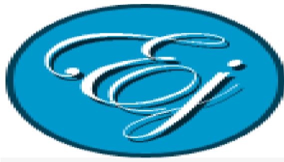

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DISSOLUTION NARRATIVE IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S WORKS

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Abstract

Large group of people around the world Cubans and Mexicans in the US, Indians and Pakistanis in Britain Canada, and the US, Maghreb's in France, Turks in Germany, Chinese in Southeast Asia, Greeks, Polish, and Armenians in various parts of the world, Chinese and Vietnamese in Australia, Canada, and the US, Indians in Mauritius, Fiji, the Caribbean the idea of "home" has indeed become a "damaged" concept. The word "damaged" forces us to face up to the scars and fractures, to the blisters and sores, to the psychic traumas of bodies on the move. Indeed, "home" is the new epistemological logic of (post) modernity as the condition of "living here and belonging elsewhere" begins to affect people in an unprecedented fashion. No longer is exile rendered simply through an essentially aesthetic formulation (on the contrary, it is a travail/travel to which we are becoming inextricably linked as we are progressively dragged into a global village. "Home" now signals a shift away from homogeneous nation-states based on the ideology of assimilation to a much more fluid and contradictory definition of nations as a multiplicity of diasporic identities. The Indian shopkeeper in Vancouver who comes to Canada via Fiji already has held two previous passports; his Salman Rushdie: A Review of International English Literature, third, the Canadian passport, is one that gives him the that gives him the greatest difficulty in reconciling his body with the idea of Canadian citizenry. He remains a negative yet to be processed, a penumbra in the new nation-state of Canada, his privileges as a Canadian citizen most obvious only when he is travelling overseas. Back at home his condition remains hyphenated because in Canada "home" is only available to those passport holders, those citizens whose bodies signify an unproblematic identity of selves with the nation-state. For Indian shopkeepers who are outside of this identity politics, whose corporeality's fissure the logic of unproblematic identity of bodies with citizens, the new dogma of multiculturalism constructs the subject-in-hyphen forever negotiating and fashioning selves at once Indian and Canadian: Canadian Indian and Canadian Indian.

Key Words: *Corporeality's, Teleological, Utopia, Unprecedented, Spatiotemporal, Ethicized, Mishra, The Diasporic Imaginary, Crusoe*

RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction

It is becoming increasingly obvious that the narrative of the home thus takes its exemplary form in what may be called diasporas, and especially in diasporas of colour, those migrant communities that do not quite fit into the nation-state's barely concealed preference for the narrative of assimilation. Diasporas of colour, however, are a relatively recent phenomenon in the West and, as I have already suggested, perhaps the most important marker of late modernity. In the larger narrative of postcolonialism (which has been informed implicitly by a theory of diasporic identifications), the story of diasporas is both its cause and its effect. In the politics of transfer and migration, postcolonialism recovers its own justification as an academic site or as a legitimate object of knowledge. To write about damaged homes, to re-image the impact of migration in the age of late capital, requires us to enter into debates about diasporic theory.

One of the overriding characteristics of diasporas is that they do not, as a general rule, return. This is not to be confused with the symbols of return or the invocations, largely through the sacred, of the homeland or the home-idea. The trouble with diasporas is that while the reference point is in the past, unreal as it may be, there is, in fact, no future, no sense of a teleological! end. Diasporas cannot conceptualize the pointtowards which the community, the nation within a nation, is heading. The absence of teleology's in the diaspora is also linked to Walter Benjamin's understanding of the ever-present time of historical (messianic) redemption. In this lateral argument, an eventual homecoming is not projected into the future but introjected into the present, thereby both interrupting it and multiplying it. Diasporic history thus contests both the utopia and irreversible causality of history through heterotopic (Foucault) or subversive readings. In these readings, time is turned back against itself in order that alternative readings, alternative histories, may be released. In this "diverse scansion of temporality, in this active remembering (as opposed to the mere recalling) of traces and fragments, a new space in language and time is opened up, and historical moments are sundered to reveal heterotopic paths not taken. The absence of teleology's, this intense meditation on synchronicity, thus opposes the tyranny of linear time and blasts open the continuum of history to reveal moments, fragments, traces that can be re-captured and transformed into another history.

