



V.S. Naipaul's *Half a life*, *Magic seeds* and globalisation¹

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Abstract

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Naipaul's work has been described as an examination of "the clash between belief and unbelief, the unravelling of the British Empire, the migration of peoples" (Donadio, 2005). Controversial both in terms of his perceptions of postcolonial nations (Said, 1978) and of postcolonial literary criticism (King, 1993), Naipaul, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001, at an earlier point declared the novel dead and postcolonial nations half-baked. Despite his provocative pronouncements and his readers' criticisms (the most stringent and extensive critique by Nixon (1992)), Naipaul is too important to be marginalised. While major contemporaries have ceased to be productive (Walcott, Ondaatje, Soyinka) Naipaul's voice continues to be heard, his tones new, his perspective flexible enough to apprehend new phenomena in culture and politics, and his critique sufficiently disturbing to merit critical attention. Despite accusations of being a postcolonial lackey, a reactionary, a racist, and a misogynist, he has survived, and not only because of his elegant prose.

My purpose in this article is to explore his 21st century writing as a critical understanding of the postcolonial phenomenon of globalisation as a cultural and economic force which is a development and consequence of imperialism and decolonisation. I shall argue that as a phenomenon, globalisation

1 I am grateful for the thoughtful and thorough comments made by the reviewers of this article to bring greater clarity and purpose to my writing.

differs from postcolonialism, in the interaction it brings about between marginalised classes and nations and those who by virtue of class, economic power or race are defined as being at the centre in the 21st century.

Opsomming

V.S. Naipaul's *Half a life*, en *Magic seeds* en globalisering

Naipaul se werk is al beskryf as 'n ondersoek na die botsing tussen geloof en ongeloof, die verbrokkeling van die Britse Ryk, die migrasie van volke (Donadio, 2005). Sy omstrede sienings van postkoloniale nasies (Said, 1978) en van die postkoloniale literatuurkritiek (King, 1993) vind onder meer neerslag in sy uitlating dat die roman dood en postkoloniale nasies halfgebak is. Ondanks sy uitdagende uitsprake en kritiek van lesers (veral die sterk en uitgebreide kritiek van Nixon (1992)) is Naipaul te belangrik om gemarginaliseer te word. In 'n tyd waarin sy belangrikste tydgenote (Walcott, Ondaatje, Soyinka) se produktiwiteit afgeneem het, laat Naipaul steeds sy stem hoor – sy klank is nuut en sy perspektiewe is soepel genoeg om nuwe verskynsels in die kultuurdomein en die politiek te omvat. Sy kritiek is ook ontstellend genoeg om groter kritiese aandag te verdien. Ten spyte van beskuldigings dat hy 'n postkoloniale lakei, 'n rassis, 'n vrouehater en 'n reaksionêr is, het hy oorleef – nie net danksy sy elegante prosa nie.

Die doel met hierdie artikel is om Naipaul se skryfwerk in die 21ste eeu te verken as 'n kritiese siening van die postkoloniale verskynsel van globalisering as 'n kulturele en ekonomiese krag wat 'n ontwikkeling en gevolg van imperialisme en dekolonisering is. Daar word aangevoer dat globalisering as 'n verskynsel van postkolonialisme verskil vanweë die aard van die interaksie wat dit teweegbring tussen enersyds gemarginaliseerde klasse en nasies en andersyds diegene wat op grond van klas, ekonomiese mag of ras as die sentrum in die 21ste eeu bestempel is.

1. Introduction

Naipaul refers to *Half a life* (2001) and *Magic seeds* (2004) as his last two novels. Though they were written separately, the experiences they contain of Willie Chandran and his sister, Sarjini, comprise a single narrative of migration and identity politics, delineating a stark trajectory that begins with the brutalisation and diaspora of peoples as a result of slavery, colonisation and decolonisation and industrialisation. The texts offer a critique of globalisation, or rather of the "late" consequences of decolonisation, in terms of the rootlessness of the characters, their half-lives and

failed possibilities. They appear to disprove the contentions of postcolonial theorists who have asserted the migrant's possibilities: border intellectual, subaltern, hybrid, mirror. To show how this critique is constructed, I have used literary theory and theories of economics and cultural globalisation to demonstrate the characteristics of Naipaul's critique of postcolonial categories.

I argue that *Half a life* (2001) and *Magic seeds* (2004) evidence a departure from postcolonial theoretical positions and shows how they have been overtaken by globalisation as an economic and cultural phenomenon. My article gestures towards the critical directions "beyond postcolonialism", not unrelated to these but sufficiently different to merit attention. I shall describe theoretical positions derived from economics and globalisation theory with reference to instances in *Half a life* (2001) and *Magic seeds* (2004).

Willie Chandran and his sister, Sarojini, have been damaged by colonisation, displaced by decolonisation, and marginalised by globalisation. Because of the need to introduce new theoretical perspectives, and to illustrate their illuminative capacity in *Half a life* (2001) and *Magic seeds* (2004), I have not been able to strictly adhere to a linear account of each narrative.

