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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PSYCHOLOGICAL 'DE-TERRITORIALISATION' AND 'RE-TERRITORIALISATION' OF THE THIRD SPACE IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S "THE COURTER": AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

A sense of identity starts with the concept of birthplace, and from there starts the question of rootedness, rootlessness, belongingness, unbelongingness, homeliness, unhomeliness, 'de-territorialisation' of the psyche and 're-territorialisation' of the mind. In "The Courter" of the collection of short stories, *East, West*, Salman Rushdie depicts the psychological 'de-territorialisation of the Indianness in the main characters as they settle down in England. This process of 'de-territorialisation' is accompanied by their attempts to 're-territorialise' their mind-sets and establish cross cultural communication, exemplifying Rushdie's statement: "To forget that there is a world beyond the community to which we belong, to confine ourselves within narrowly defined cultural frontiers, would be, I believe, to go voluntarily into that form of internal exile which in South Africa is called the 'homeland'." (*IH* 19) Mary's Indian roots ***prevent her from connecting with*** the surrounding structures that exist outside the invisible domain of the India of her mind. The Courter aids Mary in 'de-territorialising' her limited territories of her mind and connects her to the Western ones. Through the jealous eyes of Mary's grandson, the narrator, Rushdie metaphorically depicts both the allure, and alienation present within a state, or relationship of cross-cultural integration. This is an echo of Rushdie's statement: "What does it mean to be 'Indian' outside India? How can culture be preserved without becoming ossified?" (*IH* 17) Rushdie uses the chess game within "The Courter" as a metaphor to depict the constant battle of balance that one must maintain to exist outside one's native land. This paper analyses how Mary, the Courter and the narrator (Mary's grandson) 'de-territorialise' and 're-territorialise' their psyches in their encounters with the West and provide answers to the existential question raised by Rushdie: "How are we to live in the world?" (*IH* 18).

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INTRODUCTION

Salman Rushdie believes that there is no natural division among men in terms of geography or culture. All the factors, that differentiate one man from another, are artificial and related to the assumptions of the mind. These divisive factors have become a pseudo-reality because of years of conditioning of man's mind. Rushdie opines that "To forget that there is a world beyond the community to which we belong, to confine ourselves within narrowly defined cultural frontiers, would be ... to go voluntarily into that form of internal exile…" (*IH* 19) Hence, this paper investigates the problem of 'De-territorialisation' and 'Re-territorialisation' as something that really pertains to mind, and which, therefore, can be debunked and redesigned through apt conditioning of the mind. Moreover, Rushdie has suggested in his works that one must be capable of thinking beyond culture, religion, etc.

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In the short story "The Courter" which appears in *East, West*, Rushdie depicts the psychological 'de-territorialisation' of the Indianness and its 're-territorialisation' in the main characters as they settle down in England. Rushdie uses the chess game as a metaphor to depict the constant battle of balance that one must maintain to exist outside one's native land. This paper analyses how Mary, the Courter and the narrator (Mary's grandson) de-territorialise and re-territorialise their psyches in their encounters with the West and provide answers to the existential question raised by Rushdie: "How are we to live in the world?" (IH 18) Mary lives in her built-in cocoon in the name of culture. She comes out of it with the help of the Courter, but, in the absence of his spirited self she goes back into the same cocoon. The narrator, Mary's grandson, after few initial hiccups, understands the essence of the true sense of cultural understanding which Mary and the Courter exemplified by existing in their sense of misunderstandings. Thus, he overcomes his sense of loss and alienation. Cultural identity, as Stuart Hall defines, can be sorted out into two different categories. Shared culture, leading to a sort of

collective 'one true self', constitutes the first category whereas the second one recognizes 'what we really are' and 'what we have become' (Hall 435) amidst many aspects of similarities. The former resembles the 'hiding inside the many other' and focuses on the shared history and ancestry that people hold in common. The latter focuses on the 'critical points of deep and significant *difference*' that falls amidst 'many points of similarity' (Hall 435). The first form of cultural identity reflects the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes that lead to make up 'one people' and 'oneness', underlying all superficial differences. The second one recognizes the 'uniqueness' of a culture along with its 'ruptures and discontinuities' and the process of 'becoming' along with the state of 'being': "It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture." (Hall 435) This second position acknowledges the continuous influence of history, culture and power without negating the 'recovery' of the past, 'which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity'(Hall 435).

