

VIOLATED HISTORY. COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXTS AND THE SOUTH-ASIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

*This article examines British colonialism in South-Asia and the violence of this process, as well as the internal post-empire violence, as reflected in a number of novels, among which *Midnight's Children* or *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, *Shalimar the Clown* or *Shame* by Salman Rushdie, *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh, *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, *The Impressionist* by Hari Kunzru, *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai or *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali. The discussion revolves around the idea of institutional violence of the Empire or the new merging state(s) over the collective body of a nation (or several nations or ethnic groups) or over individual people. Colonial violence has a different impact on the common bodies of both colonisers and colonised, depending on spatial and temporal location, but more importantly on other factors, such as gender, caste, or religious denomination.*

Keywords: colonialism, postcolonialism, violence, the Empire

Violated history

History is repeatedly violated in the South-Asian colonial and postcolonial contexts and this has a clear effect at the level of character formation in the novels by South-Asian authors. As Salman Rushdie claims in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, country and region separation is felt in the family and at individual level, too:

You can't just keep dividing and slicing – India-Pakistan, Maharashtra-Gujarat – without the effects being felt at the level of the family unit, the loving couple, the hidden soul. Everything starts shifting, changing, getting partitioned, separated by frontiers, splitting, re-splitting, coming apart. Centrifugal forces begin to pull harder than their centripetal opposites. Gravity dies. People come off into space (Rushdie, 2000: 164)

The same issue is discussed in depth in the essay “The Act of Witnessing. Violence, Poisonous Knowledge and Subjectivity” (Das, Keinman, 200: 205-225),

where Veena Das looks into the meaning of witnessing in relation to violence and the formation of the subject in the context of the Partition of India (1947), fieldwork is done among Punjabi families, some of which were displaced after the war. Das claims that the experience of becoming a subject is linked to an experience of subjugation. She analyses the situation of women witnesses to violence (death of relatives) who then make this space of destruction their own not through an ascent into transcendence but through a descent into the everyday:

Thus we need to ask not only how women were made the victims of ethnic or communal violence through specific gendered acts of violation such as rape but also how they may have taken these noxious acts of violation and reoccupied them through the work of domestication, ritualization, and re-narration. (Das, Keinman, 2000: 205)

This is done through the example of one woman, Asha, who “shows the creation of the gendered subject through engagement with knowledge that is equally poisonous but addressed through the everyday work of repair” (Das, Keinman, 2000: 208). Partition meant for some families significant changes in the situation of wealth within the kinship network due to forced displacement and death of family members. Help became in these conditions a strategy of survival, but the other side of the coin was a constant allusion to betrayal of trust, to infidelities. The question is how the violence of the Partition was folded into everyday relations, not how the events of the Partition were present to consciousness as past events:

The brutality of the Partition lay in what violence could do to alter the ways in which kin recognize or withhold recognition from each other. Thus the traumatic memory of the Partition cannot be understood in Asha’s life as a direct possession of the past. It is constantly mediated by the manner in which the world is being presently inhabited. Even when it appears that some women were relatively lucky because they escaped direct bodily harm, the bodily memory of being-with-others makes the past encircle the present as atmosphere. (Das, Keinman, 2000: 221)

The past enters the present not necessarily by traumatic memory, but as poisonous knowledge. The body of Asha, the widow, was incorporated, not only ritually, but also in everyday interactions, in the body of her dead husband. This was the only acknowledged aspect of her being (Das, Keinman 221). After her decision to remarry and leave her dead husband’s family, she has to find a way of living with the poisonous knowledge of her so-called betrayal and to inhabit her new world through a constant work of repair relationships.

