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The native informant who writes within the metropolitan center always labors under the burden of representation[1] and the texts produced by him or her are invariably always read as representing the periphery to the center. In this economy of cultural production, the so-called native informant must navigate the Scylla of the metropolitan market place—namely, the kind of fictions accepted and canonized in the center[2]—and the Charybdis of the demands of the periphery whose histories and lives must, through the logic of the global market, form the basis of such artistic production. Naipaul is one such cultural informant whose works have had to negotiate this perilous demand of the metropolitan market and the burden of representation. Naipaul critics,[3] depending on their disciplinary training and critical choices, either find Naipaul and his works to be orientalist or a true representation of postcolonial realities. Such an approach to Naipaul and his works, thus, ends up privileging the text and authorial intention over the possibility of using a text to explore the larger structures within which it is produced.

This article aims at complicating the critical reception of Naipaul with a two-pronged approach: it intends to complicate reading Naipaul by treating the text as a point of departure, rather than being a site of arrival, by inundating[4] it with specific critical and historical insights. It also attempts to locate the very worldliness[5] of Naipaul as a writer as well as a historical subject in flux. There are several Naipaul texts to choose from: one could spend quite a lot of time by just dwelling on his journalistic travel writing, his interviews and statements about the role of an artist, or his works of fiction. This paper focuses primarily on Naipaul's *A Bend in the River,* illustrating the use of inundation in tran-

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sporting a text beyond the politics of representation. It is, however, important to note that *A Bend in the River* is not Naipaul's last word on Africa; it is rather one of several representations of Africa in Naipaul's œuvre.[6]

The critical reception of *A Bend in the River* easily finds itself equally addressed by Naipaul's apologists and detractors. Most of the earlier readings of *A Bend in the River* suggest that Naipaul adopts the transitional and binaristic view of history privileging the traditional/colonialist hierarchies of the West. Hence, in such a representation, the West's other becomes a product of narcissistic reflection and the dark madness of the African subject, leading to a distinct Conradian vision of history. Christopher Wise suggests that in *A Bend in the River* Naipaul "too quickly dismisses the cultural products of Africa as dying or hopelessly reified objects" (72), asserting that Naipaul does not understand the larger economic structures that control the construction of African reality. Harold Farwell decries the narrow vision of the novel by asserting that "the conflict of cultures in Africa is explored through an alienated vision that never can give us anything but a partial picture" (2). Similarly, Fawzia Mustafa's more subtly complex reading still indicts Naipaul for the tendency to "ascertain and develop his propositions about Third World collapse and, in particular, the political failure that cultural and 'racial' disruption visits upon the world" (146). In a more recent article, Ranu Samantraj asserts that "Naipaul's novel enacts an epistemology that locks in place the relationship of colonizer and colonized even after the end of direct military occupation" (59).

Obviously, Naipaul's critics want Naipaul to carry the burden of his representation. They, therefore, either compare his works to the idea of the authentic Africa or want a more comprehensive account of the African realities. In both these instances, the text and the author remain the subject of critical inquiry, thereby reducing the entire practice to the competing demands of textual representation. This approach of the postcolonial critics can be complicated by transforming Naipaul's texts into pedagogical tools to study the complexities of the postcolonial world.

Conversely, for the mainstream metropolitan critics the novel becomes a means to justify their own dominant stereotypes of Africa. Hence, the book's review in the *New York Times* cited on the back-cover is emblematic of the type of reception such a representation of Africa receives: "Naipaul gives us the most convincing and disturbing vision yet of what happens in a place caught between the dangerously alluring modern world and its tenacious past traditions."[7] Lillian Feder displays the critical impulse of the metropolitan critics to retrieve a certain detached rationality in Naipaul's fictional character, Salim. She

suggests that "Naipaul has endowed Salim with something of his own curiosity and skepticism, his commitment to seek out the truth within himself and to apprehend the corruption that political machinations and cultural pretensions would obscure. But he has deprived him of his own advantages" (227). Salim, in her words, can be recuperated as a character if we keep in mind that he is partially autobiographical but lacks the capacity to tease out the truth as opposed to his creator, Naipaul. Feder's claim rests on the assumption that Naipaul possesses this capacity of seeking the truth. For her claim to be credible, one must acquiesce in the existence of hidden truths waiting to be liberated by the artist's relentless inquiry.