The former conception, as Hall points out, has played critical role in shaping all post-colonial struggles: "It continues to be a very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation amongst hitherto marginalized peoples …" (Hall 435) This concept is embodied in the character Mecir or Mixed-Up or the Courter in this story as he aids Mary in bridging her gap with the West and as he shields the Maharajas of P and B from the '*tacticians*' and the '*strategists*' of the West. In doing so, he incurs sufferings on himself. The second one enables one to understand the traumas of the colonial oppression. The second concept is represented by Certainly-Mary, narrator's gradmother since she never displays any kind of confusion or uncertainty in her choices: " … she never said plain yes or no; always this O-yes-certainly or no-certainly-not." (*East,West* 143) She is able to connect herself with the West, during her stay in England, with the help of Mixed-Up or the Courter. Though she enjoys her experiences in her Western existence, she is unable to overcome her homesickness when Mixed-Up's spirits dim after their terrifying encounter with the 'two Beatles'. She is caught between, according to the second concept, 'becoming' and 'being' (Hall 435).

She enjoys the process of 'becoming' for a while in the spirited company of Mixed-Up, but, is unable to neglect her position of 'being' an Indian basically. The traumatic experience with the 'two Beatles' reminds her of the 'uniqueness' of her Indianness. Mixed-Up, a representative of the first position, is able to make way for his mere survival or existence, but, fails to withstand the effects of 'critical exercise of cultural power' and attain 'normalisation' (Hall 436). As such, both Mixed-Up and Certainly-Mary, when positioned in the Western regimes, fail to establish normalcy. The narrator of "The Courter", who had settled in England since his family's migration there, represents the 'Third, 'New World''(Hall 438) – similar to '*Presence Americain'* (Hall 436) – among the three 'presences' (Hall 436), Hall mentions in the positioning and repositioning of Carribbean culture identities. The Third New World which the narrator represents, however, should be taken in terms of Indian cultural identities and when done so, the Third New World he comprises can be coined as 'East,West', as Rushdie has done in naming his collection of short stories (rather than 'East and West or East-West), in which the comma leaves the ends of the chain of hybridization open and lose to incorporate 'n' number of elements.

The way 'the presence / absence of Africa' lead to the privileged signifier of the 'new conceptions of Carribean identity' (Hall 437), the presence / absence of the Indianness / '*Europeenne*' (Hall 436) positions the narrator in The Third New World for he refuses to choose between the East and the West – "I buck, I snort, I whinny, I rear, I kick. Ropes, I do not choose between you. Lassoes, lariats, I choose neither of you, and both. Do you hear? I refuse to choose." (*East, West* 170) This new sphere stands 'necessarily 'deferred'- as a spiritual, cultural and political metaphor' (Hall 437) – for the narrator undergoes a psychological turmoil to reach it: "But I, too, have ropes around my neck, I have them to this day, pulling me this way and that, East and West, the nooses tightening, commanding, *choose, choose*." (*East, West* 170) This stands in confirmation to Hall's statement that any profound cultural discovery or recovery cannot be made directly. It needs a kind of mediation: "It could only be made *through* the impact on popular life of the post-colonial revolution, the civil rights struggles …" (Hall 437). Hall recommends complex cultural strategies to negotiate a smooth dialogue of power and resistance, of refusal and recognition, with and against '*Presence Europeenne'* (Hall 437). These strategies are associated with the calculated moves of a chess game in "The Courter". Mecir / Mixed-Up / the Courter is an erstwhile celebrated chess Grand Master (an Indian who had settled down in England years ago), presently placed as a hall porter at Waverly House (apartments in England populated with Indians). Mixed-Up's relationship with Mary strengthens as he edifies her with chess game strategies. Mary, an illiterate, has problems with her English communication which draws the 'damaged old Mixed-Up' (*East, West* 144) towards her. She has a problem with the letter 'p' which often turns into a 'f' or a 'c'. Her 'unexpected, somehow stomach-churning magic' (*East, West* 144) of mispronunciation of the word 'porter' as 'courter', an unintentional strategy, gives him a new identity in his sixties: "People called him many things, he did not mind. But this name, this courter, this he would try to be." (*East, West* 144) Their 'unintentional but prophetic overtones of romance' (*East, West* 145) shields them and the narrator finds it impossible to beat them in the chess game. Their courtship and their adventure at chess game together make their Western existence blissful for a while:

> 'It is like an adventure, baba,' Mary once tried to explain to me. 'It is like going with him to his country, you know? What a place, baap-re! Beautiful and dangerous and funny and full of fuzzles. For me it is a big-big discovery. What to tell you? I go for the game. It is a wonder.' (*East, West* 158)

Though they are widowers in their sixties, they derive romance and flirtation without any intention of any 'monkey business' of marriage: "But in the game of chess they had found a form of flirtation, an endless renewal that precluded the possibility of boredom, a courtly wonderland of the aging heart." (*East, West* 158). Another strategy, the narrator uses to get his British passport and citizenship, is that he willingly allows himself to be defeated at the residence of Field Marshal Sir Charles Lutwidge Dodgson in Beccles. The narrator is invited to the Dodo's house for few days so that he could know the narrator better before supporting his application for British citizenship. His nickname, 'Dodo', itself dictates his inner dominant as well as damaged regimes: "No wonder he was irascible at times; he was in Hell …" (*East, West* 155) The huge body of Dodo, 'an old India hand' and a family friend of narrator's

family, positioned in a place that is not even an ordinary residence, indicates his limited, curbed and trapped existence in spite of his having held a high post as that of a Field Marshal: " … a giant living in a tiny thatched cottage and forever bumping his head … a Gulliver trapped in that rose-garden Lilliput of croquet hoops, church bells, sepia photographs and old battle-trumpets." (*East, West* 155) The narrator's stay in Dodo's cottage is 'fitful and awkward' (*East, West* 155) until he has a ninety-minute win over Dodo in the chess game. The narrator converts his first victory into a deliberate defeat in the second at the request of Dodo's housekeeper. This turns out to be a winning strategy for him for it ensures him freedom and British citizenship which he desires for:

> "I was one of the lucky ones, I guess, because in spite of that chess game I had the Dodo on my side. And the passport did, in many ways, set me free. It allowed me to come and go, to make choices that were not the ones my father would have wished." (*East, West* 170)

Thus, the narrator stoops to conquer and provides answers to the questions raised by Hall regarding the negotiation between the East and the West: "How can we stage this dialogue so that, finally, we can place it, without terror or violence, rather than being forever placed by it? Can we ever recognize its irreversible influence, whilst resisting its imperializing eye?" (Hall 437) Here, the narrator's voluntary defeat in the chess game advocates tolerance in place of resistance, recognition of difference rather than refusal and apt cultural strategies to the dialogues of power. The defeat does not leave any regrets or inner turmoil in the narrator. He just cherishes his first victory without compunctions over the second round of defeat. In fact, his first victory leaves him with confidence that he always looks forward for another such chance to prove his worth.