Personal identity and history

There are numerous instances of personal and group character violations, from the special Saleem Sinai, the main character in *Midnight's Children*, who, in his own words, has been “mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country” (Rushdie, 1984: 11), so that he imagines himself to be at the origin of all personal and national events, to that of an otherwise inexistent character in *The Hungry Tide*, Nirmal (who is only evoked by his wife Nilima and by his nephew Kanai's words), whose life was changed by history: “Nirmal was originally from Dhaka but had come to Calcutta as a student. The events of Partition had cut him off from his family and he had elected to stay on in Calcutta where he had made a name for himself as a leftist intellectual and a writer of promise” (Ghosh, 2005: 76). That is also where he meets his wife Nilima, his student; thus Partition, otherwise a violent event in South-Asian history, is here only serenely mentioned as the cause of subsequent life changes for some of the characters.

Saleem Sinai is designed by Rushdie to be the embodiment of India, his face “the map of India” with Pakistan “a stain on the face of India” (Rushdie, 1984: 226), victim, as things are done to him, Saleem claims his right to centrality, he wants to be the protagonist: “May the career of a single individual be said to impinge on the fate of a nation? I was linked to history both literally and symbolically” (Rushdie, 1984: 232). Therefore his mutilation, leading to the discovery of his humble origin and the exchange done by the nurse at his birth with another baby triggers the violent historical events of the time:

...those occasions on which things done by or to me were mirrored in the microcosm of public affairs, and my private existence was shown to be symbolically at one with history. The mutilation of my middle finger was a case in point, because when I was detached from my fingertip and blood (...) rushed out in fountains, a similar thing happened to history, and all sorts of everywhichting began poring out all over us; but because history operates on a grander scale than any individual, it took a good deal longer to stitch it back together and mop up the mess (Rushdie, 1984: 233)

The violence of the Indo-Pakistani war and the invasion of Kashmir affect Saleem's family and himself to the extreme; at the same time, he believes that all these events were triggered by his own power of imagination. “Nothing was real, nothing certain” (Rushdie, 1984: 329), states Rushdie, who casts doubt on the very existence of these wars in reality and describes them as a succession of strange and somewhat imagined series of events. In the same way as the birth of India and Pakistan are depicted as coming out of the dream of the people (and of the main character, Saleem Sinai), the violence of the battles, although undeniable, are to a

certain extent presented as accidents of history, “some kind of astonishing illusion” (Rushdie, 1984: 330). Saleem seems to believe that it was his own dreaming that provoked the national violence, and that the purpose was again personal, rather than national: “Let me state this quite unequivocally: it is my firm conviction that the hidden purpose of the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965 was nothing more nor less than the elimination of my benighted family from the face of the earth” (Rushdie, 1984: 327). The reasons are the two bombs that fell in the war: one destroyed the family house and killed everybody on the premises, with the exception of his sister and of himself, and the second one fell on the construction site of their house, which was then being built. Also the preparation of the coup d’état and the subsequent military grip of power together with the arrest of the President of Pakistan are depicted through the eyes of the eleven-year old Saleem, who feels he is not only the witness or silent actor of the events, but their very script-writer and director: “not only did I overthrow a government – I also consigned a President to exile” (Rushdie, 1984: 282). The violence of the events is imbedded in the otherwise subtly ironical and somewhat comical description, which includes for example the incontinence of cousin Zafar or the capturing of President Iskander Mirza, who is accompanied naked to the airport to fly to his exile destination. The political and military action that will change the course of a country’s history is rendered without the heroic aura and the mythological connections which usually surround it, but as the articulated series of scenes which a child believes to be provoked by his imagination, and therefore are presented to the readers from the angle of an eleven-year old boy. Saleem is the instrument of the revolutionary forces, he is made by the generals to use the dinner table in order to make a military map of the events to come; it is like a childish game, nevertheless with severe consequences:

How we made the revolution: General Zulfikar described troop movements; I moved pepperpots symbolically while he spoke. In the clutches of the active-metaphorical mode of connection, I shifted salt-cellars and bowls of chutney: This mustard-jar is Company A occupying Head Post Office; there are two pepperpots surrounding a serving-spoon, which means Company B has seized the airport. With the fate of the nation in my hands, I shifted condiments and cutlery, capturing empty biriany-dishes with water-glasses, stationing salt-cellars on guard, around water-jugs (Rushdie, 1984: 281)