As Salman Rushdie has written: It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledgewhich gives rise to profound uncertaintiesthat our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, India's of the mind. We cannot trace the growth of diasporas in any systematic form here. All we can do is refer very schematically to one particular diasporic development that has a direct bearing on the texts discussed in this paper. 1963, the year the Beatles exploded on the world scene, may also be chosen as the watershed year in global migration. Demand for labour in Western Europe and Britain and the collapse of the colonial empires of Britain, France, and Holland meant that millions of non-white migrants from the outposts of the Empire, as well as guest workers from Turkey, began to enter the European city on a scale unprecedented since the Moorish invasions. The

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contemporary European city, for instance, is now a very different demographic fact. It is no longer the centre out of which radiates imperial activity. Instead, European cities are no longer controlled by the logic of centre and periphery Instead, what we get, in Iain Chambers' words, is a new kind of demographic redistribution "along the spatialtemporal-information axes of a world economy" He continues, "the national, unilateral colonial model has been interrupted by the emergence of a transversal world that occupies a 'third space' a 'third culture' (Featherstone) beyond the confines of the nation state.

It is symptomatic of a greater awareness of the transnational nature of nation-states and the presence within them of degrees of difference that led Khachig Tololyne editor of the new journal Diaspora, to maintain that struggles from the margins for the centre and for definitions of the "national" subject are equally legitimate concerns for the constructions of identity or selfhood. Nevertheless, cautious remarks towards the end of his editorial warn us of the difficult space occupied by diasporas and the dangers of displacing the centre (made up of the vast majority of citizens that do not define themselves in diasporic terms) totally by the margins. Tololyne writes: 'To affirm that diasporas are the exemplary communities of the transnational moment is not to write the premature obituary of the nation state, which remains a privileged form of polity, this proviso is important. Elsewhere I have spoken about this condition as the indeterminate, the contaminated condition of diaspora Here I want to do something slightly different, something at once bold and fraught with difficulties.

I want to examine the literary production of Salman Rushdie—whose works exemplify the blasting open of agonistic politics in embattled ethnicities within nation-states that can no longer construct their nationalisms through a homogeneous and synchronous imagining of a collective body consensually reading its newspapers or responding to global events as a totality. Indeed, if we are to follow the hidden text of the previous sentence Benedict Anderson's influential Imagined Communities, we begin to detect not so much the logic of capitalism at work here but the religious, millenarian dogma of an earlier age in which the issues were not necessarily that of imagining national identities but of participating, through sacred languages with communities across "nations." There is, then, a reverse scansion of history at work here, a desire for a lost unity within the ethicized state that minorities continue to inhabit. In the cultural sphere, this leads to the end of consensual politics, the end of a community of speakers/ thinkers that could be relied upon to arbitrate for the national good. In short, what is emerging is "the postcolonial different." What I would like to offer in the following pages is an instance of this postcolonial different with reference to the Indian-Pakistani diaspora in Britain. The diaspora, however, stages a "difference" that can be accommodated only if consensual politics also takes into account the possibility of the diasporic subject itself initiating the consensus. In other words, the majority population has to concede that the diaspora's ground may be different from its own.