Naipaul's revisiting in the novels of themes (the pains of displacement, brutality, emptiness) in his earlier work suggests that the moment of decolonisation has passed, and the moment of globalisation has arrived. This moment offers fewer possibilities for belonging within the "global village" to migrant people, be these exiles, refugees or migrant workers. However, as I will show, the possibilities offered to "surplus populations" not only within critical literature of economics (Weeks, 1999) and globalisation theories (Hobsbawm, 2000; Rosenberg, 2000; Hardt & Negri, 2001), but also in the criticism of literary studies, are inadequate. In this article I treat *Half a life* (2001) and *Magic seeds* (2004) as one narrative, because to treat each separately might suggest that they deal with different concerns. Furthermore, by providing a broad perspective on the narratives, I am interweaving the perspectives offered by postcolonialism, globalisation and economics in order to show how Naipaul draws upon a half century of reflection to critique these possibilities.

In the second section of this article I discuss globalisation, exile, and identity as concepts through which the characters apprehend the possibilities for agency and being in various "first" and "third" world contexts. In the third section of the article I offer three perspectives

on globalisation and Western hegemony, drawn from the novels and the theoretical perspectives described earlier. In the fourth section I use JanMohamed's (1992) notion of the "specular border intellectual" as a means of understanding the dilemmas of Naipaul's characters and demonstrating the limitations of postcolonial theory in the understanding of globalisation for the postcolonial and metropolitan subject. The fifth section of the article extends the argument of the fourth section and suggests that one of the deleterious effects of globalisation is its attempts to deny the obligations of metropolitan centres to formerly colonised nations, and the obligation of Western states to protect migrants within its borders.

2. Globalisation, exile, and identity

According to Weeks (1999) the ideology of globalisation claims that it breaks with the associations (now regarded as patronising, and tainted) of colonisation, decolonisation, and neocolonisation. Critical studies, however, suggest that this claim masks a hegemony of developed nations, powerful over those regarded as developing. This hegemony is maintained by the fact that financial capital, accrued as a consequence of transactions involving money, not goods, has become the ascendant form of capital. Nations which rely on productive capital as their primary means of earning are therefore disqualified from effective participation in the global economy (Weeks, 1999:51). Markets and capital cannot easily be detached from the historical processes (colonisation, industrialisation, speculation) out of which they arise and individual identity is not easily disentangled from these social, economic, and political forces. Gramsci (1971) offers an understanding of identity in an environment shaped by hegemonic forces, sometimes exploitative, often brutal and capricious:

When one's conception of the world is not critical and coherent but disjointed, one belongs simultaneously to a multiplicity of mass human groups ... The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory (Gramsci, 1971:37).

That inventory, and the knowledge required to construct it, obliges the migrant or exile (as Willie Chandran becomes, leaving India voluntarily, but driven from Mozambique, and Germany), particularly in the aftermath of decolonisation, to subject each culture to analysis

and scrutiny, offering a mirror both of the society to which he is exiled and his predicament within it. "Offering the mirror" according to JanMohamed (1992) suggests, however, that the subject's reflections are configured to reflect and accentuate particularities of the society under scrutiny. I return later in this article to an appraisal of the possibilities of this position (specular border intellectualism) and demonstrate that it is no longer adequate.

Seidel maintains that the exile in another country perceives the "outland [as] a version of the inland; the possible a version of the previous ... saving remnants" (Seidel, 1943:8).² Seidel is important here because I wish to demonstrate not only that the concept of exile has altered, but that later developments, such as those offered by Said (1986) and Bhabha (1994), are similarly inadequate in the face of globalisation. In the vacuum left by the decay of empires, there remained a world in which "the version of the previous" (Seidel's imagined "previous"; 1943:8) could no longer exist in isolation, even as an idea. The obliteration of the homeland, its history and memory, in the period of colonisation and after represents the corruption of what Fernandez-Armesto (2000) describes as the settler's "impulse to civilize". The corrupted "remnants of memory" in Seidel's sense, when put together after decolonisation by pan-Africanists such as Kwame Nkrumah, were shown to be inadequate for postindependent states. If globalisation is the necessary aftermath of decolonisation, and decolonisation is the aftermath of empire (an idea disputed by Rosenberg (2000) but supported by Hobsbawm (2000)) then we might accept that compiling the "inventory" described by Gramsci must entail a rejection of identity when linked to any single place, historical influence, or moment. Thus the postcolonial project of re-constituting a national identity based on a retrieval of the imagined past, explored by Naipaul in *The middle passage* (1962), *A flag on the island* (1967a) and *In a free state* (1971), is inadequate. It is inadequate in part, because the diversity occasioned by diaspora is likely to expose features like class and gender divisions, which are general and not particular to historical moments or disruptions. Globalisation offers us an understanding of the economic function of diasporas, where, divorced from race and class conflict, they serve