Religion: a source of violence

The coup d’état in Pakistan is also described in *Shame*, the violent capturing of Chairman Iskander Harappa, because of the betrayal of his friend and family Raza Hyder, his imprisonment in horrible conditions and his physical and mental torture, and finally his killing, are given a religious twist: all is done in the name of true faith. In the context of India, Der Veer’s analysis of religion as a source of

communal violence concludes that it is difficult to consider it so; religion is at the core of a community as something immutable and non-negotiable, to externalize it in the same way as the state is impossible:

To say that violence is religiously motivated makes it seem inescapable, although we know that religion does change, that religious institutions lose functions over time and sometimes disappear. But religious discourse tries to deny historical change and to an important degree derives its power from its successes in doing so. Indeed, in that sense, religion is ideology, but it does not hide class dominance, it hides its own history, its rootedness in society. (De Vries and Weber, 1997: 199)

However, when the very justification of aggressiveness comes from the necessity of “unscandalling” (Rushdie, 1983: 223) which will only be done with the help of prayer and reciting Quranic verses, when state and religion are one, as the very creation of the state is done alongside the religious factor and within a common religious denominator of its inhabitants, then we must consider institutional violence as brought on by religion. After describing the religious rules imposed by the Army (among which there are: dismantling the legal system and replacing the judges with religious courts, appointed for sentimental reasons, banning films or forbidding unveiled women to walk the streets, allowing religious students to carry guns and kill their not enough devout professors or strangling those who smoke in the month of fasting), Rushdie proceeded indeed to show the essence of this religious fundamentalism in Pakistan: as it is not a root-level movement, but imposed from the top-down, it can be interpreted as institutional violence over its citizens:

So-called Islamic ‘fundamentalism’ does not spring, in Pakistan, from the people. It is imposed on them from above. Autocratic regimes find it useful to espouse the rhetoric of faith because people respect that language, are reluctant to oppose it. This is how religions shore up dictators; by encircling them with words of power, words which the people are reluctant to see discredited, disenfranchised, mocked (Rushdie, 1983: 251)

Yet, in the long run, Rushdie does not believe in the solution of religion for the nation-building myth; people weary of religious dictators will destroy them, while unmaking the founding national myth; the options are disintegration, a new dictatorship or the more optimistic one of finding another myth to place at the basis of a new and modern state (Rushdie mentions in this context the ones that justified the French Revolution and led to the creation of the French lay and modern state: liberty, equality, fraternity).

Official history: whose version?

A more official version of Partition and of the war over Kashmir is presented in *Shalimar the Clown*; Rushdie focuses on the general picture:

The summer of 1965 was a bad season. India and Pakistan had already engaged in battle (...) but now talk was all about war over Kashmir (...). Threats were made – force will be met with overwhelming force! – and counter threats offered in return – aggression will not be countenanced or permitted to succeed!” (Rushdie, 2006: 118-119)

At the same time, the war is presented through the eyes of a character, a British-educated general in the Indian army, for whom “military action had been a disappointment” (Rushdie 2006: 129), due to the desire for self-determination of the local population and their ingratitude concerning Indian army protection. The solution, the complete and violent change of population, is a subtle hint at ethnic cleansing, which so often has in fact been the political and military answer to patriotic and nationalistic enthusiasm:

The population was unsuitable. A new population should be found. The valley should be emptied of all these people and refilled with others who would be grateful to be here, grateful to be defended (Rushdie, 2006: 130).

