

Rites of Self and the 'Other': Naipaul's Construction of Muslim Identity

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The problem of writing across cultures does not necessarily require the essential support to the distinction between 'our' culture and 'their' culture. The complex process of dialogue from 'ours' to 'theirs' comprises saying 'no' to one's own cultural affiliations, as the autonomy of creativity demands a constant replenishment of one's own historical and social *self*. If this sense of autonomy is an important condition of telling one's own story, then it cannot be independent of one's responsibility towards the 'other'. This responsibility issues a call for dialogue across cultural boundaries wherein the *self* defines itself not just in its own terms but in terms of the relationship, in its moral, aesthetic and spiritual dimensions, with the *other*. If one recognizes this relationship with the *other* as one's source of creative autonomy, then the relationship with other ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identities require a voluntary conversation and dialogue with *otherness*. One performs one's civic role as a writer in one's participation in the conversation with the *other* by way of extending one's autonomy to a field of pluralism and difference. This is the spirit of a dialogic encounter with the *other*.

Within this bracketing of *self* and the *other*, one could think of contextualizing and interpreting the possibilities of meaning emerging from inter-cultural conversations. The community bound religious, political and cultural meanings produce a set of values that aim at determining the relationship between the *self* and the *other*. An imbrication of such values in the horizon of dialogues opens up questions about qualifying oneself, which generates a process of strategic communication and representation. In the field of late modern, non-eurocentric, non-orientalist, glocal and postcolonial drift of the human sciences, *self* as a play of substitution outside the hegemony of a discipline assumes a style of story telling that stages a diachronic upsurge breaking through the comfort of a stable epistemic frontier. Call it relativism or an incommensurable *otherness*, of those who are unrepresented in history but with whom one is engaged in a dialogue. How

does one retrieve the *self* as well as the *other* from this diachronic upsurge of an indefeasible other? Does the *other* speak to the *self* or how does the *self* speak to the *other*? Does one discover a causal-metaphysical and temporal structure of representation as an artifice of the *other*, for the *other*, if not from the *other*? Beyond the homogenizing view of other cultures and civilizations that has its roots in Europe's discovery of universalism, how does one overcome the limitation of a structure of representation? This question takes us to a politics of reflexivity, when we interrogate the very condition of the possibility of writing, which in a structure of representation produces a discursive construction of the *other*. Isn't writing then a politics of representing the *other* where others are namesakes by submission to the reigning ideas of the time? The 'other' as a namesake is often a metaphor that draws a line for an agency that simultaneously writes of and writes off the *other*.

In critiquing the Eurocentric, universalist positions, the agency of off-west writers and critics have been instrumental in representing 'social groups' which are defined by their 'otherness' in relation to the West. In a gesture of rendering voice to 'silenced', 'suppressed' and 'invisible' social groups postcolonial writers like Rushdie, apart from being critical of neo-colonial attitudes, also reveal 'native and settler, that old dispute, continuing now upon soggy streets with reversed categories'.¹ Edward Said has also represented 'the marked out by stereotypes' groups in Palestine in a series of writings.² In the recent times, V. S. Naipaul who has been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for 2001 has been officially accredited by the Swedish Academy on 11th October 2001 of "having united perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny in words that compel us to see the presence of suppressed histories." This accredited privilege, as an idea of history, apparently pulls out the cover, for history as a discipline renders history itself into the 'other'. This is a strategy of rewriting events that banks itself on *othering* the already represented history of the *other*, which borders on subjecting the *other* to a history that doesn't represent them but objectifies them as 'mute victims'. But this is not a victim's history, as opposed to a victor's history, but a narrative that produces an account of victimization, which takes away the victim's own history by historicizing the victims themselves. This is what is called the banishing of history into a historicized *other* which the discourse of history cannot bear with. Beyond the space of history, the artifact of representation exorcizes the language of history into a language of banishment by mixing the victim's history with historicization of the victim. The disjunction between a victim's history and the victim is presented in a story of victimization that produces a rupture in the agency of the victim as the author of his/her own history. This is a double act of victimization: an erasure of a victim's *self* by an author who banishes the victim's history, and refigures him/her as a returnee from the supposed

history of being victimized. In that mode of resurfacing, the victims appear as an 'other' without an agency, as the story that they tell prefigures their enslavement within History, taken out in a narrative that historicizes this enslavement in a reconfigured distance between their author and themselves.