It is here that postcolonial theory, through a careful study of diasporic archive, could address what Lyotard has called the differed. This is to anticipate my concluding remarks, however. What I would like to continue here is an examination of key texts of an author whose works have something of an exemplary status as proof-texts of diaspora as an intermediate, increasingly mobile idea. In the works of Salman Rushdie, the Indian-Pakistani diaspora in Britain is seen as a powerful source for the hermeneutics of the liminal, the borders of culture, the unassimilable, the margins, and so on. The critique of the centre through the kinds of hybrid, hyphenated identities occupied by this diaspora has been one of the more exciting and original theorizations of the project of modernity itself. As an

ideological critique of, as well as a corrective to, established working-class British social histories, the pay-off has been considerable: one remembers how his to-Few works of fiction have been the subject of debates as intense as those that have surrounded The Satanic Verses since its publication in 1988. Books have now been written on the Rushdie Affair, a film made on the author's death (much-deserved, as it turns out in the film) by the Pakistani film industry, and Tehran continues to re-emphasize Khomeini's fatwa on any staged denunciation of the West. The author's life, meanwhile, is one of double exile in the company of his "protectors" in the Welsh countryside of "unafraid lambs," country houses, and farmers from whom he must "hide face," as Rushdie describes it in his poem "Crusoe." However, he still hankers after travel, the diasporic condition, even though this travel, like V. S. Naipaul's "arrival," is towards the Arthurian "once and future Avalon."

The cause of Rushdie's second exile, of course, was a book about migrancy, dispossession, cultural hybridity, and the absence of centres in diasporic lives. To give these themes an intertext, a frame, or a narrative template, they were hoisted on another moment in history when "newness" entered the world. The entry of strange people into so many parts of the globe presents the older inhabitants with precisely the threat of the new, the threat of "ideas" no longer commensurable with pre-existing epistemologies. In this retelling, Indian Islam is seen as a hybrid, contradictory phenomenon that conjures strange dreams about the founding text and prophet of that religion. Indian Islam thus has a polytheistic splinter in the side of its monotheism in which the intercession of female gods in any act of worship is not excluded outright.

Moreover, this kind of syncretism is truer still of Bombay, Rushdie's magical metropolis, the postcolonial city, that challenges the erstwhile metropolises of London and Paris. What is true of Indian Islam is also true of Indian narrative forms and culture generally. The Aryans, the Moguls, the British have been invaders, leaving their traces behind as the nation gradually reabsorbs multiplicity into a totality. Thus the central themes of the book—how "newness" enters the world, how the many coexists within the one, and why love remains the only organizing principle of our lives—get written in a hybrid discourse that is borrowed from the Bombay film industry, the idioms of HobsonJobson,4 a colonial English curriculum, the Katha-Sarit-Sagar, the nativist jokes on the operablemethylal the narrative of the epic recast as the battle for the , the populist narratives of Phoolan Devi, the female dacoit, the fundamentalist world of the post-Ayodhya Hindus, the references to the Indian Penal Code section as well as the Indian Civic Code, section , and many more. The Satanic Verses situates itself in the midst of these heterogeneous discourses. It is from the space of hybridity, of multiplicity, that many of the characters speak. Mimi for instance, knows very well the meaning of the world as "pastiche: a 'flattened' world" and the author's own, very postmodern intervention makes this clearer still Gibreel... has wished to remain, to a large degree, continuous—that is, joined to and arising from his past whereas Saladin Chamcha is a creature of selected discontinuities, a willing re-invention; his preferred revolt against history being what makes him, in our chosen idiom, "false Gibreel, to follow the logic of our established terminology, is to be considered "good" by virtue of wishing to remain, for all his vicissitudes, at bottom an untranslated man. But, and again but: this sounds, does it not, dangerously like an intentionalism Such distinctions, resting as they must on an idea of the self as being homogeneous, non-hybrid, "Rushdie begins by offering the usual binary between the continuous and the discontinuous, between tradition and modernity, between good and evil, only to undercut it through the intervention of the hybrid. Indeed, what this extended statement about the construction of the self indicates, in the context of the diaspora

and margins, is that subjectivity is now formed through modes of translation and encoding because erstwhile distinction tones "cannot, must not suffice.