With such critical insights, both from Naipaul's detractors and apologists, even before *A Bend in the River* is read, as the very materiality of its back cover suggests, the reader comes to expect that the novel is about the clash of modernity (European) and tradition (Africa). Hence, the reader is hailed and interpellated even before he/she has encountered the text within the covers. Naipaul is either recuperated in the name of objectivity or truth, or indicted for misrepresenting or shortchanging the African reality. Within this critical climate, the need for inundating the novel becomes even more urgent. Inundating the novel by reading Salim in his class specificity as petit-bourgios in the Marxian sense of the term[8], by highlighting his ambivalence as a narrator, by reading the novel in opposition to the idea of history as progress, and by keeping in mind the latest theoretical insights about postcolonial Africa as, for example, theorized by Achille Mbembe, could radically transform the critical reception of the novel.

Put in his particular class specificity, Salim is no longer the East-Indian juxtaposed with the African characters of the novel, and his responses to the unfolding material history become more understandable when compared to a study that refracts his ideas only through race and colonial allegiance. In Marx's terms, Salim's class specificity might allow him to create alliances with the African natives, (a clear sign of which is his business alliance with the *marchande*, Zabeth) but his ultimate interests lie with the bourgeoisie, and his involvement with the revolution would always be conditional to his own personal survival. Hence, to him anything that can provide the stability to run his own little profit enterprise is better than the chaos of an independent country with an uncertain future. By inserting class into the narrator's consciousness, one can already see that the representation of Africa in the novel becomes a class specific view of Africa.

In other words, this novel is largely a representation of Africa from a bourgeois perspective. Being a pro-business novel, the work posits a vision of Africa as a place within the very utilitarian paradigm of global capitalism, which makes the case for a failing Africa all the more

convincing, without attributing any causes of this failure to the mandated economic restructuring, or the colonial heritage that creates this cycle of violence and economic failure. This neoliberal context of the novel should not be taken as a mere appendage; it is foregrounded from the very first line by Salim, the narrator: "The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it" (*A Bend* 3).

From the very beginning the narrator tells us the story of his fictional postcolony. Now, there is no doubt that the post-independence African states have gone through violent uprisings, civil wars, and that they have more than often failed miserably in the democratizing processes. Salim, the narrator, drives this point home repeatedly throughout the narrative, while leaving no doubt about his own loyalties. Being a businessman, his main concern is with stability, regardless of who provides it. Independence, which obviously introduces new sociopolitical upheavals, does not seem to be that important in his imagination. In fact, in his opinion pre-independence Africa was better off, as it was much more inhabitable (for people like him): "You could imagine the land being made ordinary, fit for men like yourself, as small parts of it had been made ordinary for a short while before independence [by the colonial masters of course]—the very parts that were now in ruins" (*A Bend* 9). This description of the land also places the novel within a certain tradition of African novels through association. Here, for example, the similarity between Salim's narration and that of Conrad's Marlowe is quite striking:

> In the darkness of river and forest you could be sure only of what you could see—and even on a moonlight night you couldn't see much. When you made a noise—dipped a paddle in the water—you heard yourself as though you were another person. The river and the forest were like presences, and much more powerful than you. You felt unprotected, an intruder. (*A Bend* 8)

This amazing representation of Africa as elemental, dangerous, and otherworldly is not quite different from Conrad's Africa. Here is a brief excerpt from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*:

> Going up the river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. . . .You lost your way on that river as you would in a desert and butted all day long against shoals trying to find the channel till you thought bewitched and cut off from for ever from everything you had known once—somewhere—far away—in an other existence perhaps. (35)

This similarity cannot just be coincidental, nor is Salim's account ironic: this is the way he sees the African reality. It is not surprising though: both Kurtz and Salim are, after all, businessmen, trying to make a living within (and from) the heart of Africa. Why shouldn't their views of Africa be similar? The question that needs to be answered is simple: what causes this kind of African reality to exist, even in the works of a "postcolonial" author? For a partial answer, let us consider Dipesh Chakrabarty's insightful comment about history. While discussing the nature of Marxist historical narratives, Chakrabarty explains the idea of history as transition narrative: "Most modern third-world histories are written within problematics posed by this transition narrative, of which the overriding (if often implicit) themes are those of development, modernization, and capitalism" (267).