Given this artificial reconstruction of History and its deployment in contaminating History with victims without an agency, it produces a genealogy of suppression and a structure of representation that objectifies the identity of the *other* into a passive mythology. In a global space of dominance, History as a contested discipline emerges as a binary of 'we' versus 'them', reconfigured into them as—we-see-them without proclaiming the intentionality of seeing. The message is coded into command like 'see us' as 'we see you', to dissolve their way of seeing into ours and our way of seeing into theirs. What transgresses these binaries of 'seeing' and 'seeing as' is the return of the 'other' contaminated by all masquerading as historical facts. The content of this masquerading assumes a liberal interpretation of disclosure of those facts that were suppressed by the hegemony and dug out by a masquerader and unapproved by the subjects presented as victims without any contingent sense of time and space. Such subjects are proper names to the ideal readers of History, awakened to realize how subjects outside history do not have a sense of their own *self*. History as servitude enmeshes these namesakes onto the other side of the fence, something parallel to History's parasiting and museumizing the inane cultures of non-western countries and then wielding the authority of a purportedly scientific history.

What such authoritative construction of history intends is to extricate itself from the voices from below and to silence them by presenting their lives as a causal trajectory of things that happened to them. It is like the rebel who has no place in the history of the rebellion, but has a place as a subject—within a narrative that utilizes rebellion as a historical ploy. Such a ploy could be further utilized to perpetuate a principle of infinite substitutability in which events could be transposed, locales could be changed, characters could be constructed as ingredients of a narrative that represents the violence of an aggression, to which the violated has a historic aversion. In an increasingly cluttered atmosphere of understanding the past, the majoritarian notion of a past locates events in the life of a majority. One doesn't fail to notice the reluctance in encompassing any contrary discourse of identity to the majoritarian identity that builds up the idea of 'unity against diversity'. Further, such a unity constructs an *other* not in its own image but as an inverted image of oneself belonging to the majority. Such a strategy of building an inverted image of the 'other' goes with an emergence of a 'global archipelago' in which identities enter into a clash that stretches itself throughout the world. Contemporary *clash of civilizations*, projected in the second Gulf War as well as in the War in Afghanistan, has thrown open the

politics of otherization, which is an inevitable corollary of globalization of cultures. The 'other' in the drama of the 'clash of civilizations' therefore is inevitably the 'other' of the West. Social and cultural groups moving across the geo-political boundaries of the First, Second and Third Worlds—deterritorialized and dehistoricized by the discourses of the West—are sites for such otherization.³

In one's inquiry into such sites of otherization, one finds that Islam emerges as one such site of interrogation and contestation, particularly after September 11, 2001. The globalizing agenda of the West centres itself around the metaphor of civilization in almost a repeat demonstration of colonial superiority, attempted to globalize itself in its march across Asia. As this march is supposed to turn the Asian backyard into an interior of liberal democracy, the melancholy over conquering the terrorist 'other' is subdued in their status as 'conquered' protectorates of the United States and of the West, as Regis Debray puts it.⁴ This is how Islam as *other* is made to be a part of the victorious 'self' that the West has developed in its accomplished fact of countering terrorism on a global scale. The Western dilemma in playing a role in the war machine of the United States of America is resolved by the West when it has found a credible villain in Islam in all senses of the term. As the morality of the defeated expresses itself in the form of rebellion, the possible backlash from the Islamic groups and States now constitutes the somber and bizarre analysis of Islamic culture as an extension of Europe's own past. In seeing its own past in 'them' (people of the Middle East and Asia), the West inverts its prehistory of liberal democratic modernity by supposing that Islam necessarily connotes a illiberal dogmatic and fundamentalist past of its own and thereby produces a juxtaposition between the present of Islam and in its barbaric past. The United States defends itself as a global civilizational institution that would decide the road map for all other, culturally different social groups in a renewed orchestration of universalism that subsumes the particulars from the backyard. This meta-representation of other cultures has been the idyllic forté of the books and journals on the East that enchanted western liberals since the late nineteenth century. What is novel in this meta-representation of the 'other' in the text of global hegemony is an aftershock that followed from the so-called terrorist attacks of September 11, a subversion of a fantasy of the West from the supposedly innocent and powerless community of the East. But the aftershock generated a dystopic mire of misrepresentation in which Islam emerged as the only bad, dangerous and untenable brute force of terror. How does one aestheticize this breaking of the myth that the West is the superpower and the East is the powerless, without really breaking the deadlock of terror?