2 Gurr (1981) and Ilie (1980) have written extensively on the literature of exile, but for the purposes of this article I want to concentrate on Seidel's (1943) perspective since it illustrates, in a way later writings cannot do, the difference between an older, perhaps "Western", perspective on exile, as opposed to another, perhaps "global", perspective.

in the short term to create surplus populations; in other words, populations which though vulnerable to exploitation are critical for the survival of expansionist capitalism. What *Half a life* (2001) and *Magic seeds* (2004) reveal in the multiple border crossings of Willie and Sarojini is the devastating effect of instability on the diasporic migrant (compelled to move within national borders or between them) and the globalised citizen (mobile and able to move at will), who because of race, gender and class differences remains marginal and displaced.

Marginalisation and the exploitation of what Adams, Gupta, and Mengisteab (1999) refer to as the "domestic working class" in the post-colonies and within former imperial centres, is not an accidental consequence of the collapse of empires, but a prerequisite for their reformulation and survival. It is not that a "new phenomenon" in the form of globalisation has been produced, Amin (1999) suggests. What has happened is that displaced people can no longer draw on the obligations or guilt of empires or states, since these have been replaced by multinationals seemingly without locality or responsibility to any former metropolitan centre. Recognition (both moral and economic) by the displaced or diasporic peoples of past guilt remains – even though the obvious links to these centres have been broken, as seen in the strategic movement of De Beers and Anglo American stock from the South African Stock Exchange to the Wall Street and London exchanges.

Although the subjects in *Half a life* (2001) and *Magic seeds* (2004) may "create an inventory of the past", it seems useful to distinguish between what JanMohamed (1992) describes as "syncretic border intellectualism" (recreating home in exile along the lines of what Fernandez-Armesto (2000:445) terms as the "impulse to civilize"), and "specular border intellectualism" (reflecting on and registering discomfort with what home might mean). What is different about these two novels is that the political and social struggles of the decolonised are now relocated globally, and the enabled Western subject, and the disempowered decolonised subject are revealed to be equally vulnerable to globalisation. Prior to decolonisation, political movements, social struggles, and ideological currents found expression in the state. According to Amin, in the aftermath of decolonisation and at the onset of globalisation:

all of these institutions in the South [associated with the state] have lost part or all of their legitimacy. In their place a variety of 'movements' have taken centre stage, focusing on the demands of environmentalists or women or the struggle for democracy or

social justice, or asserting community identities (ethnic or religious) ... Extreme instability is therefore a characteristic of this new political life (Amin, 1999:25).

The ensuing instability has been an occupation for the colonised subject, though characterised by recurring displacement, disenfranchisement, dispossession and diaspora. If *Half a life* (2001) is characterised by Chandran's growing realisation that neither family or locality offer him the protection he needs against his race and caste, then *Magic seeds* (2004) extends the psychic journey outwards in a series of half-attempts at a life (in Africa, India, Europe) in which the "Jim comes to Joburg" motif is replayed with variations which attenuate or intensify the rejection internalised and externalised in people's reactions people to Chandran. It is no surprise that *Magic seeds* (2004) opens with Chandran contemplating the fact that he cannot stay in Berlin with his sister Sarojini:

Another world. He was living there in the half-and-half way with his sister Sarojini. After Africa it had been a great refreshment, this kind of protected life, being almost a tourist ... it began to end the day Sarojini said to him, 'you've been here for six months. I may not be able to get your visa renewed again ... You've got to start thinking of moving on' (Naipaul, 2004:1).

"Moving on" becomes both a strategy used by Chandran to maintain "the half and half-life" and a means of resisting the obligations to localities to which he finds himself so curiously detached and unattached. In *Half a life* (2001) and *Magic seeds* (2004), the postcolonial state are shown by Naipaul to be "insufficiently imagined" (cf. Nixon's (1992:11) discussion of this theme in earlier novels by Naipaul) and are transposed in the experiences of characters such as Ana, Sarojini, Roger, and Chandran. Critics have pointed out that Naipaul's characters in *Half a life* (2001) and *Magic seeds* (2004) seem to be only partly developed, but I believe that these "insufficiently imagined" characters are created to reveal the devastation of migration and rejection on the psyche of the displaced individual. From the vantage point of Berlin the time in Africa is regarded by Chandran as associated with enervation:

I had began to feel that because of my insecurity – the insecurity I had been born into, like you – I had yielded too often to accidents, and that these accidents had taken me further away from myself. When I told my wife [Ana] I was leaving because I was tired of living her life she said something strange. She said it wasn't her life either (Naipaul, 2004:115).