If history is a transition narrative on its way to the present, and if that present can only be made meaningful under the Eurocentric registers of development, modernization, and capitalism, then of course Salim's view of Africa is quite justified. The fictional country of his novel, situated in the middle of the continent, is inevitably failing, for it has no chance of becoming what the transitional view of history considers civilized. But doesn't this simplify African history to a bare-bones representation of a primitive world by a businessman who is within it without being a part of it? It is only from a transitional view of history—in which the present has to be the technologically advanced, capitalistic, liberal democracy—that Africa can be termed a failure, and that is precisely the perspective Salim seems to hold. This view of Africa can only hold true if the Eurocentric notion of history-as-progress is privileged over the notion of multiple histories, and what Achille Mbembe calls the "time of entanglement":

> First, this time of African existence is neither a linear time nor a simple sequence in which each moment effaces, annuls, and replaces those that preceded it, to the point where a single age exists within a society. . . . Second, this time is made up of disturbances, of a bundle of unforeseen events, of more or less regular fluctuations and oscillations, not necessarily resulting in chaos and anarchy. . . . Finally, close relation to its patterns of ebbs and flows shows that this time is not irreversible. All sharp breaks, sudden and abrupt outbursts of volatility, it cannot be forced into any simplistic model of and calls into question the hypothesis of stability and *rupture* [italic in original] underpinning social theory, *notably where the sole concern is to account for either Western modernity or the failure on non-European worlds to perfectly replicate it.* (16; emphasis added)

It is this complex sense of time that Salim lacks. He has a binary view of African reality: post and pre-independence. In his imagination, while the colonial nation was ordered, the postcolony is full of chaos. But if we inundate the concept of time in the novel with the insights provided by Mbembe, then we can complicate the binary and disrupt it by introducing the specificity of African history as opposed to the metanarrative of history as progress. Salim, of course, cannot have this view, for he is, after all, so embedded in the progressive narrative of capital that anything that does not point to the logic of capital is irrational. This is where some other insights by Mbembe can be useful in complicating the reading and making the text a site to insert new knowledge into the discussion of African lived experience. In tracing the reasons for the failure of the African states, Mbembe clearly foregrounds the impact of restructuring requirements forced on most of the African states. He asserts that as a result of these policies:

> Having no more rights to give out or to honour, and little left to distribute, the state no longer has credit with the people. All it has left is control of the forces of coercion, in a context marked by material devastation, disorganization of credit and production circuits, and an abrupt collapse of notions of public good, general utility, and law and order. (76)

Hence, as the African state loses its means for self-legitimization, and as it fails in its distributive functions, those exact functions are privatized and appropriated by the regional elite, a phenomenon Mbembe calls the "private indirect government" (67-94). This failure of the centralized government results in militias, war lords and drug traffickers appropriating those same means of coercion. This aspect of the African state finds no voice in the novel. For Salim the frequent uprisings of the people against the government are inexplicable, essentialized, and primitive. Also missing in the novel are references to the close connections between regional African militias and global financial networks. One such African big man, Liberia's Charles Taylor, could not have stayed in power without his global corporate partners' strategic financial links. According to Ted Fishman, before the sanctions were applied against Liberia, Charles Taylor had "pioneered the route from [war] booty to hard cash. . .diamond centers in Belgium, Britain, and New York absorbed all the loot Taylor could supply." "In 1998, $298 million worth of diamonds," adds Taylor, "made its way from Liberia to Belgium, the world's largest diamond center" (38).