Neither a 'professional orientalist' nor a 'thrill seeker' but a spectacular narrator of religious loyalties turned into instruments of collective

subordination as observed in Islamic states like Malaysia, Iran, Indonesia and Pakistan, V.S. Naipaul occupies the centre stage of western speculation of the nature of Islam. Naipaul describes and re-describes to an implied audience of the West of the dark, illiterate and unselfconscious medieval subordination of people of these four countries to Islam. This stereotyping of Islam goes with the imperial arrogance as the orientalist view denies non-western civilizations their right to self determination, as they are considered to be culturally inferior. This dogma about the status of non-western countries of the East is blindly shared by the politics of anti-semitism.⁵

V. S. Naipaul has been described as 'a literary navigator.' The cultural confusion of the Third World and the problem of an outsider has been a feature of Naipaul's own position as an Indian in the West Indies, later described as a 'British writer born in Trinidad' by the Nobel Committee. He has been also described as a 'nomadic intellectual' in the postcolonial world who has constantly refused to avoid unwelcome topics, characterizing his role as writer "to look and to look again, to relook and rethink."⁶ Naipaul's later view of identities of 'social groups' and individuals vis-à-vis his own artistic preoccupation with self identity in his early works like *A House for Mr. Biswas* has provoked the sensibilities of his readers, particularly in the Third World. Therefore a re-thinking of issues of identity, suppressed histories and their representations by Naipaul as 'half made societies' has become pre-emergent, along with a 're-looking' (to use Naipaul's own experience) at his earlier engagement with the ambiguities of home and homelessness, personal memories and impersonal histories.

Naipaul's fictional work, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, which is his masterpiece, has been a desperate search for 'home' and 'houses' amidst the flux and ambiguous moments of belonging(s) and identities.⁷ In *A Way In the World*, Naipaul writes, "as a child, I felt that history had been burnt away in the place where I was born." In positing a continuity from pre-Columbian Trinidad to slavery and modernity in this novel he says, "we go back all of us to the very beginning; in our blood and bone and brain we carry the memories of thousands of beings."⁸ In fact an experience of a back and forth movement of the 'self' in history, which is a two way play, has been the predicament of the migrant, diasporic and exiled⁹ writers like Rushdie and Naipaul, whose constructions of cultural identity have been through a process of reconstruction of personal memories and historical experience.¹⁰

In reading such narratives of crossing between personal memories and (im)personal histories, in attempts to construct a cultural identity, a critic inspired by poststructuralism is inclined to argue that cultural identities are 'fictitious' because the 'self' they claim to designate as the authentic recipient and chronicler of historical experiences is merely a fiction of language, an effect of discourse.¹¹ This is how identities also become dangerously mystifying because "they treat fictions as facts and cover over the fissures.

contradictions, and differences internal to the social construct we call a self."¹² Therefore, an ambiguous identity—cultural and historical—runs the risk of serving oppressive and hierarchized ideological functions when there is a positivist assumption that a knowable world can be described and theorized by a knowable self. This is how some of our migrant intellectuals, critics and writers mostly residing in the metropolis consciously or unconsciously celebrate an essentialist mode of narrativization of oriental life-world and history, while privileging disguised structures of power that really suppress histories. Given the problematic of identity construction in culture and history, how does one know 'who are we' and who is the 'other' and how the (un)knowable self knows how the 'self' and the 'others' fit into the (un)knowable world?¹³ To overestimate claims of cultural identity in an essentialist mode or to underestimate it as a mere wounded attachment¹⁴ is to ignore the political 'salience' of actual identities. Narratives of suppressed histories can be largely liberated and rendered voice when an 'organic intellectual' who encounters 'otherness'.¹⁵