In an earlier novel, *A bend in the river* (1979), Salim articulates this same sense of enervation when he says: "You were in a place where the future had come and gone" (Naipaul, 1979:33). In other words, the conceptual or intellectual possibilities apparently offered to settler and native in the period of decolonisation are neither available nor viable. The destructive quality of the "civilising impulse" is recognised by Salim in *A bend in the river* (1979) when he connects the Crusoe-like existence of expatriates in Africa and the inability of the indigenes to recreate anything out of the ruins of (de)colonisation. In *Magic seeds* (2004) its opposite is a wilful intervention, of the kind practiced by Sarojini, Chandran's sister, who goads lost individuals like Chandran into misguided action in the service of political causes:

When I went out to Africa ... I never wanted to stay. I thought something was going to happen and I would never unpack. Yet I stayed for eighteen years. And it was like that when I joined the guerrillas. The first night in the teak forest. It was too unreal. I wasn't going to stay. Something was going to happen and I was going to be liberated. But nothing happened, and I stayed seven years (Naipaul, 2004:178).

Much of Naipaul's fiction deals with border intellectuals like Chandran, a writer, and Sarojini, a maker of documentary narratives, who, displaced by the forces of colonisation and its aftermath, know that "home" exists only in corrupt and unsalvageable form, but sense that the impulse to obliterate the culture of the "other" is recreated in globalisation.³ The suggestion that globalisation works to disenfranchise as much as it does to draw people together enjoys some credibility in economic theories of globalisation. This literature can help to delineate the difference between postcolonial fiction and what is now replacing it, the "fiction of globalisation". This phrase is ambivalent because, as I argue throughout this article, the ability of globalisation to present itself as a departure from decolonisation and imperial and neo-colonial practices, depends on the perpetuation of fictions in which the imperial impulses underlying globalisation (as an economic and ideological phenomenon rather than a theoretical critical project) are hidden.

3 JanMohamed (1992:97) distinguishes between the "specular border intellectual" and the "syncretic border intellectual" as follows: the "syncretic intellectual" is more "at home" in both cultures than is his/her specular counterpart, and "is able to combine elements of the two cultures in order to articulate new syncretic forms or experiences".

JanMohamed's (1992) observations regarding specular border intellectuals are not only relevant to literary and cultural critics like Said who, as a Palestinian intellectual and critic of Western cultural practices, drew from his experience of exile. Hardt and Negri (2001) suggest that the processes by which the new global order establishes and maintains itself contradict its own principles, which are concerned with the accessibility of technology, promotion of democracy, the free market and the narrowing of the gap between the rich and poor, the settled and displaced. Chandran and Sarojini are never afforded place or settlement. The son of a Brahmin, and a coloniser's favourite (he received an education from his English patron), Chandran abandons his father's settled life at the temple. He travels to England, marries a Portuguese settler (Ana), attempts to settle with her in a disintegrating colonial Mozambique, returns to Europe where he is sheltered temporarily by his sister Sarojini (herself abandoned there by her partner) in Berlin, before becoming a land-rights activist, imprisoned and tortured in India, only to return to England where he finds work in an architecture firm. In recognition of his failure to find locality, Chandran recognises the plight of displacement when he sees Africans pretending to converse in phone-booths in Berlin:

Sometimes ... they saw Africans in the blue light of telephone kiosks pretending to talk, but really just occupying space, taking a kind of shelter ... Willie thought, 'How many of us there now are! How many like me! Can there be room for us all?' (2001:139).

"[P]retending to talk": Naipaul renders the plight of the displaced postcolonial within a former centre of imperialism, not unlike the portrayal of migrants in a recent Independent article (Hari, 2005:27) entitled "Sweatshops move North", in which a paradox of globalisation is described, the creation of poverty in wealthy industrialised states:

They have been inhaled by London's economy from Africa, South America and every poor country in the world, and they see our self-congratulatory multiculturalism as a bitter joke. Thank you, thank you for letting us come here and skivvy for you 12 hours a day for less than a fiver an hour. How tolerant you are. If they were British citizens they would be entitled to have their wages topped-up through the government's excellent Family Credit. But since almost all the cleaners are migrant labourers they are forced to live at rates everyone admits are way below the poverty line (Hari, 2005:27).

In *Half a life* (2001) and *Magic seeds* (2004) the exiles, former protégés and homeless sheltered in Germany and Britain are people for whom the only shelter is the mimicry of connection, the pretence at conversation.

3. Observations concerning globalisation and Western hegemony

Three observations can be made on *Half a life* (2001) and *Magic seeds* (2004) in relation to global economics. First, in Naipaul's novels the people who become unemployable are educated migrants with skills, refuting a mantra of globalisation that these two elements, irrespective of race or gender, enable mobility. This observation is evident also in the economics literature critical of globalisation. Amin argues, for example, that three features characterise globalisation: "[m]assive and permanent unemployment has reappeared within the Triad (US, Europe, and Japan), the welfare state has been eroded, and a new phenomenon of exclusion/marginalisation has become a permanent feature of the landscape" (Amin, 1999:17). It is the first two features that have made the third more visible. In other words, wealthier nations cede control of national economies and of their economic policies to transnational companies and international regulating bodies which operate in their shared interests. Welfare systems are threatened or curtailed as a consequence of the drive to maximise capital gain, as is the incentive of the wealthier nations to honour commitments to aid developing countries. Weeks (1999:50) describes the process:

The 'story' [or spin] derives from the premise that the countries of the world are now integrated through trade and capital flows to an extent that national economic policy is ineffective in so far as it does not follow a common set of highly restricted policies. Those who deviate from that set of policies can anticipate swift and terrible punishment by the impersonal discipline of markets, and most notably the financial markets.