With this aim in mind, the colonel orders routine action through the Kashmiri villages under his so-called protection, with the warning to the population that “accidents could happen”, an episode ironically narrated by Rushdie, the repetition of the words “accidental?”/“accidentally” indicating the very non-accidental nature of the events:

And, in fact, the level of violence accidentally rose. There was talk of accidental shootings, accidental beatings, the accidental use of cattle prods, one or two accidental deaths (Rushdie 2006: 130)

The general, himself an instrument of this policy of force, gets to like the feel of violence; lacking the sexual impulse, this aggression becomes its substitute. The description of violence is done with the help of sensory images; touch, smell, taste, vision, sound, they all contribute in an orgy of the senses to an orgasmic state of the general:

The idea of violence had a velvet softness now. One took off one’s gloves and smelled the sweet fragrance of necessity. Bullets entered flesh like music, the pounding of clubs was the rhythm of life, and then there was the sexual dimension to consider, the demoralization of the population through

the violation of its women. In that dimension every colour was bright and tasted good. He closed his eyes and averted his head. What must be, must be. (Rushdie, 2006: 291)

The detailed description of the torture he submits the local population to, the aggressive and yet half-joking tone manage to depict institutional violence as eradication instruments left at the disposal of madmen, who are allowed to create their own laws and rules in war situations. The denial of obvious facts and the ease with which the blame is put on victims mirror the official vocabulary of any world power wishing to defend their aggressive policies. The episode of the schoolteacher who is accused of terrorism is an example: as he denies the allegation, in order “to be assisted towards the truth”, he was first beaten, then his beard was set on fire, then “electricity was offered to his eyes, his genitals and his tongue”. In the process, the body of the victim as the space where power is applied is reduced to a mere detail, unworthy of much pondering and easily discarded of. What follows is only a small piece in the series of torture applied to this man:

He repeated his lie, that he was just a schoolteacher, which offended them. To assist him, they took him to a small stream containing dirty water and dirty glass. The liar was pushed into the stream and kept there for five hours. The men walked over him with their boots, applying his head to the rocks in the water. He lost consciousness to avoid questioning, so when he woke up they chastised him again (Rushdie, 2006: 292)

The conclusion - “These people were beyond saving. There was no hope for them” (Rushdie, 2006: 292), uttered by the general - is in fact meant to be a boomerang line targeted towards himself (and towards all the ones who abuse their positions of power to satisfy their own frustrations and physical weaknesses on other people).

In fact, the description of military terror from the standpoint of the general continues with two more episodes, equally aggressive in facts and ridiculous in language. One such instance is the torture of a sixteen-year old and his middle-aged father accused of terrorism; when the youth loses consciousness, he is put at the back of a truck “and taken away for his own benefit, for medical assistance”. At the complaint of the father that he was later found naked in a ditch with a bullet in his back, the general comments: “This was not the doing of his men. Probably after he had received medical attention and was allowed to go home he encountered terrorists of a rival faction and they attended to him” (Rushdie, 2006: 293).

Raping – the gender dimension of military violence

The gender dimension of the official army attacks over the population and its symbolic interpretation is described in the last episode, where the rape of some local women by their “military protectors” takes the form of an act of bravery in

the words of the otherwise sexually impotent general: “the women G, H and I, upon whom the virile wrath of the Indian forces had been potently unleashed” (Rushdie, 2006: 293). The explanation of the necessity of rape (“the manifestation of the protectors’ virile wrath against the female population”) as military action (“an important psychological tool”) with a clear reasonable aim (“It discouraged the menfolk from carrying out the subversive acts which it was in their nature to perform”), as “strategic and tactical matters” which “should not be discussed emotionally” casts yet another even gloomier and more cynical view over the general’s opinions. (Cf. Rushdie, 2006: 293-294). “Crazy assaults on crazy local girls” (Rushdie 2006: 98) are violent acts against which the local population has no power. Women’s bodies become passive means of showing the force of the conquerors, and the possible consequences (pregnancy, childbirth) represent traumatic instances of a collective memory of violence. Moreover, post-rape mutilations applied to women’s bodies signify an even more violent instrument of control of the collective psyche of people. Military raping is described in detail, and the reason clearly stated:

Meanwhile the army used sexual assault to demoralize the population. In Kunan Poshpora, twenty-three women had been raped by soldiers at gunpoint. Systematic violation of young girls by entire Indian army units was becoming commonplace, the girls taken to army camps, naked and strung up from trees, their breasts cut with knives (Rushdie, 2006: 361-362)