Inundating the reading of the novel with an awareness of how the African big man is produced, Charles Taylor being one example,

transforms the text from an essentialized representation of African realities to a more complex understanding of African history and culture. Salim, however, does not see the complicity of the global market economy within the context of African violence. In fact, he cannot even understand the rage against the former symbols of oppression. To him the destruction of colonial symbols portrays an inexplicable "African rage" (*A Bend* 26). Of course, to Salim this African rage is unfathomable: he, it seems, never suffered the kind of social degradation that African subjects suffered at the hands of the colonizers. He, being a businessman, actually profited from the system of slavery: he has no sympathy for the former slaves who must destroy the signs of their long degradation at the hands of the colonizers. He also lacks the deeper understanding of the historical and material reasons of this rage within the postcolony. Read through the insights provided by Mbembe, this rage, this implosion of the state is no longer a barbaric practice, but can be placed within the logic of the very capital and market which is being proffered as redemption of Africa as well as other parts of the global South.

In the sections of the book entitled "The Domain" and "The Big Man" Salim gives represents a typical African big man, the kind of big men and war-lords who have been a prominent aspect of postcolonial Africa—Charles Taylor, Mubutu, and Idi Amin being some familiar examples. The domain, of course, is the big man's experimentation with modernity that is represented as a comical, outrageous gesture. But it is also a means of legitimating based on the distributive function[9] of the state. Ridiculous as it may sound, the domain's function within the novel's political economy is to provide a sort of exception[10], a sharing of wealth for the newly emerged government to legitimate itself. Salim, of course, does not see it like that, for his class specific vision cannot possibly see the merit of creating such a monument in the heart of the African jungle. Salim's views on the nature of such domains are as follows: "He was creating modern Africa. He was creating a miracle that would astound the rest of the world. He was by-passing real Africa, the difficult Africa of bush and villages, and creating something that would match anything that existed in other countries" (*A Bend* 101). It is no wonder that for Salim, with his ambivalent loyalties to the postcolony, the Domain is a waste of resources: any attempt by Africa to modernize is something un-African, not genuinely African, as if Africa can only be the Africa of the bush, of the villages. However, he later admits that the domain had, despite its overall failure, provided some opportunities for the native Africans. In fact, Naipaul's own changed and ambivalent stance on the domains can clearly be traced in the last lines of "The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro," a non-fictional account of such a domain in Africa.

Naipaul concludes his account in Arlette's words: "We get so many like them from the United States. Black people who come here to convert the Africans. They are like everybody else who comes to do that. They bring their own psychic sickness to Africa. They should instead come to be converted by Africa" (176).

Salim, however, does not possess this insight and instead resents the opportunities provided for native Africans, as if they were being granted privileges that others—businessmen like him—had worked hard to earn. Hence, the problem does not only seem to be that the big man is wasting resources and has a great vision for his country, but rather that *Africans* are getting undeserved, unearned chances at upward mobility, which is an issue of race as well as class. Here is how Salim traces Ferdinand's success:

> You took a boy out of the bush and you taught him to read and write; you leveled the bush and built a polytechnic and you sent him there. It seemed as easy as that, if you came late to the world and found ready-made those things that other countries and peoples had taken so long to arrive at—writing, printing, universities, books, knowledge. The rest of us had to take things in stages. (*A Bend* 103)

What this narration does not take into account is the mere fact that for most of the African subjects of the postcolony school and higher education had never really been an option in the times of the empire. For Ferdinand, then, that chance has been earned after generations of suffering, and that chance has been provided by his own government as a legitimating gesture to create what Mbembe calls "social debt" (47). Also the narrator's take on this is quite typical of the Protestant work ethic that excludes the possibility of upward mobility without much struggle. The narrator can only make such a claim if he totally elides the history of African slavery and his own involvement in that practice, for his own family owned slaves. This fear of the upward mobility of the masses is certainly caused by a combination of racial prejudice and class anxiety and should not only be read in terms of race. In Salim's class specific vision of Africa, neither the past nor any attempt to modernize seems suitable for Africa. Africa seems to have no place in the world because he flattens the complexity of Africa into the modern-premodern binary and fails to create something in-between. All attempts at modernization—The Domain, for example—are reduced to a sham and any gesture of retrieving some aspect of African culture itself is reduced to a farce.