Financial markets, according to the proponents of globalisation, are non-racial, non-discriminating against developed and developing nations, and global and their effect is to withdraw control from the state as an agent of protection. However, associated with independence in the global age is the covert advancement of colonialism's legacy: racism, displacement, and exile. Naipaul's novels situate themselves in postcolonies and metropolitan centres in order to problematise the effects of displacement or exile; to demonstrate how these centres attempt to deny any affiliation, let

alone obligation, to postcolonial national states. *Half a life* (2001) and *Magic seeds* (2004) analyse the consequences of globalisation for the postcolonial intellectual subject who is turned into the critic of and refugee from the global order. Both novels are set in the old sweatshops of the South and East (Africa, India) and the new sweat shops of the North (Germany, Britain), between which the protagonists move. Naipaul focuses on the experience of displaced colonials in Europe and the experiences of indigenes, suggesting that a re-evaluation of Europe and the West's role in patterns of displacement, dispossession, and political turmoil, requires attention. This second observation is echoed by Halliday (2001:21):

Not the least important part of such a recognition [that the past may be reassessed to lessen its impact on the present or to heighten the positive rather than negative influence of the past] is the discussion of how Europe, the focus of twentieth-century conflict but also source of many ideals of freedom, can contribute to this reassessment [of the impact of the past upon the present].

Halliday suggests that contemporary theories critical of globalisation offers Europe and its former colonies a means to reconsider that forgetfulness. Surplus populations associated with globalisation are not only a third world phenomenon.

A third observation is that in *Half a life* (2001) and *Magic seeds* (2004) Naipaul describes how the move from national sovereignty to global economic, political, and cultural institutions causes peculiar anxieties. What Fanon (1968) described as “nervous conditions” are experienced by Chandran in India and Britain and by Sarojini in Berlin. Both characters recognise that the pressures exacerbate the marginalisation of people considered irrelevant to, or displaced within, the “global village”; gradually pieces of the self die:

[he] felt ... the beginning of old grief. But then he thought, ‘I have been there. I have given part of my life and I have nothing to show for it ... I must let that part of me die ... I must understand that big countries grow or shrink according to the play of ... forces that are beyond the control of any one man. I must try now to be only myself (Naipaul, 2004:176-177).

Chandran's inability to identify himself with either place (locality) or cause (activism, human rights), or family, results from the exclusionary practices associated with globalisation (experienced as self-exclusion in *Half a life* and *Magic seeds*). One such practice is the creation of “Fortress Europe” in which it is increasingly difficult to

obtain asylum. Hobsbawm (2000:64) articulates this: "[t]he interesting thing about the current phase of the global economy is that it has taken place under conditions of immigration control imposed by all the large capitalist countries". Liberalisation of state economies encourages what theorists refer to as a drive towards the bottom, as countries compete to offer cheaper labour, fewer taxes, and relaxed restrictions on the movement of capital. These tend to support a class that already enjoys access to a global economy, whilst undermining any protection the state might offer to those who do not. The process is massive, and is rendered personal in the literature of the new century.⁴ Indeed, as Hobsbawm (2000:65) suggests: "globalisation means wider access, but not equal access". This not as a new order but the continuation of older patterns, what Naipaul in *Half a life* (2001) terms an "old grief". Halliday (2001:21) asserts that the connections between globalisation and neo-colonialism are strong:

the lived experience of globalisation draws on conceptions of power and inequality derived from earlier periods – the cold war and, before that, colonialism. Indeed the whole discourse of conflict within globalisation reflects the continued impact of these times, since that very discourse is in large measure phrased in a vocabulary and conceptual system derived from earlier conflicts.

The three observations above may be summarised as follows. Hobsbawm's suggestion that globalisation does not bring about access, let alone equal access by the rich and poor nations to resources, together with Halliday's suggestion that globalisation is a natural development of imperial and colonial practices, finds expression in an argument presented by GoGwilt in his analysis of Conrad's work: "[t]his idea of 'the West' is still very much linked to a diverse set of colonial and imperial practices. It functions, however, by denying the assumptions of colonial and imperial power, and dispersing the assumed links between such powerful ideas as race, nation, and culture" (GoGwilt, 1995:68; emphasis – RB). The perpetuation of imperial practices finds its obvious manifestation in *Magic seeds* (2004) in which Chandran's experience of imprison-

4 According to Adams, Gupta, and Mengisteab (1999:3-4) "Globalisation is sometimes considered the *inevitable* and *irreversible* product of technological change and the power of capital." However, many theorists have noted that the bias of international regulatory institutions and transnational companies, makes the inevitability and irreversibility seem more natural than it is.

ment in India after a period of failed activism instigated by his sister Sarojini is described. The warden says to him: “I see you are the walking wounded ... I will tell you why I have called you. I’ve explained to you the privileged position you enjoy in the jail ... We operate under the same rules as in the British time ... In a jail everyone is at war” (Naipaul, 2004:170-171).