This last phrase, in fact, sums up the agenda of the book as a whole: distinctions made through established cultural epistemologies will always fail. Yet, even as hybridity is celebrated, one gets the feeling that the disavowed leaves its traces behind because, as we shall see, ***The Satanic Verses*** itself failed to convince the diaspora that there is no such thing as an "untranslated man": sections of the diaspora wish to retain this nostalgic definition of the self and cling to "millenarian" narratives of self-empowerment in which only the untranslated can recapture a lost harmony but, paradoxically, the desire to retain a pristine sense of the past is only possible through the technologies of mechanical reproduction such as cassette tapes, films, and so on. Since historical reconstructions through these apparatuses introduce the heterotopic into the Utopian or the linear, what we get here is precisely a heterogeneous, contradictory rendition of history by making memory and cultural fragments metonymies representations of the whole. While cassette culture reconstructs the past as a synchronic moment), it also contaminates the diasporic idea of culture as belonging to the homeland alone. As Paul Gilroy has argued so persuasively in ***The Black Atlantic*** Modernity and Double Consciousness, the newer technologies of cultural transmission accentuate the fact that cultural commodities travel swiftly, criss-crossing geographical boundaries, creating new and vibrant forms.

The Bhojpuri-Hindi songs of the Indian singers Babia and Ranchan, for instance, combine Hindi film music with calypso/ hip hop, while in Britain, Asian Bhangra and Indian groups such as Loop Guru show obvious influences of reggae and soul music of Black Africa. In this respect, ***The Satanic Verses*** affirms the impossibility of millenarian diasporic narratives while at the same time stressing that these narratives invariably will be the starting point of any radical re-theorizing of the diasporic imaginary, which, for Rushdie, is identical with modernism itself and may be read as a "metaphor for all humanity “The story of "migration, its stresses and transformations, from the point of view of migrants from the Indian subcontinent, nevertheless drops the old realist modes of writing and embraces the European avant-garde. Yet it also keeps its realist nose sharply in focus. This is partly because the book is as much about South Asians in a racialized Britain as it is an avant-gardist break in the history of "English" fiction.8 Rushdie, in fact, is quite explicit about this dual agenda, at the risk of repetition, let me underline once again that The Satanic Verses is the text about migration, about the varieties of religious, sexual, and social filiations of the diaspora.

The work is the millenarian routed through the space of travel and then problematically rooted in the new space of the diaspora. In this respect the text's primary narrative is a tale of migrancy and the ambiguities of being an Indian in Britain. In the process, the work explores the disavowal of so many fundamental assumptions and values because of a massive epistemic violence to the intellect. The narrative, in fact, begins with people who have already lost their faith in religion and who now have a truly diasporic relationship with India. As Rushdie has explained, these people are the new travellers across the planet; having lost their faith, they have to rethink what death means to the living and how desire can find expression when people cannot love.

One of the key phrases that recurs deals with being born again (to be born again, you have to die” says Gibreel to Saladin), and the diasporic world is very much the world in which one undergoes a rebirthing. In the case of Gibreel and Saladin, the context in which

this occurs combines the fantastic free-fall from an exploding plane (AI 420 from the height of Mt. Everest, a full 29,002 feet10) with the realistic narrative of terrorism and hijacking. The combination of these two generic modes is striking, since it forecloses the possibility of naturalistic readings because the work reveals a kind of simultaneous reincarnation: two people die and are immediately reborn as they were at the moment of their deaths. The rebirthing of Gibreel and Saladin, then, parallels, say, the rebirth of Amba as Shikhand in the Mahabharata, the founding Indian text that is simultaneously diachronic and synchronic, it happened then, it happens now. One becomes someone else but keeps the earlier history/biography intact. The relationship between Rushdie's writings and the Indian epic tradition of generic mixing is a narrative we cannot go into here, but it is nevertheless important to refer to it, if only because it reminds us of the fictiveness of the text and its relationship to the "eclectic, hybridized nature of the Indian artistic tradition" shows, the dominant cultural form of modern India, the Bombay film, the successor to the encyclopaedic pan-Indian epic tradition, constantly adapts itself to and indigenizes all global cultural forms, from Hollywood to Middle Eastern dance and music. The "emigration" of Salahuddin Chamchawala from Bombay has close parallels with Salman Rushdie's own pattern of emigration.