Salim also has a problem with the African will-to-power. In the novel most Africans are posited as angry young men who are bent on destruction. This representation could only be possible if the deep

psychological traumas—so painstakingly elaborated by Fanon[11]—are totally elided, hence reducing the African rage to an inexplicable madness for which there could be no material, psychological, historical, or economic causes except the innate madness of the African subject and the African landscape itself, the very recipe of African representation that Conrad seemed to have used in *Heart of Darkness.* Seen through Salim's class perspective, there can be no such comprehension of the socio-economic or psychological reasons for the African rage. Salim, therefore, must cash in his chips, for he is still unwilling to cast his lot with fellow Africans and follow another path to realize his bourgeois dreams. Hence these last thoughts before leaving Africa "Then there were gunshots. The searchlight was turned off; the barge was no longer to be seen. The streamer started up again and moved without lights down the river. Away from the *area of battle*" (278; emphasis added). It seems that Salim has just left barely in time: as a businessman he has his escape already planned. He is on his way to the center, where he already has his business connections and even a wife waiting for him. Africa—the inexplicable, menacing Africa of violence—is left in darkness, the very color that suits African reality in Salim's imaginary. While international capital thrives in chaos, the petty bourgeois must leave, for the colonial rule that provided stability for his little venture has ceased to be, and he does not have the courage (nor does he feel the obligation) to stay and wait until a new nation masters its own freedom and becomes a vibrant society in its own right.

So far this discussion has been focused on Salim as a narrator, his class specificity, and his views about the African realities, in an attempt to inundate Salim with theoretical and historical insights. Salim, however, is not a flat character and goes through a slight transformation toward the end of the novel, a fact that is mostly elided in the discussions of the novel in the debate on representation. It is during his brief stay in jail that Salim comes literally to see the world from the place of the other, from the place of the African inhabitants of his country. This alters his views about native Africans as he declares,

> I felt I had never seen them so clearly before. Indifferent to notice, indifferent to compassion or contempt, those faces were not yet vacant or passive or resigned. . . .They had prepared themselves for death not because they were martyrs; but because what they were and what they knew they were was all they had. They were people crazed with the idea of who they were. I never felt closer to them, or more far away. (269)

This scene from the jail clearly suggests the kind of wisdom Salim gains through his experience, for despite feeling different from the other prisoners, he does reach a certain understanding of their plight

within the context of *their* and not his own assumptions. There are also countless other ambivalent statements by Salim within the novel. The problem, however, is to trace why this narration by an ambivalent figure, a narrator in a work of fiction, is usually associated with Naipaul's own views on Africa, especially in the era of the death of the author. It is Naipaul's non-fictional works about the periphery that sometimes force the critics to read his fictional works as mimetic.[12] Therefore, as stated in the beginning, one needs to place Naipaul within his own worldliness as an author. It is this move wherein I wish to discuss the second aspect of the essay's stipulated two-pronged emphasis: locating the author.

Naipaul's general critical reception is also divided between his detractors and his apologists. Within the field of postcolonial criticism, Naipul's critics have indicted him extensively for his fictional representation as well as for his journalistic works about Asia, Africa, and the Islamic world. For example, Fawzia Afzal-Khan, while analyzing one of Naipaul's nonfictional works, suggests that Naipaul uses myths "to contain Africa as other—the 'dark continent' and is still caught in the grip of magical, sinister forces of the night" (9). In this particular indictment of Naipaul, Afzal-Khan is relying on the role of the postcolonial author in debunking the myths about the global periphery, and in her view Naipaul's representation ends up perpetuating the same myths. It is also important to note that this particular work of Afzal-Khan is highly influenced by Edward Said's *Orientalism,* and her indictment of Naipaul clearly posits itself within the larger question of representation and European Orientalism. Given her theoretical choice and the comparative nature of her work—the work analyzes the cultural production of four writers of Indian origin—it becomes necessary for her to question the representational aspects of Naipaul's works. Similarly, while Said questions Naipaul the author and the phenomenon, he voices an apt concern that Naipaul's representation is read as "telling-it-like-it-is about the Third World which he [Naipaul] comprehends 'better' than anyone else" ("Expectations" 22).