In Naipaul's case there has always been an element of strangeness in identity construction and representation. For West Indian critics like George Lamming, Naipaul's work represents a denial of the Third World spirit, whereas for Naipaul an enactment of the personal and the domestic in novels like *A House for Mr. Biswas* is also an occasion to narrate "the most personal, created out of what (he) saw and felt as a child."¹⁶ In such a context, Fawzia Mustafa has commented that Biswas's role then carries the double burden of being illustrative of general historical process, as well as embodying the consequences of a specific and local moment."¹⁷ An ambiguity amidst the flux of the general and the specific in order to resist and disclose the articulation of the experience has mostly resulted in skewed comments and a muddling of fact and fiction in Naipaul's writings.¹⁸ This characteristic of Naipaul's writing is illustrated truly in his recent non-fictional writings *Beyond Belief* (1998) and *Among the Believers* (1981), which are Naipaul's 'literary excursions' through Islam. An author who remained at the tangent of a stable self-identity undergoes a transformation, as his sense of absent self recuperates itself in taking an excursion through Islam, an other that awaits unveiling, in contraposition to which he can 'centre' himself as an observer and tell us supposedly the wrongs in it. Authors and intellectuals like Rushdie, Edward Said and Amitav Ghosh have expressed their anxiety over the ideological function that an extremely brilliant author like Naipaul is performing in such excursions. Many are of the opinion that Naipaul deserves the Noble prize for his early novels alone and not for these so-called excursions.¹⁹ The question is whether Naipaul's ideological role is deliberate or an inevitable consequence of his own existential crisis as a Trinidad born British writer.

In an early essay "The Mutiny on the Bounty" mentioned by Amitav

Ghosh,²⁰ Naipaul had described how the flowers of the Caribbean in his youth were rendered invisible by the unseen daffodils of the textbook English poets. In *The Middle Passage* Naipaul says, "Nationalism was impossible in Trinidad"²¹ because the history of Trinidad is essentially an European history. Experiencing the double exile of language, Naipaul had stated that the English language was his, but not the tradition. Third world researchers and intellectuals had then found the most powerful tools and images of postcolonial representation and appropriation in Naipaul. However, the Western audience has been more sensitised always by Naipaul's non-fiction, precisely his two books on Islam. Naipaul is indeed Conrad's heir as the Nobel Committee stated, as we gradually note the shift in Naipaul's tone, in his rage against his own past and his "disillusionment with the myths of his uprooted ancestors."²² The Caribbean compulsion of "Where else to row but backwards"²³ was no more a backdrop for Naipaul's identity construction. India, the Caribbean and Africa as 'areas of darkness' fade away, almost disappear from Naipaul's representation, like those Caribbean flowers of his youth, privileging the western image of a half-made orient, defined only by what it lacked. Ironically, Naipaul got 'canonized' for his indictment of the Third World to the frustrations of scholars and researchers who had been quoting him to prove their postcolonial point. The decision of the Nobel Prize committee on the 11th of October, exactly one month after the September 11th incident, has made Naipaul admirers anxious as to whether the Nobel is a (belated?) reconciliatory tribute to Naipaul for legitimizing the Western representation of the oriental societies and religion as 'half-made' and barbaric.

Naipaul's inversion of the colonized world into a field of native and indigenous despotism follows from a late modern 'Western' de-centring of the West. Such a decentering empowers the West to celebrate and mourn its ruins of cultural and intellectual self-destruction. Naipaul situates his authorial agency as a writer of the memory of these ruins like many other off-West authors like Umberto Eco and Gunter Grass.²⁴ Again, Naipaul turns the disillusionment of self-esteem of the West as the starting point of demystification of the Orient, which the West has so far exoticized in many ways. In such a strategy of representation Naipaul becomes the discursive author of neo-western phantasmagoria of recreating the lost Orient that makes the West disappear from the scene as an aggressor and establishes the moral legitimacy of the West in grounding a desire for correction and reform of the Third World.

