discuss the need for change within ourselves and our community without seeming to play into the hands of our racial enemies? What are the consequences, both spiritual and practical, of

In the case of Rushdie, for example, the situation is even more complicated, as he is from India (more specifically Bombay, which he claims is a different world, apart from the rest of the country, with its metropolitan and cosmopolitan elements), but he had to leave it for Pakistan, after the Partition War². At the same time he spent a lot of his formation years in Britain, the longed-for territory of culture and education, and at the time of writing this article he is living in the United States. He has been constantly preoccupied with his immigrant condition and he touches upon it both in his novels and in his non-fiction writings. In a BBC *Conversations* series he praises hybridization, as the migrants have a two-fold experience: while being changed themselves by migration, they also are the ones who, through this very fact, bring about the world changes.

Other writers have the same preoccupation with their biographical condition, and also with their writers' status. Hanif Kureishi in *Something Given – Reflections on Writing* talks about the disorder and strangeness that the immigrant condition brings to themselves and their families, while they strive to keep traditions together, in some kind of "strange suspension" that life in the diaspora brings along (cf. Hanif Kureishi's personal website).

As a consequence of their migrant condition, the postcolonial British writers had to find their own special voice(s) on the multicultural British literary scene. Therefore, as Homi Bhabba said, they do not attempt to create a separate-but-equal narrative to run alongside the dominant cultural narrative of the nation. It is not an attempt to assimilate their story (of the Other) into the dominant story (the Centre, Britishness), but an attempt to disrupt this centrality, the dominant culture, "to hybridize" the discourse, to reconfigure the concept of all cultural identities as fluid

refusing to make any concessions to Western ideas and practices? What are the consequences of embracing those ideas and practices and turning away from the ones that came here with us? Those questions are all a single, existential question: How are we to live in the world?" (Rushdie 1991:18)

² The Partition of India was a partition that led to the creation on 14 August 1947 and 15 August 1947, respectively, of the sovereign states of *Dominion of Pakistan* (later Islamic Republic of Pakistan) and *Union of India* (later Republic of India) upon the granting of independence to British India from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In particular, it refers to the partition of the Bengal province of British India into the Pakistani state of East Bengal (later East Pakistan, now Bangladesh) and the Indian state of West Bengal, as well as the similar partition of the Punjab region of British India into the Punjab province of West Pakistan and the Indian state of Punjab. The secession of Bangladesh from Pakistan in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War is not covered by the term *Partition of India*, nor are the earlier separations of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and Burma (now Myanmar) from the administration of British India. Ceylon, part of the Madras Presidency of British India from 1795 until 1798, became a separate Crown Colony in 1798. Burma, gradually annexed by the British during 1826 – 86 and governed as a part of the British Indian administration until 1937, was directly administered thereafter. Burma was granted independence on January 4, 1948 and Ceylon on February 4, 1948. The remaining countries of present-day South Asia — Nepal and Bhutan — having signed treaties with the British designating them as *independent states*, were never a part of British India and therefore their borders were not affected by the partition. ("Partition of India")

and heterogeneous. Instead of seeking recognition from the dominant culture the work of these writers tries to challenge the borders of national and cultural identity. (cf. Bhabha, 1994). At the same time, writing nowadays poses a different problem, as it is no longer only about a national or individual quest, but it should include a globalised view of the world, in which story lines and characters from different parts of the world intermingle to create a fragmented, yet more complete, view of contemporary realities.³

Blending their national roots into an artistic identity and also continuously seeking to define and self define are very important processes. While Hanif Kureishi considers himself a British writer with another view of a Britain which is “a genuinely plural, multi-cultural place, where, somehow, everything gets different” (cf. Hanif Kureishi’s personal website), other writers are more inclined to represent themselves as not so much British or Indian, but in between or universal. “The other view of Britain” that Kureishi talks about is represented by the disruptive power discourses coming from the perspective of these writers, challenging the canonical one, and creating alternative literary spaces.