Said clearly refers to the co-optation of Naipaul's representation by the metropolitan audiences as well as critics, which ends up justifying the reductive stereotypes of the postcolonial periphery. Said, after all, is one of the seminal figures of postcolonial studies and most of his major works are philosophical studies of the colonial discourse and representations of the Orient, Islam, and other former colonies. His approach to Naipaul is steeped into the history of his own critical attention to the voices of the global periphery. He can therefore only read Naipaul within the broader expanse of Naipaul's œuvre. Hence, for Said, Naipaul becomes the very Oreintalist who can conveniently

proffer civilizational solutions for Islam by suggesting that the "life that had come to Islam had not come from within" (*Among the* 429), or that for a better future of India "the past has to be seen to be dead; or the past will kill" (*India* 191). Obviously, what troubles Said is not that Naipaul makes these pronouncements, but that such pronouncements are embedded within a larger corpus of Orientalist cultural production, and that Naipaul's narrative from within ends up sanctifying the old European prejudices. Both Said and Afzal-Khan, therefore, are responding to Naipaul within their own disciplinary parameters, and their critical responses, apt as they are, echo the very questions of the politics of representation.

This trend to question Naipaul's general representation of the periphery continues even in the works of younger postcolonial critics. Siddhartha Deb, for example, while reviewing Naipaul's *Magic Seeds*, suggests "how constricting his writing has become, how the old prejudices have expanded to devour almost everything appealing about his writing" (50). Deb is not only suggesting the presence of authorial prejudices but is also implying that by the time this particular text has been produced, Naipaul's art has been eclipsed by his prejudices. Obviously, such criticism is more about tracing the regression in Naipaul the person and the representation occasioned by it. Adebayo Williams' comparison of Chinua Achebe and Naipaul suggests that Achebe, like most postcolonial critics, is worried "not just by the contents of Naipaul's various pronouncements [about Africa] but by the pomp and merciless bravura with which they are made" (17). All these critics, it seems, either indict Naipaul for misrepresenting Africa or decry the inconclusiveness of his works. As Naipaul and his texts fail to speak according to the expectations of the postcolonial critics, the Naipaul criticism, therefore, still remains bogged within the politics of representation.

Naipaul's defenders, on the other hand, offer their own explanations of Naipaul the author and Naipaul the phenomenon. Rachel Donadio redeems Naipaul by suggesting that "what spares Naipaul from the ideology of critics who would dismiss him as anti-Muslim. . . is its [his work's] unsentimental, often heartbreaking detail" (8). Hence, Naipaul is still mired with the question of representation, but that can be recuperated by a stylistic sleight of hand. Lynn Freed suggests that "one of Naipaul's most endearing qualities is his unfailing impulse toward honesty. It is manifested in the intelligent candor with which he lays bare his subjects, never excepting himself" (11). This defense of Naipaul is based on his capacity to tell the truth about his subjects and his criticism, a criticism so honest that it does not even spare Naipaul himself.