Naipaul as an off-West writer derides all notions of home and culture (e.g. *Enigma of Arrival*) and turns culture and home into tools for determining authenticity of Islamic belief in countries like Pakistan, Iran, Malaysia and Indonesia. In a queer stroke of ironizing the history, Naipaul chooses stories of personal encounter as Islam personified and considers these as historic episodes to displace real history of Islam through the lives

of such persons whose affiliation to Islam becomes the subject of Naipaul's irony. Strangely enough, this choice demonstrates a deliberate annihilation of fiction as a form of representation and a feigning of history through metaphors and events of an excursion based on a few personal encounters. As mentioned earlier, this is an excursion into a site which is carefully chosen to debunk what it stands for; rather it acts as an assenting and testing ground for some of the colossal anti-Islamic stereotypes of the Western mindset.

The fundamental thesis about Islam that comes from Naipaul is that Islam is the religion of the Arabs and so if one is not an Arab Muslim one is a convert and s/he cannot be an authentic Muslim. At the beginning of his narration in *Beyond Belief* Naipaul states,

A convert has to run away from everything that is his. The disturbance for societies is immense. (...) People develop fantasies about who and what they are; and in the Islam of converted there is an element of neurosis and nihilism. These countries can be easily set on boil. (*Beyond Belief* 1.)

Naipaul has neither the patience of a social scientist or of an Eurocentric ethnographer to make a point after a consistent and systematic observation of his respondents nor does he have the benevolence of an (colonial) author who looks down at the oppressed from above. He is already the assumed *other* of those 'neurotic' and the 'nihilistic' converted people.

Tales of such "inauthenticity" galore in Naipaul's *Among the Believers* and *Beyond Belief*. The very titles of these books sound dubious as these refer to believers and beliefs that are inauthentic. The question is: why is Naipaul terming the followers of Islamic faith as believers and calling Islam as 'belief' when the conclusion is that none of these are authentic? Naipaul uses standard literary methods to show the use of the word 'believers' and 'belief' which ascribe a state of mind that holds a conviction in some human beings, while they are negated in the narrative of the text. Perplexed by such deliberate effacement of believers in question and their belief, the question of authorial intent and of its presumed readers comes into picture. Apart from critics like Rushdie and Said one can also see through Naipaul's oddity from his own text. While making a comment like 'the life that had come to Islam had not come from within,' he comments that Islam's flaw is at "its origins—the flaw that ran through Islamic history to the political issues it raised it offered no political or practical solution. It offered only the faith. It offered only the prophet, who would settle everything—but who had ceased to exist. This political Islam was rage, anarchy."²⁵ The prosaic vendetta on Islam finds its spot of blame in what he calls political Islam, meaning institutions of State that are based on faith. This juxtaposition by Naipaul between Islamic State and the faith of the people is to widen the dragnet of criticism. The facts of social deprivation and oppression could now be attributed to the failure of the promise of salvation that is enunciated in Islam. The clergy, the

government and the civilization, all would fall within this wide net of aspersion and one could be interchanged by the other in a story of vilification. What is generalized as the most abominable in this plotting is any kind of indigenous Islamic identity that grows around a State inspired by Islamic faith. The motive and the intent of the author becomes further clear in the very claim that life of Islam hadn't come from within, as this conspicuously blends Naipaul's vantage of an outside observer and what he calls life that has come from outside. In this field of gazing from outside and not from inside, Islam is supposedly more political than religious, more enriched by the late 20th century liberal institution than the faith that it professes. The strategy here is not only to constitute 'Islam' as a substance for blame but also to indict all those real lives and institutions that had given rise to the Islamic world in order to finally prophesizes a self-abnegating doom for all of these, as if they cannot exist by being so away from Naipaul's own worldview. In such an outsider's worldview, formation of an indigenous religious identity is necessarily anti-modern and anti-secular and especially if it is an Islamic one it is more scandalous than the dark ages of Europe. Such is the deculturalizing effect of Eurocentric modernity that authors like Naipaul use modern notions of State and individual freedom against traditional societies in the form of presenting their subjugated status as if they do not conform to those standards.²⁶ Even more interestingly what comes out of such a besmirching is that the Third World writers and theorists suffer from this limitation of including specific identities and histories within the rubric of their writing, as the standard and protocol accepted by them is the self-same universal western standard. So the short cut is to debunk the diversity and talk of some kind of inadequacy on the part of the 'subject' spoken of. Here Naipaul, the 'homeless' and 'wanderer', moves out from his oft-liked paradigm of an 'undefined place and undated time' to be an advocate of hardcore Western rationality that functions only as a structure of an imperialist epistemology.²⁷