The war over Kashmir can indeed be regarded from many view points; the intricate territorial dispute was complicated by the desire for self-determination by the small population of the region, while three states, India, Pakistan and China, were the main powers disputing the land. Rushdie manages to present all the angles of the complicated history in *Shalimar the Clown*, again through the eyes and understanding of general Kachhwaha. His derogatory consideration of Kashmir wanting to control its fate, “a moronic idea” for a valley with only five million people, is suggestive of the general’s lack of sensitivity for national issues: “And why stop there? Why shouldn’t towns or villages declare independence, or city streets, or even individual houses? Why not demand freedom for one’s bedroom, or call one’s toilet a republic? Why not stand still and draw a circle round your feet and name that Selfistan?” (Rushdie, 2006: 102). The general’s ironic words stand at the basis of his future violent action against the locals, and represent the foundation of all military powers not respecting the will of the people. Later on he meets with approval the words of the “military echelon” that “*every Muslim in Kashmir should be considered a militant. The bullet was the only solution*” (Rushdie 2006: 291), and is happy to start his campaign of mad aggression against the Kashmiri population. The show of power, on the one hand by the Indian army and General Kachhwaha, and on the other hand by the suicide bombers, is presented by Rushdie as some sort of children’s game, with the truth becoming

irrelevant in a competition of the strongest; winning or losing the war is just a matter of will and interpretation (Cf. Rushdie, 2006: 311-313).

The “legitimized violence of war” (Rushdie, 1984: 393) is mentioned in *Midnight’s Children* as well, the character of Shiva, a major in the Indian army and the one with whom Saleem had been changed at birth, allows Rushdie to make one of his long-lasting remarks: “There is nothing like a war for the re-invention of lives” (Rushdie, 1984: 393), as he is transformed from a slum child into a war hero, admired by women in high society.

The justification of military violence comes from another novel by Salman Rushdie, *Shame*, and is also done alongside gender lines: there are moments when civil law - in the words of Raza Hyder, only a “discredited womanly tongue of minimum force” (Rushdie, 1983: 101), not enough to respond to the violence of the population - must be replaced by military necessity. The opposition civil law (feminine) and military law (masculine) emphasizes the state justification of violence in certain situations, as necessary acts of the restoration of institutional control (male) over the chaotic and unpredictable movements of the population (the female body).

Also in *The Impressionist*, Kunzru describes the massacre of Amritsar (In 1919 General Reginald Dyer opened fire on a civilian gathering. 339 people were killed and approximately 1200 wounded. As a consequence, General Dyer was released of his military duty and called back to Britain, where some people received him as a hero), where military force was justified by the British through the inferior race of the colonised: “Ethically, the dark-skinned races are like children, and the General was fulfilling the primary duty of the white man in Asia, which is to say he was laying down a clear line” (Kunzru, 2002: 183). The cruelty of the military intervention is minutely described in the novel, and it mirrors the historical accounts of what was to be known as the “Jallianwalla Bagh massacre” (Cf. Kunzru, 2002: 181-183). To make the portrait of the General in his novel recognizable as the real life General Dyer, Kunzru records his warning and threatening speech in front of the Indian leaders almost word by word. Here are the words of the novel character: “I am a soldier, he told them in clipped-parade-ground Urdu. For me the battlefields of France and Amritsar are the same. Speak up if you want war. If you want peace, open your shops at once. You will inform me of the badmashes. I will shoot them. Obey my orders” (Kunzru, 2002: 183).

See by comparison the speech held in reality by General Dyer in Urdu (here in English translation):

You people know well that I am a Sepoy and soldier. Do you want war or peace? If you wish for a war, the Government is prepared for it, and if you want peace, then obey my orders and open all your shops; else I will shoot.