This brief overview of Naipaul's critical engagements, from both sides of the political spectrum, makes one aspect of Naipaul scholarship fairly obvious: its unrelenting reliance on the question of fair or unfair representation. As any challenge to the representation cannot be made without recourse to the concept of the authentic—authentic African subject or culture—such criticism is, therefore, always hovering between elusive authenticity and true representation, both subjective and relative concepts. Considering the vast array of his literary works, Naipaul is too important an author to be either simply valorized or castigated, for both these attempts end up distorting the importance of his works as pedagogical tools. There is, therefore, a need to approach Naipaul's work with a fresh method of reading; hence this attempt at proposing inundation. An inundated text serves as a tool in broadening the knowledge of the global periphery instead of being a summation of it in crystallized form. Similarly, one must also read Naipaul not only to challenge his representation of what could only be the fiction of an authentic Africa, but also to ensure that one's criticism of Naipaul does not become an apology for the corruptions and violence of the African national elite, while silencing the very heroic efforts of the African artists and critics, who, instead of writing from a safe perch within the metropolitan academy, have actually suffered drastic and even fatal consequences within their own countries.[13]

Reading Naipaul purely as a postcolonial author produces a certain range of expectations about his works; Naipaul, however, cannot only be treated as a postcolonial author. He rather belongs to the category of writers theorized by Timothy Brennan as the Cosmopolitans. Brennan asserts that the cosmopolitans are those "who offer an *inside view* of formerly submerged peoples for target reading publics in Europe and North America in novels that comply with metropolitan literary tastes" (26). Naipaul certainly fits this profile as he has consistently attempted to provide an inside view of the periphery to his metropolitan audience. It is this aspect of Naipaul's worldliness that must be highlighted rather than his responsibility of representation. If we place Naipaul within the context of his own worldliness—located within the metropolitan—then the question of representation is no longer paramount. Naipaul might be a hybrid subject but he is too immersed in the material and ideological determinants of his adopted culture, where he has lived most of his life. Asking Naipaul to speak with the African subject, literally from the place of the other, requires a total transcendence of his material determination. If he is considered only a postcolonial author, then the burden of representation immediately manifests itself. But by allocating him his place within the cosmopolitan authors, one can read his texts with a different critical sensitivity, and one's

criticism will have to inundate the texts to provide the context that his texts, given their specific worldliness, are incapable of invoking.

According to Gayatri Spivak, the native informant who had previously been foreclosed is now being appropriated in the interest of the multinational capital.[14] Naipaul is one such native informant, located in the center, whose works need to be studied with a much deeper cultural knowledge than is usually available to a metropolitan reader. In the absence of a more informed criticism, Naipaul's works can be read against the back-drop of the telos of history ending only in the present of metropolitan West, and thus precluding any possibilities of multiple histories. The postcolonial writer, whose cultural identity is erroneously associated with Naipaul, like the colonial officers of the past, also engages in a form of worlding[15] of the periphery. This essay has therefore attempted to inundate a canonized text to take it to the very liminal borders of representation, where it ceases to be a truncated version of the historical and becomes rather a jumping-off point for interpretation beyond the borders of representation and metropolitan co-optation. One must also keep in mind that Naipaul is a human subject in flux and that any of his views about Africa and Islam cannot just be read as fixed and unchangeable. Even a brief overview of his three major non-fictional works about India is enough to suggest the changing nature of his stance about India. On the whole, Naipaul should be read as a cosmopolitan writer located in the West with its attendant modernist tendencies, instead of expecting him to write the way the critics would like him to write.

This brief article is an attempt at reading Naipaul within his own cultural specificity and to look at his works beyond the politics of representation. To reiterate Spivak's famous conclusion, "representation has not withered away" ("Can the Subaltern" 104), but the critics must also make an effort to inundate the texts so as to make them less prone to reductive readings and metropolitan co-optation. Naipaul is much too ambivalent and important a figure to be placed within the reductive binary of metropolitan versus the periphery. His works, contested as they might be, provide an opportunity to step beyond the circumscribed and often contested terrain of literary production to study the larger structures that affect, alter, and challenge the very possibilities of life in the global periphery.

Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of the burden of representation faced by the diasporic authors see Kobena Mercer's work on the subject.

2. Aijaz Ahmad explains this process of canonizing the counter-canon texts quite brilliantly: "The essential task of a 'Third World' novel it is said, is to give appropriate *form* (preferably allegory, but epic also, or fairy tale, or whatever) to the *national* experience. The range of questions that may be asked of the texts which are currently in the process of being canonized within this categorical counter-canon must predominantly refer, then, in one way or another, to representation of colonialism, nationhood, postcoloniality, the typology of rulers, their powers, corruptions, and so forth. ...What is disconcerting, nevertheless, is that a whole range of texts which do not ask those particular questions in any foregrounded manner would then have to be excluded from or pushed to the margins of this emerging counter-canon" (124).