What naturally follows from such preconceived and doctored version of Islam is the picture of impoverishment that Naipaul draws of these Islamic countries. Instead of a liberal sympathy that the Western observers hold for Third World conditions, Naipaul adopts the wretched as a libel against the wretched themselves, a neo-liberal conservative stance for blaming the poor for their poverty. Naipaul takes this fig of the late liberal perspective in presenting the state of affairs in Islamic States. The desiderata of the liberal West are further articulated in Naipaul's illiberal description of Islam as the worst calamity in India's history.²⁸ Rushdie calls such blatant tirade against Islam as a recruitment material used by fundamentalists. In *Among the Believers* Naipaul writes about his own understanding of Islam,

Islam, going by what I saw from outside, was less metaphysical and more direct than Hinduism. In this religion of fear and reward, oddly

compounded with war and worldly grief, there was much that reminded me of Christianity—more visible and 'official' in Trinidad; and it was possible for me to feel that I knew about it. The doctrine, what I thought was its doctrine didn't attract me. It didn't seem worth inquiring into; and over the years, in spite of travel, I had added little to the knowledge gathered in my Trinidad childhood. The glories of this religion were in the remote past, it had generated nothing like a Renaissance. Muslim countries where not colonized, were despotisms; and nearly all, before oil were poor (*Among the Believers* 16).

Naipaul's ambiguous understanding of the history of Islam comes round as he banishes Islam into a subject of glory of the remote past, not worth inquiring into. Although not worth inquiring into yet, he undertook the journey to four major Islamic States. So also his expectation for a Renaissance in Islam grossly dismisses the contribution of the Islamic civilizations to the Western world that created the background for Renaissance. Further, he reduces the prosperity of some of the richer Islamic States into their presence in the global oil market, as if without this backhanded compliment they would have remained non-descript. One can understand Naipaul's emphasis on oil as a linkage to the development of neo-colonial market relations that made the West include Islamic nations into the cherished new world order. Naipaul operates through this oil-dependent status of Islamic States and presents the Third World Islam as a nascent territory of subjugation under the 'power' of the West.²⁹ That this power also produces difference and resistance from the native subjects of Islamic countries is pooh-poohed in his bracketing of Islamic State into a society of degraded civilizational content as expressed in his fond 'dossier' of Islam, cited above. Not only that, the subjects of his analysis are necessarily native Muslims with low intelligence, as all the funny and footloose moments of his journey and excursions come through the confessions of their ineptitude. Every time a weakness of theirs is exposed, Naipaul the witness appears on the scene and gives the jaded judgement on the quality of these converts and Islamists.

Naipaul's construction of Islam therefore appears as a suppression of its 'real' history in a pre-judged mimicry of the existential conditions of its followers. In a territory, largely unknown to the Orientalist and the Western commentators of Islam, he chooses to poach the pluralistic and often multiple narratives of Islamic antiquity. The narrative tends to wipe out the past of the existence of Islam in a manner as if the excursionist is digging out those strata of Islam, which are forgotten³⁰ by its current form of existence. Naipaul considers Muslims of the non-Arabic origin found in countries like Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia and Iran as those who do not fall inside the Islam as known to the Orientalists. Rather they are annihilated in the totalizing theory of Islam given by Naipaul and the Orientalist Western scholars. Standing outside "History," these subjects of conversion act as a 'strata', which after