In prison Chandran has the opportunity to reflect on his sister’s revolutionary sentiments: “though her talk never ceased to be about injustice and cruelty and the need for revolution, though she played easily with the tableaux of blood and bones on five continents, she was strangely serene with ... her easy half-and-half life” (Naipaul, 2004:8-9). He reflects later on his own time as a revolutionary: “I am surrounded here [in the Indian jail] by a kind of distress I don’t know how to deal with ... We talked about their oppression, but we were exploiting them all the time. Our ideas and words were more important than their lives” (Naipaul, 2004:167).

If my argument thus far has been to describe evident parallels between Naipaul’s treatment of characters in *Half a life* and *Magic seeds* and an ascendant cultural and economic hegemony, then the argument provided by Hardt and Negri (2001) provides an encapsulation of the covert continuities between imperialism and globalisation as affirmations of that hegemony:

... although the practice of Empire is continually bathed in blood, the concept of Empire is always dedicated to peace ... In effect, one might say that the sovereignty of Empire itself is realised at the margins, where borders are flexible and identities are hybrid and fluid (Hardt & Negri, 2001:xv, 39).

What I have demonstrated here is that the processes by which people become hybridised and acquire fluid identities, associated with decolonisation and the onset of globalisation, remain the same – disruption, displacement, and conflict. They seem to function in the same way, to enable the “Western” self – rich, confident, white – and to disable others: poor, black, uneducated, exiled.

In the next section I turn to postcolonial theory: from the outset of this article I have claimed that postcolonial theory, whilst offering concepts useful to my argument, is nevertheless inadequate as a means of apprehending globalisation and the implications of globalisation theory for the study of cultural artefacts.

4. Postcolonial theory and the possibilities of specular border intellectualism

Theorists such as Bhabha (1994), and Mamdani (1996) have discussed the migration and integration of people within the theoretical paradigms of postcolonial theory where the status of the margin offers intellectual and cultural possibilities. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989), JanMohamed (1992), and GoGwilt (1995) trace the development of colonial discourse and literature as a measure of resistance to neo-colonial hegemony. Chandran and Sarojini are subaltern voices attempting to resist, but overwhelmed by the hegemonic discourses associated with globalisation. Their privileged education appears to coincide what JanMohamed (1992) defines as "the positionality of specular border intellectuals" who anticipate the dangers of globalisation for people made vulnerable by race, gender, and class. JanMohamed offers an understanding of the possibilities offered to the specular border intellectual, since he argues that it is not merely the combination of initial dislocation, together with a Western education, which rules out the possibility of "gregarious acceptance" of any new home culture; "homelessness cannot be achieved without multiple border crossings or without a constant, keen awareness of the politics of borders" (Jan-Mohammed, 1992:112). Sarojini and Chandran are propelled to various locations by impulses not always understood by them, and by external agency. Unable to find "locality" or home, the process of multiple border crossing comes to define identity for Chandran and Sarojini as specular border intellectuals.

Multiple border crossings lead to intellectual specularity only when the individual's sense of displacement is stripped of the impulse to recreate a home, and the individual comes to reflect critically on ideas of home and exile, which are either unavailable or corrupted. Chandran is mission-educated in India, an education that is wholly out of keeping with his cultural and physical context, and which alienates him from the intellectual and religious currents of pre-independence India. He writes about holidays with his fictive Canadian family in the Rockies of America and leaves India for England to escape his father's failure and misery: "I began [to feel] ... detached, or floating, with no links to anyone or anything ... I forgot my situation. Sometimes I forgot where I was" (Naipaul, 2001:29). After moving from England to Africa and his marriage with a colonial Portuguese woman, Chandran goes to Germany to be with his sister, Sarojini, to be "inspired" by her to serve a revolutionary cause in India.

Sarojini leaves her father's ashram with her German lover, comes to regret her armchair activism in Berlin, and returns to the ashram, only to be frustrated by its (im)possibilities, and to return to Germany, disenchanted by her meaningless life and abandoned by her partner: "I am not too happy with what I have done, though everything was always done with the best of intentions. It is awful to say, but I believe I have sent many people to their doom" (Naipaul, 2004:159).