For me the battle-field of France or Amritsar is the same. I am a military man and I will go straight. Neither shall I move to the right nor to the left. Speak up, if you want war? In case there is to be peace, my order is to open all shops at once. You people talk against the Government and persons educated in Germany and Bengal talk sedition. I shall report all these. Obey my orders. I do not wish to have anything else. I have served in the military for over 30 years. I understand the Indian Sepoy and Sikh people very well. You will have to obey my orders and observe peace. Otherwise the shops will be opened by force and Rifles. You will have to report to me of the Badmash. I will shoot them. Obey my orders and open shops. Speak up if you want war? You have committed a bad act in killing the English. The revenge will be taken upon you and upon your children (Cf. "Reginald Dyer")

Racial violence and the police

Police brutality justified by caste rules and a racist build-up of Indian society is presented in *The God of Small Things*. The episode of Velutha's catching and his subsequent beating, leading to his death, are dramatically presented; his self is reduced to a simple physical entity, which is consequently destroyed by aggression and totally annihilated. Velutha does not belong to himself; as an Untouchable, his body is meant to serve and obey the other castes; when he is seen to have taken control over it, Velutha is simply erased from this world, without any visible consequences from the point of view of state or human justice, except for Ammu's voiced protest. The mixing of racist elements (Velutha was an Untouchable, therefore the police did not know how much of their violence he could take: "any implication that if nothing else, at least biologically he was a fellow creature – had been severed long ago") with the sheer police duty, as it was understood then and there ("they were not arresting a man, they were exorcizing fear". Roy, 1997: 309) adds to the tragedy of the episode. All is blamed by Roy on the pre-established order of things, against which she stands, together with the main character, Ammu; however, Ammu is defeated in her attempt to oppose it, as "this was an era imprinting itself on those who lived in it. History in live performance" (Roy, 1997: 309). The sad and pessimistic destiny of the characters leaves no hope for the future, although the ending of the novel seems to cast a more optimistic light upon the events – the final word, pronounced by Ammu to her lover Velutha, "Tomorrow", may indicate some hope for a change of this closed and racist society (Cf. Roy, 1997: 339).

When individuals try to oppose the course of history, they are defeated; their futile attempts cannot stand in the course of a greater design of their fate. It is the case of Mahmoud (nicknamed the Woman) in *Shame*, the owner of Empire Talkies, a cinema place, who tries to ignore the "famous moth-eaten partition" (Rushdie, 1983: 61) and to play two films on the same day, one for vegetarians and one for

non-vegetarians, i.e. one for the Hindu and one for the Muslims. He is defeated in his attempt at reconciliation, first by playing the films for an empty house, then by being killed in a bomb attack of unknown authors, aptly called by Rushdie “the gardeners of violence” (Rushdie, 1983: 63).

Whose history?

Violation of history is in itself a means through which people’s interpretation of their national identity is damaged; this is a recurring theme in the Indian-British novels, and the different official versions of history lead to a complicated relationship with one’s past (and for that matter, present) national self. The strong connection between history and school is clear within the colonial project: schools are places where young men are disciplined and organised for the colonial service, therefore a hyperbolic past of glory and present victories over opposing forces are used to prepare them for “success in the world after school” (Kunzru, 2002: 316). The presentation of history is done mechanically, like a theatrical succession of events, it is a grey scene of uninteresting blurred events, with sudden “still compositions of shining faces and rich drapery” (Kunzru, 2002: 316).