a gap between Islam in Arabia and Islam in the Far East punctuates the emergence of modern Islamic States. As subjects of these modern Islamic States, Muslims as communities and citizens do not evoke any curiosity in Naipaul as they are portrayed as un-self-conscious actors under the influence of some or other sect of Islam. So they represent, according to Naipaul, the lost and vague memory that they were not Muslims. Such a strategy of representation is a failure of the act of remembering the pre-Islamic past not only by his subjects but Naipaul as well. This loss of memory in his subjects gives Naipaul the sense of the concurrent imperialist refrain: "had these countries not accepted Islam as their faith (that too quite lately), with their rich resources like oil, they would have been the hotbed of First world prosperity and business." Naipaul's ruling disdain is this active forgetting of a pre-Islamic past in Islamic countries; but how could such forgetting be a matter of lamentation in the modernizing moment of Western modernity that necessarily advocates breaking away from the past?

Is Naipaul interested in upturning the present in terms of a past that is buried for the revivalist agenda of the claims of historical continuity? This discontinuity between the present Islam and the pre-Islamic past provides him the necessary whip to swing at the Muslims. He can now infer that they have wiped out the pre-Islamic past and had done violence to non-Islamic communities. This is how he interprets the break between the past and the present by bringing in those blind acts of some rulers and invaders that obfuscate transitions in history. What Naipaul is doing here is two fold: wielding a liberal stick to generate a condemnation of rulers of the Islamic States; and using this plank to reinforce the discomfiture and the bias that the West has against Islam. This is a particular mode of politicization of Islam's history in order to persuade the West against it, a strategy commonly taken recourse to by the fundamentalists of other hues and the military powers of the West (read post September 11 Western response to Islam). Naipaul's excursions provide the ideological moorings to such responses.³¹ The charge that Islam necessarily wipes out the pre-Islamic culture becomes an indispensable element of Western indictment of Islam in order to exorcise it and to checkmate any appreciation for the Arabic-Islamic civilization. This past is reconstructed by attributing acts of mindless violence on Islam as if it provides the clue to the 'truth' to the belief that Islam is necessarily violent. This is a shattering of the past of Islam in order to create a new world from its fragments, a reminiscence of the medieval unconscious of the Crusade. Naipaul fully plays upon this deep-rooted Western bias without really unraveling the social conditions of conversion to Islam. His method of constructing Islam follows a conspicuous path of telling the readers that the only way to understand history is the way the invaders looked at their own deeds.³² This justifies the way he looked at Islam and it's history within this mirror of invasion. It's a typification of Islam that would resist any potential

inquiry into why communities of the aforementioned Islamic States stepped outside the framework of received ideas and faith of the past. That it is not sufficient to give merely a will-to-power explanation, nor is it enough to essentialize that a pre-Islamic past are sublated under the typifying move of projecting the advent of Islam as rupturous and violent. So, Naipaul's arguments follow from a supra-historical ensemble of traditions that are suddenly awakened to confirm the advent of Islam's will-to-power. Naipaul didn't want to write fiction about these characters picked out from his tours but as they are neither representable in History nor in fiction; what is spoken of them as non-fiction is neither true nor false. They are 'non-fictional' in the sense that they are neither fiction nor history and are easily pushed out of the realm of reason and truth through anecdotes of personal encounters.