Half a life (2001) describes and problematises the vision offered by Chandran's father, the failed Brahmin whose only recourse after his defiance of caste is a fatalism portrayed as self-destructive. The alternative vision, in which the dialectics of revolution are offered as the hopeful beginnings of a new world, is embodied in his "untouchable" wife and their daughter Sarojini. This is revealed as equally flawed, since the will to revolt is constrained and deformed – half a life – by power, obligation, and influence which may seem to promise inclusion and access, but which prescribe the limits of what these mean. The Brahmin becomes a court secretary in a Maharajah's palace, a world fading rapidly in postindependent India.

Contrary to Bhabha's suggestions in *The location of culture* that migrancy and hybridity offer rich intellectual possibilities (1994), in Naipaul's work migration leads to the impossibility of belonging anywhere. Despite their Western education, both Sarojini and Chandran are disadvantaged and made more vulnerable to the rejection inflicted upon them as the unlucky favourites of patrons (Chandran's Roger, Sarojini's Wolf). Sarojini and Chandran are aware that their host countries offer them sanctuary while rejecting them on the basis of race. If they have any value in terms of accomplishment or possessions, these are quickly categorised and undervalued. Race, the last bastion of colonialism, cannot be hidden, even when the coloniser shares an education and language with the formerly colonised. Yet those aspects of education and language which supposedly enable global mobility and acceptance in the global marketplace, work only insofar as they homogenise a notion of what it means to be *Western*, where *Western* is defined in colonial terms: race categorisation and the fear of contamination. Such practices form part of the "practice of globalisation", even if the rhetoric of racism does not.

Neither Chandran nor Sarojini embodies the "uncritical gregariousness" which JanMohamed (1992:101) characterises as part of the disposition of the immigrant to a new country. They cannot adopt an "uncritical gregariousness" towards their countries of

adoption because they are "specular border intellectuals", made homeless by multiple border crossings between countries regarded by globalisation's critics as peripheral. Barred from participation in the adopted culture, they are obliged to situate themselves on the border. Yet as JanMohamed (1992:103) points out:

In theory, and effectively in practice, borders are neither inside nor outside the territory they define but simply designate the difference between ... interiority and exteriority they are points of infinite regression ... Thus, intellectuals located on this site are not, so to speak, 'sitting' on border; rather they are forced to constitute themselves as the border, to coalesce around it as a point of infinite regression.

The "infinite regression" referred to above takes the shape of the inability of Chandran and Sarojini to be at home even in India. Yet, if a global identity, "Western, educated, Anglo-Saxon or European", is unavailable to those who are disqualified in terms of their race, class, gender or education, then what is offered in lieu of this?

5. Westernisation/globalisation: the impossibility of identity for the migrant

GoGwilt argues that the idea of a Westernised identity as normative and the only valuable identity may be traced to the colonial state, and to the effort made by its citizens to forget the humiliations of decolonisation as they experienced them (GoGwilt, 1995:9). The implications of decolonisation as a "global process", aimed at further opening markets to world capital, and the attempts by its victims to forget it, are embodied in Sarojini and Chandran, who are alienated from themselves in terms of personal choices and the categories offered to them in metropolitan centres (exile, asylum seeker, migrant). Their colonised *selves* are no longer acceptable, the practices of colonisation remain in evidence after the decline of empire. Yet by laying claim to the *ties of empire* (the relationship of obligation), and by the denial of that claim by the metropolitan centre, they hold a mirror to the hypocrisy of former colonial powers who deny agency in displacing peoples.

What is new in these novels is not that they expose how people are rendered valueless in the global economy, but that even traditional welfare states are now less able to protect vulnerable populations at home. Sarojini and Chandran were favoured by colonial power through the education provided by missionaries, but become redundant in a globalised world.

Lack of control over one's destiny is not limited to characters in novels. The increasing inability of states to determine their own labour and production policies is a major feature of the "global pull towards integration" as argued by Weeks (1999). Yet if, as GoWilt suggests, forgetfulness of the brutality of imperialism is a prerequisite for the maintenance of Western hegemony, then in its latest guise: "[t]he passage [from state] to Empire emerges from the twilight of modern sovereignty. In contrast to imperialism, Empire establishes no territorial centre of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries" (Hardt & Negri, 2001:xii). Hardt and Negri define *Empire* as the economic and cultural hegemony which follows formal colonialism and decolonisation. Despite the absence of fixed boundaries the concept requires an "other", in this case, the undeveloped or developing world. Halliday (2001:27) notes that "generally Europe is constructed in terms of negatives ... Sometimes this other is defined as the Islamic world, or ... sometimes it is associated with the Third World as a whole".

Negotiating a new identity is therefore an important aspect of exile. Sarojini (perhaps not unlike Naipaul himself) in her activism, for example, appeared able to transform the remnants of her past to form a new home in which she was creative, an activist, and an anarchist, pointing to the syncretism which critics such as Bhabha (1994) have described as developing after the binary and totalising structures of power have been fractured and displaced. In other words, a new form of community of what Bhabha terms the "unhomely", a new internationalism, a gathering of people in the diaspora: "[t]o live in the unhomely world, to find its ambivalences and ambiguities enacted in the house of fiction, or its sundering and splitting performed in the work of art, is also to affirm a profound desire for social solidarity" (Bhabha, 1994:18).