Rushdie's roar for a borderless world– " 'For God's sake, open the universe a little more!' " (*IH* 21) – in the episode which renders Mary baffled and exposed at the tricks of the escalator at Piccadily Circus. Mary, a representative of the second conception of cultural identity that focuses on 'becoming' as well as 'being' and 'uniqueness' (Hall 435), is unable to pace up with the jaws of the escalator. During her visit to 'up West' with the old Mixed-Up, her sari gets struck in the jaws of the escalator at Piccadily Circus. As the escalator pulls and unwinds her sari, she is forced to spin like a top in horror. This failure of Mary to understand the rhythms of the escalators, the invents of new technology and the ever evolving and changing modern world or European strategies, indicates the impossibility of the survival of the concept of cultural identity which simultaneously tries to encompass the future and the past, 'many points of similarity' within the 'critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute 'what we really are'' (Hall 434). It is the timely help from Mixed-Up, a representative of the first position that defines cultural identity in terms of one, shared and collective culture imbibed inside many superficial or artificial cultures, saves Mary before she is exposed in shame. Mixed-Up's updated knowledge about the West and its differences (of 1962-63 England) enable him to tackle the strategies of the jaws of the escalator. He pushes the emergency stop button and saves Mary before she is completely unwound and exposed in her petticoat. This episode echoes Rushdie's cry in "Imaginary Homelands" – "What does it mean to be 'Indian' outside India?" (*IH* 17)

The success of the first concept of cultural identity is mirrored in Mixed-Up's relationship with Mary and his success in shielding the reputations of the two Maharaja's (of P and B). Certainly-Mary and Mixed-Up spend their afternoons together, even though their first dating does not reach 'complete success' (*East, West* 151). They go for walks in Kensington Gardens. They go to Barkers and Printings and Derry&Toms to choose furniture and curtains for their imaginary home. They find delight in cruising supermarkets and choosing little delicacies to eat. They enjoy sipping 'chimpanzee tea' and toasted crumpets in Mixed-Up's cramped lounge. They offer a contrast to the 'seething mass of bad marriages, booze, philanderers and unfulfilled young lust' (*East, West* 154) that mark the narrator's apartments, Waverly House – "… and at the heart of our little universe were Certainly-Mary and her courter, drinking chimpanzee tea and singing along with the national anthem of Bedrock." (*East, West* 154) Mixed-Up exhibits tolerance and patience when the narrator and his sisters inflict insult on him. In spite of being an erstwhile chess Grand Master, he keeps his hands always dipped in pink rubber washing-up gloves and busies himself buffing and polishing brass works at Waverly House as a hall porter: "… Mecir just grinned an empty good-natured grin, nodded, 'You call me what you like, okay,'…" (*East, West* 146-47). His pink rubber washing-up gloves, which he never seems to part with symbolize his acceptance of the cultural identity in terms of 'shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common'(Hall 435).

His strategies of tolerance and acceptance influence the narrator and his sisters in such a way that they all come to a conclusion that there is no point teasing him anymore, but, these strategies do not work towards his advantage in relations to the Indian Maharajas of P and B. These two Maharajas use his room to ring in women from the call-box, and this later subject him to violence from the so called *tacticians* and *strategists* of England. Similarly, he suffers another violent attack from the 'two Beatles' who mistake narrator's mother and grandmother to be from the two Maharajas' families and assault them. Mixed-Up's timely interference saves the two ladies, but, he gets wounded badly. After this bloody encounter with the West, both Mary and Mixed-Up start losing their spirits implying that the respective positions they hold regarding their cultural identity cannot survive in their new phase as immigrants in England. Mary's stand, as far as cultural identity is concerned, to focus on 'the deep and significant *difference*' and 'uniqueness' of 'what we really are' (Hall 435), could have worked wonders during the freedom struggle against the British. Similarly, the sphere which Mixed-Up represents – where cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes to unite people as one whole beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of history – could have rendered magical effects during the post-colonial period to establish cordial international relationships among different countries and people. These two stands, however, cannot harmonize with the present demands of the cry for globalization. This is exemplified in Mary's deterioration after the clash with the two Beatles: "Certainly-Mary spent as much time as she could with Mecir; but it was the look of my old Aya that worried me more than poor Mixed-Up. She looked older, and powdery, as if she might crumble away at any moment into dust." (*East, West* 167).