A special situation is the re-writing of history for postcolonial use and from the view point of the imperial power in, for the natives, an unrecognizable depiction of realities. It is the case of Biju in *The Inheritance of Loss*, who spends a lot of time at the library in the United States, where he is an illegal immigrant, to read about an India with which he cannot identify; it is a metaphorically described India of explorers and geographic discoveries, but also of The East India Company and the British Empire. Biju finds it impossible to superimpose this image on the image of the home realities he had left as an economic migrant: “What on earth was all of this? It had nothing to do with what he remembered of his home (...). This was all news to him and he felt greedy for a country that was already his” (K. Desai, 2006: 110). The reverse is depicted in *Brick Lane*: this time the distortion of the past into a fabulous image of heroes and beauty is done by Chanu, in response to the realism of the presentation of the British History school-books. Thus “the Paradise of Nations”, a mythical “stable”, “wealthy” and “educated” Bengal, with “gentle, benevolent people”, for which four European countries fought, which provided “one third of the revenues of Britain’s Indian Empire” and “when the British took control, this is what gave them strength to take all India” (Ali, 2003: 151-153) is contrasted with its image in contemporary post-imperial English text-books, with “flood and famine” the predominant elements. His conclusion, “A loss of pride (...) is a terrible thing”, seems to be in opposition with Biju’s sudden gaining of pride, out of the realisation of coming from a country with such a fabulous past. However, both episodes witness a violation of the individual’s image of nation and national pride. In a discussion between Chanu and Dr. Azaz the former supports the idea of distorted history in English text-books; while in the days of the Empire they praised the British civilising intervention, the contemporary ones present the

image of multicultural Britain. In Chanu's opinion the British intervention in India was to the economic advantage and the spiritual fulfilment of the Empire:

When I was in school, do you know what we learned? The English gave us railways. As if we should get down on our knees for this (...). Do you think that they brought us railways from the goodness of their hearts? We needed irrigation system, not trains (...). They bequeathed us law and democracy. That's what they think. And never a word of the truth – that they beggared us, that they brought Bengal to its knee (Ali, 2003: 205)

At the same time, the brochure his daughter found in the hallway of their block of flats entitled *Multicultural Murder* focuses from an English xenophobic and highly gender-biased perspective on the South-Asians reclaiming the centre through school teachings of Asian cuisine (“*In domestic science your daughter will learn how to make a kebab, or fry a bhaji*”), postcolonial interpretations of history (“*For his history lesson your son will be studying Africa or India or some other dark and distant land. English people, he will learn, are Wicked Colonialists*”) or ecumenism (“*And in Religious Instruction, what will your child be taught? Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? No. Krishna, Abraham, and Muhammad (...) Christianity is being gently slaughtered. It is “only one” of the world’s “great religions*”). Whereas the leaflet urges English people not to “*put up with this*” “*when the truth is that it [Islam] is a religion of hate and intolerance. When Muslim extremists are planning to turn Britain into an Islamic Republic, using a combination of immigration, high birth rates and conversion*” (Ali, 2003: 207-208), Chanu's conclusion is that the English suffer the symptoms of “*an oppressed minority*” (Ali, 2003: 210). In a strange way, the British seem to have suffered a national disruption themselves, coming from a deep feeling of the coloniser's guilt. The same idea is found in *The Black Album*, where the English are presented with a double image: the past imperial one, and the present inferior one, with which they cannot come to terms: “*Brought up to rule, to lead, now they were just another minority*” (Kureishi, 1995: 79). In his book *Războiul timpurilor* and in a number of articles in *Idei în Dialog* Traian Ungureanu, a Romanian journalist, supports the same idea, of a Western society incapable of reaction to the Eastern Islamic attacks due to a feeling of guilt for the past inequalities, an idea in his opinion invented and supported by Leftist academics and the media.

Another type of disrupted image of the self is presented in *The Midnight's Children*: Aadam Aziz went to Germany to complete his medical education, and here “*he learned that India – like radium – had been ‘discovered’ by the Europeans*” (Rushdie, 1984: 13). Thus he suffers a personality displacement disorder, he sees himself through the eyes of his German friends, and ultimately “*this belief of theirs that he was somehow the invention of their ancestors*” disrupts their friendship and produces an unequivocal separation.

Conclusion

History has many manifestations and the violence of some of its episodes often influences others. This article explored such instances and analysed their inclusion in some of the novels by authors of South-Asian origin. The national history of the region as reflected in the above mentioned novels is constructed and re-constructed, depending on the point of view (of the Empire or the provinces) and on the narrating perspective, with violence as the common point, as violation of history is in itself a means through which people's interpretation of their national identity is damaged.

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