Childs and Williams argue that "[d]iaspora can be aligned with other by now familiar terms, such as hybridist, syncretism, and realisation, which promote both the liberating aspects of ... difference together with a resistance to the monologist thought and oppression that colonialism represented" (Childs & Williams, 1997:210). However, this creative possibility is interrogated in *Half a life* (2001) and *Magic seeds* (2004), since in the global village the possibilities for another life become even more limited as asylum becomes more difficult to attain, work and home more difficult to create.

Naipaul's vision of the postcolonial subject's identity in Britain and Germany is elusive: both countries offer marginal and dependent identities to the protagonists; both function as shelter, refuge, and

prison, and in both Chandran and Sarojini are aware of their ineffectuality in the "global" metropolis. Chandran, instead of claiming that he has paid for access, as part of the world colonised by Britain and the European powers, begins to perceive how vacuous the centre is. In order to exist there, it is expected that he should create a persona for himself; in *Half a life* (2001) he uses this to intimidate his contemporaries in the teaching college in London; in *Magic seeds* (Naipaul, 2004:174) he is referred to as "a pioneer of modern Indian writing". His persona is the coalescence of London's expectations. Naipaul is returning through Chandran to the world of Ralph Singh in *The mimic men*: "I tried to hasten the process which seemed elusive. I had tried to give myself a personality [yet it was] a flight to the greater disorder, the final emptiness: London and the home counties (Naipaul, 1967b:11).

Chandran carries India within him and is thus what JanMohamed terms "an exile in the weak sense, that is, a subject who always belongs to his home culture in spite of, indeed because of, a circumstantial and temporary alienation" (JanMohamed, 1992:99). Adopting the coloniser's stereotypes, if only to mimic and subvert them, is only one of the self-annihilating ironies with which post-colonial exiles must live. Unlike Sarojini with all her false certainties, Chandran is that "area of darkness" Naipaul explores in *An area of darkness* (1964) and *India: a million mutinies now* (1990). Not quite the exile, nor the immigrant, Chandran's shifts suggest an inability to establish any sense of belonging.

The emptiness of the centre is a reflection of the emptiness of the periphery, as Naipaul renders it when Chandran arrives in Africa and when he returns to Europe eighteen years later: "[h]e tried to visualise the country on the eastern coast of Africa, with the great emptiness at its back" (Naipaul, 2001:127).

The streets of the centre were everywhere crowded, so crowded that sometimes it was not easy to walk. There were black people everywhere, and Japanese, and people who looked like Arabs. He thought, 'There has been a great churning in the world' ... He felt a great relief. He thought, 'The world has been shaken by forces much bigger than I could have imagined' ... To see it too often was to strip it of memories, and in this way to lose precious pieces of himself ... he began to wonder, as he had wondered in the forest and in jail, how he was going to make the time pass (Naipaul, 2004:196-197).

Ultimately, *Half a life* (2001) and *Magic seeds* (2004) demonstrate that globalisation, while appropriating discourses concerned with

access, diversity, acceptance, mobility and upliftment, is experienced by migrant populations as exclusionary, racist, and imperial, and further that the possibilities for identity, expression, resistance, reflection, and critique within “the global village” are increasingly reduced and withdrawn, even within supposedly established democracies.

6. Conclusion

The contraction of time and history and the pull towards integration have been noted earlier as features particular to globalisation. The identity offered by *Western* histories of the East and South has been interrogated by scholars such as Said (1978), but what takes its place in a global context is equally poisonous. Homelessness, displacement, and exile are rendered in Naipaul’s fiction as the consequence of the “othering” practised on those who live on the periphery by those who see themselves as central within the global village. The postcolonial global subject, made homeless, his identity as indigene made valueless, must accept the categories afforded him in the new order where the rags of his previous self become curios of exotic value, as in the patronising assessment of Chandran’s writing. If the categories offered by postcolonial theory are turned into curios, the possibilities of their use as a means of critique and reflection (the role of the specular boarder intellectual) are reduced. It is for this reason that Hardt and Negri suggest that postmodernist and postcolonial perspectives are limited, since both define themselves in opposition to forms of power without recognising the challenge of a new paradigm which operates via partisan and differentiating hierarchies as well as hybrid and fragmented subjectivities which theorists have celebrated (Hardt & Negri, 2001:138). For writers who explore the limits of participation in “the space of flows” (Castells, 2000), the challenge is to resist an ahistorical reading of the present in which the practices which help to categorise “the refugee, emigrant and asylum seeker” remain dialectical, because new constellations of power both derive from but also transcend outdated forms of hegemony.

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Key concepts:

decolonisation
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Kernbegrippe:

dekoloniserings
globaliserings
imperialisme
marginaliserings
migrasie en ballingskap
postkoloniale literatuurkritiek
postkoloniale nasies