From the insertion of the well-known autobiographical "kipper story" to his own uneasy relationship with his father, there are striking parallels between Saladin and his creator. It is not Gibreel but Saladin who is reborn and who accepts the need for change: the nostalgia for the past (a house, one's ancestral religion, and so on) is not something one can live by but something to which, in an act of both homage and acceptance of his father ChangezChamchawala, Saladin returns. The use of a fused signSalman and Saladinallows Rushdie to enter into those areas, notably the body and the religious body-politic, that accentuate the diasporic condition. Relationships with women —Pamela Lovelace (wife), Mimi Mamoulian raise the interesting question of diasporic sexuality and gender relations. At the same time, the other autobiographical figure around "Salman"Salman from Persia in the Mahound andJahilia sections of the book is also diasporic and connects with Islam as a political as well as religious revolution staged by "water-carriers, immigrants and slaves" (101). Even the radical Iranian cultural critic suppressed under the Shah's regime, and for many the harbinger of Khomeini's revolution, refers to one SalmaneFaresi who "found refuge in Medina with the Muslims and played such an important role in the development of Islam" This SalmanFaresi may not have been the prophet's contemporary, but the connection between Iran and the advent of Islam underscores the strength of the Iranian furore against Rushdie.

In Al-e Ahmad's reading of the Islamization of Iran, what is emphasized, perhaps too simplistically, is the idea of Islam being invited into Iran. Unlike earlier Western incursions, Islam, another Western ideology, is not an invasion but a response to Iran's own need to embrace the austere harmony of the "one." It is through Saladin/Salman (Rushdie) that the new themes of diasporic interaction are explored. Saladin sees in the relics of Empire in the heart of London, "attractively faded grandeur." Gibreel, on his part, only sees a "wreck, a Crusoe-city, marooned on the island of its past." When asked about his favourite films, Saladin offers a cosmopolitan list: "Potemkin, Kane, Otto e Mezzo, The Seven Samurai, Alphaviüe, E l Angel ExterminadorwhereasGibreel offers a list of successful commercial Hindi films: "Mother India, Mr India, Shree Charsawbees: no Ray, no Mrinal Sen, no Aravindan, or Ghatak" (440). The lists, the choices made, the implied discriminations, the

negotiations with the migrant's new land, all indicate the complex ways in which two diaspora discourses (the millenarian and the diasporic) work.

Gibreel, for his part, does not undergo mutation but remains locked in the worlds of memory and fantasy. Saladin thus becomes the figure that is both here and elsewhere, and his return to the Motherland to be at his father's deathbed is perhaps the more cogent statement about the diasporic condition. Gibreel, on the other hand, acts out his actor's fantasies and becomes the conduit through whom (in his imagination) the Prophet receives the Blasphemy, therefore, falls not to the hybrid mutant but to the nostalgia-ridden Gibreel. Further, the mutant condition of Saladin (names in the diaspora are similarly mutated, a HobsonJobson discourse gets replayed) is both linguistic as well as physical: the he-goat with an erratic pair of horns and the owner of a name that moves between the Indian Chamchawala to the trans IndianSpoono (English for chamcha, "spoon," though in Hindi/ Urdu a chamcha is a sycophant gleefully doing his/her master's work). In all this, two ideas the idea of newness and that of love—keep cropping up. For Dr Uhuru Simba, "newness will enter this society by collective, not individual actions. As for love, the combinations it takesGibreel/Rekha Merchant/ Allie Cone; Saladin/Pamela LovelaceZeeny Vakil/Mimi Mamoulian—get complicated by other alignments: Jumpy Joshi/ Pamela; Saladin/Allie Cone; Billy Battuta/Mimi; Hanif Johnson/Mishal Sufyan. Al l these relationships are part of the new diasporic combinations, a kind of necessary re-programming of the mind in the wake of the diasporic newness. At the point of interaction where the old and the new come together—as is the case with the diaspora's encounter with the vibrant politics of the metropolitan centre—new social meanings get constructed, especially in the domain of psycho-sexual politics.