Kiran Desai, the winner of the ManBooker Prize 2006, is a young Indian author, (daughter of Anita Desai), who moved from India to Britain at 14, spent a year there, then moved further west to the United States, where she is currently living. However, more than just Indian or just American, she feels she is a global citizen: “I feel as comfortable anywhere as I feel uncomfortable anywhere”.⁴ On the same line, there are Hari Kunzru’s words on the idea of home. A second generation immigrant, with a Kashmiri and English origin, Kunzru doesn’t believe in a fascist blood connection with the place of origin, his view is of a more globalised orientation, of “home” being our own making, a process of building relationships

³ Here are the words of Salman Rushdie on the necessity to capture this globalised vision in the novels:

*It used to be possible to write a novel about, say, London or Kashmir or Strasbourg or California, without any sense of connection. But now it’s all one story. That’s what I want to say. Everybody’s story is running into everybody else’s story (...). Four years ago, nobody would have suspected that the story of al-Qaeda and the story of New York City would be connected, for instance. So it’s not like when I wrote **Midnight’s Children** where essentially I was writing about India and Pakistan and I didn’t need to write about the rest of the world in order to tell that story. Now I feel more and more that if you’re going to tell a story of a murder in California, you end up having to tell the story of many other places and many other times in order to make sense of that event and that place. To try to show how those stories join. (Dougary)*

⁴ However, this is how Desai comments on the relationship with her country of origin and the influence it had on writing her prize winning novel *The Inheritance of Loss*:

I feel less like doing it [giving up her Indian citizenship] every year because I realise that I see everything through the lens of being Indian. It’s not something that has gone away - it’s something that has become stronger. As I’ve got older, I have realised that I can’t really write without that perspective. (...) And then, of course, I find myself at a disadvantage because India has changed, moved on. I go every year, yet it belongs to Indian authors living in India. The subject belongs to them. So the only way I could put this book together was to go back to the India of the 1980s, when I left. (Barton)

both with people and with the place itself, wherever that is. (cf. Hari Kunzru's personal website).

Also on the issue of "home", Monica Ali (with English and Bengali ancestry) has a more idealized, mythical vision, probably due to the fact that she had to leave her original Dhaka when she was only three years old, during the civil war that led to the creation of Bangladesh.⁵ Monica Ali addresses the issue of writing in terms of centre-periphery, by invoking the process of seeking the periphery in a parallel with Naipaul's fight to find his "centre", while the narrative and literary discourses of the Muslim authors seem to be now the very centre of the canonical corpus:

For VS Naipaul, "finding the centre" has been an important part of his journey as a writer. Taking my first steps as a writer, I could argue, has involved the inverse process: seeking out the periphery. I find it difficult to fill these words with any meaning. The Muslim world (of which I have written a small section about) is at the centre of our gaze as never before; "subcontinent" literature (...) has always been more than a speck on my reading horizon, and many authors are firmly within the literary establishment; and in any case, what do we have, at the notional centre, to set against the periphery — VS Naipaul, writing about Wiltshire? Periphery is, nevertheless, a word which is useful to me. (Ali)

In this process, Ali finds herself in between two worlds, observing and describing both of them, neither a full outsider, nor a complete insider. The issue of acceptance from the point of view of the respective community is also at stake; besides what Monica Ali describes in the following lines, I would like to add the street protests and media campaign led by the Bengali community at the shooting of the film *Brick Lane*, mostly against the alleged false depiction of this community and their neighbourhood. As an insider/outsider to two worlds, Ali raises the problem of what she calls "the tyranny of representation", in other words who is allowed to write about what? The answer she gives is:

I can write about it [the Bengali community] because I do not truly belong. Growing up with an English mother and a Bengali father means never being an

⁵ Ali describes what "home" means to her by contrasting it to what it means to the main character of her first highly praised novel, *Brick Lane*:

*And home, because it could never be reached, became mythical: Tagore's golden Bengal, a teasing counterpoint to our drab northern milltown lives. A glossy women's magazine that interviewed me recently ran its piece under the headline: "I turned my life into a book." This was interesting. I did not grow up like Nazneen (my protagonist) in a small Bangladeshi village, have an arranged marriage, and move to Tower Hamlets unable to speak a word of English. But since reading that headline I have been trying it on for size. How much of what I have written as fiction is drawn from experience? "Going Home Syndrome," as one of the characters in the book terms it, might be a fertile area to examine. Many of the characters in **Brick Lane** nurture their dreams of home, even (or perhaps especially) the young radical who was born in this country and has never even visited Bangladesh. I cannot draw any clear parallels with my family history. But I can feel the reverberations. It is not so much a question of what inspired me. The issue is one of resonance. (Ali)*