3. To name a few, here are some of the critics who have dealt with various works of Naipaul and his politics of representation: Edward Said considers Naipaul as instrumental in sanctifying metropolitan stereotypes of the Asian, African and Islamic periphery (Expectations 21-2); Fawzia Afzal-Khan sees Naipaul as perpetuating the myths of the colonial times; and for Ashis Nandy, Naipaul is a modern day guru who cannot forgive India "for either being a true copy or a true counterplayer of the West." (83).

4. In its military usage, inundation involves flooding a certain area according to a preconceived strategic defensive plan to make the land impassable for the advancing enemy armor. I am borrowing this military term for the specific purpose of inserting silenced knowledge within the critical analysis of a text. Hence, here, as opposed to supplementing the text, the term also means complicating the reading of the text by inserting theoretical and historical knowledge so as to make the text less vulnerable to a reductive reading.

5. By worldliness I mean the specific discussion of the term by Edward Said. For details see Said, *The World* 24-30.

6. Naipaul's other two major works about Africa include *In a Free State* and "The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro." The first is a fictional work set in an African postcolonial state immediately after its independence and precedes the publication of *A Bend in the River*. The second work is a non-fictional account of a place in Ivory Coast. A comparative study of all three works provides an enlightening understanding of Naipaul's growth in the process of representing Africa. While *In a Free State* traces the struggles of two European characters across the physical and political African landscape, *A Bend in the River* particularizes this experience through the account of its East-Indian narrator. The non-fictional account of the "domain" in the Ivory Coast displays a deeper degree of understanding and a more sympathetic treatment of Africa.

7. Cited on the back-cover from the *New York Times*, which, being a popular source of news and criticism, suggests the fact that the metropolitan media co-opt the writer from the periphery to sanctify metropolitan prejudices about the periphery. Hence, the native informant is caught between the metropolitan appropriation and demands of a fair representation by postcolonial critics.

8. Marx and Engels define the petite-bourgeois as "The middle estates, the small manufacturer, *the shopkeeper*, [my emphasis] the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore not revolutionary, but

conservative. Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history" (13-14). For example, the way Ngugi was treated on his return to Kenya and the tragic death of Ken Saro-Wiwa at the hands of the Nigerian government.

9. I am drawing here on John Rapley's theorization about the distributive function of a particular regime in legitimating itself. Rapley suggests that a particular dominant regime must balance between its accumulative function and its distributive function in order to stay in power. In his view, the neoliberal globalization regime is quite successful in the former but has failed in its distributive function.

10. For details on the creation of a state of exception see Achille Mbembe 29-35.

11. For details see Frantz Fanon's discussion of the African subject 17-40.

12. The sheer volume of Naipaul's journalistic works about Africa, India, South America, and the Islamic world is clearly responsible for making the boundaries between his fiction and non-fiction permeable. Kevin Foster, while commenting on Naipual's *The Return of Eva Peron*, suggests that "the focus of Naipaul's analysis [of Argentinian society], then, is not Argentina's failure but his own intellectual mastery." (178). This approach seems to be a common trait in Naipual's other journalistic works. Since he places himself in the role of the outside observer of the every day realities of the global periphery, his fictional works tend to be read in association with his non-fictional views of the periphery.

13. For example, the way Ngugi was treated on his return to Kenya and the tragic death of Ken Saro-Wiwa at the hands of the Nigerian government.

14. Spivak in her *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* focuses most of her concluding insights upon the figure of the subaltern woman from the global South. I am, however, applying the same analysis to the figure of the cultural informant who produces his/her work within the metropolitan culture for a metropolitan audience.

15. For details on the term "worlding" and its usage see Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique 114*, 118, 200, 211, 228, and 428.

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