Mary's health problems turn out to be a mystery. Her problems are unpredictable and non-diagnosable, indicating the fact that her position with regard to cultural identity is flawless, but, outdated:

> She was subjected to all sorts of tests during the next six months, but each time the doctors ended up by shaking their heads: they couldn't find anything wrong with her. Physically, she was right as rain; except that there were these periods when her heart kicked and bucked in her chest like the horses in *The Misfits*, the ones whose roping and tying made Marilyn Monroe so mad. (*East, West* 168)

Since the stand she had taken is outdated, it needs to be discarded and this is done through her decision to return back to India:

> Her determination was absolute. So it was England that was breaking her heart, breaking it by not being India. London was killing her, by not being Bombay. And Mixed-Up? I wondered. Was the courter killing her, too, because he was no longer himself? Or was it that her heart, roped by two different loves, was being pulled both East and West, whinnying and rearing, like those movie horses being yanked this way by Clark Gable and that way by Montgomery Clift, and she knew that to live she would have to choose? (*East, West* 169)

Similarly, the stand taken by Mixed-Up is also outdated and needs to be casted off. This is reflected in the subsequent meetings of Mary and Mixed-Up:

> Mecir went back to work in the spring, but his experience had knocked the stuffing out of him. He was slower to smile, duller of eye, more inward. Mary, too, had turned in upon herself. They still met for tea crumpets and *The Flinstones,* but something was no longer quite right. (*East, West* 168)

The rigidity and impracticality of Mary's position of cultural identity is seen in her mannerisms while she makes her exit from England to India:

When we took her bags down to the car, Mecir the hall porter was nowhere was to be seen. Mary did not knock on the door of his lounge, but walked straight out to the freshly polished oak-panelled lobby, whose mirrors and brasses were sparkling brightly; she climbed into the back seat our Ford Zodiac and sat there stiffly with her carry-on grip on her lap, staring straight ahead. (*East, West* 169-70)

Similarly, the whereabouts of Mixed-Up are left unknown and unmentioned. The narrator feels initiated towards the end of the story after getting his British passport and citizenship. His datings with Chandini, an Indian classic dancer and Rozalia, a Polish girl, do not bring the desired results, but, make him realize his shortcomings in his expectations in relationships.

The narrator recognizes the unassailable stance that he had always held between two cultures. While dating with Rozalia and Chandni the narrator had desperately yearned to find a single cultural identity. He had sought a connection to his nostalgic Eastern roots within Chandni and to possess the ever so tempting but distant Western culture within Rozalia. As a result, neither of them offer that is sufficient to fulfill his heart and identity's needs. His refusal to choose between East and West, towards the end of the story, reflects his renewed outlooks in his expectations. His first win over Dodo in the chess and his deliberate defeat in the second set enable him to forge forward with clarity – his win over Dodo gives him 'new confidence' (*East, West* 156) and the second defeat bestows him with freedom and the inexplicable joy attached to it. In his enlightened state, he enters the Third New World, similar to '*Presence Americain*' (Hall 436), which Hall describes as the 'beginning of diaspora, of diversity, of hybridity and difference' (Hall 438). The diasporic existence, the narrator represents in the story, does not refer to 'those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all cost return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea' (Hall 438). The narrator's refusal to choose between East and West is a deliberate deviation from 'the old, the imperializing, the hegemonising, form of 'ethinicity'' towards a new diasporic experience which is defined not 'by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*' (Hall 438).

Though he is initiated and enters a new sphere of lifestyle, he takes immense pleasure and pride in paying a glowing tribute to the courtship between Mixed-Up and Certainly-Mary: "… they were not really like Barney and Betty Rubble at all. They were formal, polite. They were … courtly. He courted her, and, like a coy, ringleted ingénue with a fan, she inclined her head, and entertained his suit." (*East, West* 154-55) Thus, the narrator enters into a diasporic identity that is ever ready for producing and reproducing itself afresh, through transformation and difference and thus, offers a striking contrast to the rigid and limited possibilities of territorial expansions (both physical and psychological) in the cases of Mixed-Up and Certainly-Mary. In other words, the narrator, through his revolutionary idea, not to prioritize East or West, strikes the message with clarity that identities and 'territeriolisations' are mere names given to different ways one is positioned by, and that position oneself within the narratives of the past.

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