*insider. Standing neither behind a closed door, nor in the thick of things, but rather in the shadow of the doorway, is a good place from which to observe. Good training, I feel, for life as a writer. (Ali)*⁶

Atima Srivastava has revelatory views of her own identity as a person and as a writer. She includes both her Indian and London backgrounds to define her roots, and very interestingly she talks of the relationship with her two origins in terms of ownership and belonging: it is London she owns and India she belongs to, almost as if she “conquered” the new space, while at the same time, feeling part of the old one. Also, she is in a way the “master” of the metropolis, of the imperial centre, London, and not a part of the Empire itself; she feels a Londoner, never British, or even English:

My situation is different, although I came to England at the age of eight. My 'India', if you like, came from my parents' very present idea of India, which involved speaking Hindi, having visitors from India over etc. - very little assimilation - and also from my very frequent trips back. So yes, although the 'broken mirrors' is a concept I understand, an India, even it is not a real or authentic India (whatever that is!), has, does and continues to exist certainly for my sense of self. I have always felt myself to be Indian and a Londoner, never British, never English....My most potent image of myself is that I always have the feeling that I am from here and also from there. When I am here, I feel Indian constantly and when I am there, I feel ... English, or western, or ... I suppose I feel like an NRI⁷, which has become a relevant identity. And yet, even this is

⁶ Monica Ali gives an anecdotal explanation to her writing of the Bengali community:

Beyond the "inspiration" question, I could set lines of inquiry about my book into two broad camps. Tell us about "them," is one. The tyranny of representation — the phrase is not mine but belongs, I think, to CLR James — means that when I speak, my brown skin is the dominant signifier. The other reaction is rather different. What gives you the right to write about "us," when you're clearly one of "them?" In an audience recently at the Bengali World Literature Centre in the East End, a woman invited me to take a test. "How can you know what it is like to be a Bengali mother," she protested, "when you don't even speak our language? Come on, speak to us in Bangla." I've never subscribed to the "cricket test" and I declined the questioner's test also. (My Bengali is limited now to some tourist-phrase-type inquiries, a few nursery rhymes or song fragments and a quite extensive culinary vocabulary.) Of course, any literary endeavour must be judged on the work alone. It stands or falls on its own merits regardless of the colour, gender and so on of the author. A male author does not need "permission" to write about a female character, a white author does not transgress in taking a black protagonist. But the "two camp" split in my case brings me back to the idea of the periphery. How can I write about a community to which I do not truly belong? Perhaps, the answer is I can write about it because I do not truly belong. Growing up with an English mother and a Bengali father means never being an insider. Standing neither behind a closed door, nor in the thick of things, but rather in the shadow of the doorway, is a good place from which to observe. Good training, I feel, for life as a writer. (Ali)

⁷ A non-resident Indian (NRI) is an Indian citizen who has migrated to another country, a person of Indian origin who is born outside India, or a person of Indian origin who resides outside India. Other terms with the same meaning are overseas Indian and expatriate Indian. In common usage, this often includes Indian born individuals (and also people of other nations with Indian blood) who have taken the citizenship of other countries. A Person of Indian Origin (PIO) is usually a person of

problematic, because I do not feel like a tourist in India, although I am, of course. I feel that I belong to India, while I feel I 'own' London. (Srivastava)

In the case of Sara Suleri, daughter of a Pakistani father and Welsh mother, having spent her childhood between Pakistan and Britain, and currently living in the US, married to an American and teaching literature at Yale University, the constant shift between cultures is something “natural”. In an interview she talks about being part of the two cultures, which she is happy to share with others, again in an attempt to universalise her work:

Moving between cultures is never easy. I am very allergic to being called "exotic". At the same time, I delight in being able to teach texts that would possibly not have been taught at Yale University. (Shamzie: I am very allergic)

Another writer with a mixed cultural, ethnic and religious background, Anita Desai, has a Bengali father and a German mother, who met in pre-war Berlin, and moved after they got married to the "neutral territory" of Old Delhi, then, as Desai recalls, a "sleepy, provincial place". The youngest of three sisters with an elder brother, she describes hers as "a small and intensely close family. My family was an oddity; it didn't belong where it was. Going to school, I became aware of its difference, of things that set us apart." At home they spoke German, and Hindi to friends and neighbours. Later, Anita learned English at mission school: "It was always my literary language, my book language" (Jaggi), and Bengali when she was 18 and the family moved to Calcutta. Desai feels she “invented” her home, as she felt no allegiance to either of her ancestries. In the relationship Desai has with her motherland she simultaneously includes and excludes herself from the society and country she is part of, with the axis insider-outsider continuously shifting.