Notes

1. Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (London: Viking, 1988), p. 353.
2. Edward Said. "America's Last Taboo," *New Left Review*, 6 Nov-Dec 2000, pp. 45-53.
3. Edward Said. "Narrative Geography and Interpretation," *New Left Review*, 1/ 180, March-April 1990, pp. 81-97.
4. Regis Debray. "United States of the West," *New Left Review*, 19 Jan/Feb 2003.
5. Alexander Cockburn et. al., eds., *The Politics of Anti-Semitism* (New York: A.K. Press, 2003) (Forthcoming).
6. V. S. Naipaul, "Columbus and Crusoe" in *The Overcrowded Baracoon*. 1972. A rethinking of Naipaul's ideological position has gained urgency due to Naipaul's controversial reactions and comments during the debate on colonialism and gender oppression at the International festival of Indian Literatures in Delhi in Feb-March 2002, immediately after the awarding of the Nobel. The subsequent publications of critical essays on Naipaul and his biography have created greater heat surrounding Naipaul's ideological position. See, Amitav Kumar (2002), *The Humour and the Pity-On Naipaul* (New York: Buffalo Books).
7. V.S. Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (London: Deutsch, 1984).
8. V.S. Naipaul, *A Way in the World* (London Heinemann, 1994).
9. Exile as an in-between is a play between exile from and exile to, both crossing out the site of identification. So locating exile in the 'in-between' is a normative re-articulation of the effect of the real in a chain of shifting signification that iterates the effects of migration to places of exile.
10. Rushdie states that mass migration has created ambiguous subjects in whose deepest selves "strange fusions occur and where they find themselves." See Salman Rushdie (1991), "The Location of Brazil" in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Viking).
11. Paula M.L. Moya, "Reclaiming Identity" in Paula M.L. Moya et al. (eds.), *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2000), p.6.
12. Ibid.

13. Ibid. Positivists claim that the world is fully knowable and hence can be described, hierarchized, named and mastered. Hence there is no engagement with the other, which appears as a surprise.
14. Ibid. p.8.
15. Gayatri C. Spivak "Translators Preface," *Imaginary Maps* (Calcutta: Thema Books, 1997).
16. Naipaul's foreword to the Vintage paperback edition of *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1984) contains the statement in p.1 of the novel.
17. Fawzia Mustafa, "Home" in *V.S. Naipaul: Cambridge Studies in Africa and Caribbean Literature* (London: Cambridge UP. 1995).
18. Naipaul for example states, "(...) Mohamedan fundamentalism [is essentially negative, (...) in "area of awakening"]", interview by Dileep Padgaonkar. *The Times of India*, July 18th 1993. Naipaul also calls Tony Blair "a cultural Philistine" for celebrating plebeian culture in *Literary Review*. Details available in <http://www.book.guardian.co.uk/news/articles/06109.53094700.html>.
19. See "Amitav Ghosh on the Nobel Prize for Naipaul" in www.tehelka.com/channels/literary/2001/oct/12/1r/101201ghosh. and Edward Said, "An Intellectual Catastrophe" in www.stanford.edu/amitav/naipaul/said.html
20. Ibid.
21. V.S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage* (New York: Alfred P Knopf, 1999).
22. Amitav Ghosh commenting on noble prize for Naipaul states that in *An Area of Darkness* Naipaul expresses rage not in anyone else but himself and that "his decision stems not from what he sees in India but rather from his disillusionment with the myths of his uprooted ancestors." See <http://www.stanford.edu/~amitav/naipaul/ghosh.html>
23. See Alan Wilde, "Strange Displacement of the Ordinary: Apple, Elkin, Barthelme and the Problem of the Excluded Middle." *Boundary 2: A Journal of Postmodern Literature*, 10:1 Feb., 1981, p.12.
24. Both Umberto Eco and Gunter Grass produce a sharp critic of the West in terms of an indissoluble skepticism that grows from within the authority of knowledge.
25. See Edward Said (1998), "An Intellectual Catastrophe" in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Issue No. 389 dated 6-12 th August.
26. Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (London:Vintage 1994).
27. Anouar Majid, *Unveiling Traditions: Postcolonial Islam in a Polycentric World* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2000), p.138.
28. VS Naipaul, "An Area of Awakening," Interview by Dileep Padgaonkar, *The Times of India*, 1993, July 18.
29. See Edward Said, "Intellectuals in the Post-Colonial World" in *Salmagundi*, Vol.70-71, 1986, pp.44-64.
30. Naipaul's use of psychoanalytic terms like 'neurosis' and 'nihilism' are a part of his totalizing theory that Non-Arab Muslims are converts. He further states what acts as an institutionalized means of conversion. This is what is a form of schizoanalysis that finds out the loss of an imagined past.
31. Edward Said (1998).
32. See VS Naipaul (1993), "An Area of Awakening," Interview by Dileep Padgaonkar.