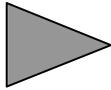
Everyone in India has close affiliations to state, home town, religion, caste - all the things missing from my life. That leaves one feeling free to invent whatever kind of home you want. I do have all the passions one's supposed to have for one's home country, but I know I'm not part of Indian society - it perplexes and amazes me. I find myself reacting sharply, as my mother would have. I don't think I'm sentimental about India. (Jaggi)

Indian origin who is not a citizen of India. For the purposes of issuing a PIO Card, the Indian government considers anyone of Indian origins up to four generations removed, to be a PIO. Spouses of people entitled to a PIO card in their own right can also carry PIO cards. This latter category includes foreign spouses of Indian nationals, regardless of ethnic origin. PIO Cards exempt holders from many restrictions applying to foreign nationals, such as visa and work permit requirements, along with certain other economic limitations. The NRI and PIO population across the world is estimated at over 30 million (...). The Indian government recently introduced the "Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI)" scheme in order to allow a limited form of dual citizenship to Indians, NRIs and PIOs for the first time since independence in 1947. It is expected that the PIO Card scheme will be phased out in coming years in favour of OCI (“Non-resident Indian.”)

The other two territorial links she has, with Germany and East Bengal, are also ambiguous ones. Her parents were effectively exiled from Germany and East Bengal by two bloody historical events: the Second World War and the Indian Independence (for which Desai's Bengali grandfather and uncle fought and were imprisoned).

Arundhati Roy also supports the idea of the universality of her only novel, as opposed to claims over its Indian character, as the Indian background is large and all encompassing. Also she underlines the idea of offering the novel to its readers, who are afterwards free to understand it in their own way, to personalise their reading of the book as they wish:

I think that a story is like the surface of water. And you can take what you want from it. Its volubility is its strength. But I feel irritated by this idea, this search. What do we mean when we ask, "What is Indian? What is India? Who is Indian?" Do we ask, "What does it mean to be American? What does it mean to be British?" as often? I don't think that it's a question that needs to be asked, necessarily. I don't think along those lines, anyway. I think perhaps that the question we should ask is, "What does it mean to be human?" I don't even feel comfortable with this need to define our country. Because it's bigger than that! How can one define India? There is no one language, there is no one culture. There is no one religion, there is no one way of life. There is absolutely no way one could draw a line around it and say, "This is India" or, "This is what it means to be Indian." The whole world is seeking simplification. It's not that easy. I don't believe that one clever movie or one clever book can begin to convey what it means to be Indian. (Reena)



"Indians" and "Mimic Men"

In opposition to all the authors discussed so far, placed in between worlds spatially, as he physically left India for the United States, Amitav Gosh underlines the idea of the culturally specific novel, in his case the Indian one, as opposed to the universal. His claim ("I feel no shame in saying, "I'm absolutely an Indian writer.") clearly underlines his strong ties with his original motherland⁸:

⁸ For Gosh, to migrate to the US meant to find the cultural neutral space and the necessary individual peacefulness for building his literary and academic career. He claims, however, he did not sever his spiritual links to the original land and he kept in contact physically by spending a lot of time in India. In time, the way he construes his self-definition has changed, from that of an expatriate to that of an exile.

When I first went to New York in 1988, it was a time of incredible political turmoil in India and I was very involved in a lot of stuff there, and then I got to America and felt that I was suddenly in a room that was not haunted, it was just a neutral space, and that was so nice. America was a space that I welcomed and that helped me get that distance. It helped me write books that I would not have

It's true a lot of Indian writers feel strongly about being labeled Indian writers because they want to be in some sense universal writers. But the novel as a form is something that gains its universality through locality and through its particularity. I think novels that start by saying "I am about the universe" actually completely fail. (...) You know, I recognize from that, with an increasing sense of humility, that all my work is rooted very powerfully within an Indian experience: an Indian experience of history, an Indian experience of time, of travel, of migration. And I think it would be a bit dishonest of me to say: "I am a universal writer". In some sense, I owe everything in my work to my sharing of this particular history, so I feel no shame in saying, "I'm absolutely an Indian writer." I mean, I celebrate that. I'm certainly not an American writer. And I feel proud to say that my work comes out of the particularity of a context. (...) In some sense, my books are very much loved by Indians ... and have been translated into Bengali and Hindi. It's a strange thing to say, but when I'm in Calcutta and do a reading there, I get a sense that my books just mean so much to so many people. I feel very at home in India. And now really, in some strange way, every month that I am away seems like a sacrifice. (Ziv)

Another distinct figure among the novelists of South-Asian origin writing in English is V. S. Naipaul. He was born on the island of Trinidad in an Indian Brahmin family, and moved to England very young. He managed to write against all these three countries, and according to some critics he writes on colonialism from an inverted perspective, that of a "casteist, communalist and racist coloniser" (Kandasamy). I will include a few quotes from different interviews or articles about VS Naipaul on his roots to prove these points:

I do not write for Indians," he says, "who in any case do not read. My work is only possible in a liberal, civilized Western country. It is not possible in primitive societies." (...)

Speaking of India he said, *"How tired I am of the India-lovers, those who go on about 'beautiful India'--the last gasp of a hideous, imperialistic vanity. And the mark of a second-rate mind. (Hardwick)*

*been able to write otherwise. I wrote **In an Antique Land** and **The Glass Palace** in America. The travel, the research — it would not have been possible from India. So it was wonderful then. But I must say, in those days I was in my thirties with the sort of energy where you're just in a room and need to pour it all out and that was wonderful. I never felt like an exile. I felt like an expatriate. But now I feel absolutely like an exile, and frankly, I just count my days until I leave. The only reason I'm in America now is because my children are there in school and I don't want to wrench them out of school. (...) Oh no! I've never really left India! I spent a lot of time in America, but I have a home in Calcutta and I spend lots of time there. (Ziv)*

On Trinidad:

I can't see a Monkey--you can use a capital M, that's an affectionate word for the generality--reading my work. No, my books aren't read in Trinidad now--drumbeating is a higher activity, a more satisfying activity.

and

These people live purely physical lives, which I find contemptible. It makes them interesting only to chaps in universities who want to do compassionate studies about brutes. (Kakutani)

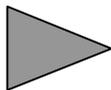
Again on Trinidad:

My most difficult thing to overcome was being born in Trinidad. That crazy resort place! How on earth can you have serious writing from a crazy resort place? (...) One does get addicted to being different (Gussow, 1976)

I can only agree with Mel Gussow when he comments on Naipaul's mimicry of the English, while at the same time criticising them and the colonised at the same time:

This "difference" is noticeable in his appearance and personality--he looks Indian, while his manner of dress and speech are those of a cultivated English gentleman--and it extends deep into the man and his work That vision is of a society consuming itself. As a colonial, he condemns not only colonialism--for its burden of slavery that masquerades as patronage--but also the colonials, for idolizing and imitating the master, for being slavish "mimic men." Naipaul includes himself, or at least an earlier version of himself, in the charge. (Gussow, 1976)

It is a physical Trinidad of his childhood, but also an imaginary Trinidad, Naipaul tried to escape from, while searching for his roots; however, as Gussow sarcastically comments, he only manages to find another "Trinidad" (cf. Gussow, 1976)⁹.



Conclusion

As seen from above, all the authors under discussion have a mixed gaze both over their original land (or the land of their ancestors, for that matter) and the country they are currently living in. Their biographical background puts them in a complex relationship with both. At the same time, the universality of their work is

⁹ As Mel Gussow writes, Naipaul meant the actual Trinidad of his childhood but the reference is also to a Trinidad of the minds. In his work he has continually searched for his roots. But wherever he has gone--to the India of his ancestors, back into Caribbean history in "The Loss of El Dorado"--he has found dereliction. He has discovered another "Trinidad." (Gussow, 1976)

undeniable, especially in the modern world. Topics such as mixed ancestry, hybridity, cultural migration and crossing of all kinds of borders (be they physical or spiritual) resonate with readers from all continents. British post-imperial postcolonial elements thrown in this *mélange* give the reading a spicy touch, and together with the English language, contribute to the claim the British literary and cultural space has over these novels.

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