Thus, the capacious Hind and not the bookish Muhammad effectively runs the Shandera cafe: her great cooking is what improves the material condition of the family rather than Muhammad's Virginian rhetoric, which has no use value in Britain. Gender relations therefore get repositioned in the diaspora, and women begin to occupy a different, though not necessarily more equitable, kind of space. The manner in which a diasporic restaurant culture in Britain is actually based on wives as cooks is quite staggering. In another world, in the world of Jahiliya, however, it is Hind, the powerful wife of the patriarch Abu Simbel, who has to battle with another new idea: "What kind of an idea are you?" (335), is the question asked of the Prophet. Yet the idea of the "new" (the idea of the "post" in any modernity) also has a tendency to get fossilized, which is where another narrative of the diaspora, the millenarian, becomes the attractive, and easy, alternative.

The late 1960s saw the emergence of a new racism in Britain for which Enoch Powell was the best-known, but not the only, spokesperson. In what seemed like a remarkable reversal of old Eurocentric and imperialist readings of the black colonized as racially inferior, the new racists began to recast races on the model of linguistic difference. This "difference," however, had to be anchored somewhere, and the easiest means of doing this was by stipulating that nations were not imagined communities constructed historically but racial enclaves marked by high levels of homogeneity. Thus, a race had a nation to which it belonged. The British had their nation and belonged to an island off the coast of Europe, and so on. In the name of racial respect and racial equality, this version in fact gave repatriation theorists such as Enoch Powell a high level of respectability in that, it was argued, what Powell stood for was not racism but a nationalism that the immigrants themselves upheld. What the argument simplified was the history of imperialism itself and the massive displacement of races that had taken place in the name of Empire. Nowhere was this more

marked than in the Indian, African, and Chinese diasporas of the Empire. More importantly, however, the new racism was used to defend Britishness itself, to argue that multiculturalism was a travesty of the British way of life, which was now becoming extremely vulnerable.

In *The Satanic Verses,* it is through the Sufyan family that we enter into changing demographic patterns and race relations in Britain, as well as see how homeland family norms negotiate the new gender politics of diasporas. The Sufyan family lives in Brickhill Street, the old Jewish enclave of tailors and small-time shopkeepers. Now it is the street of Bangladeshi migrants or Pickiest/Pakis ("brown Jews" [300]) who are least equipped for metropolitan life. Thus, in Brickhill, synagogues and kosher food have given way to mosques and halal restaurants. Yet nothing is as simple as it seems in this world of the diaspora. The diaspora here finally crumbles and falls apart because the pressures come not only from the newly acquired socio-sexual field of the participants in the diasporic drama but also because that drama has to contend with racist hooliganism as the diaspora becomes progressively an object of derision to be represented through the discourse of monetarism.

Diaspora, the Sacred, and Salman Rushdie the Satanic Verses is one radical instance of diasporic recollection or redecoration. The questions that any such rememorating asks of the diasporic subject are: what is the status of its past, of its myths, of its own certainties? How has it constructed these certainties? Does anything or anybody have a hegemonic status within the diaspora itself? Or, do we read diasporas, as I have suggested, through the Gramscian definition of the subaltern? Do the Imams of Islam constitute a ruling group within the subaltern? Can one re-invigorate one's myths? One kind of reinvigoration was endorsed by Indian diasporas created in the wake of the British indenture system. In these nineteenth century diasporas, loss was rewritten as a totality through the principle of a reverse millenarianism. There was a golden age back there that we have forfeited through our banishment. Let us imaginatively re-create this golden age, which would leap over the great chasm created in our history through indenture.

One of the grand templates of Indian diasporic millenarianism was the myth of Rama and his banishment. The alternative to this millenarian ethos is a version of rememorating in which the continuum of imperial history is blasted through a radical mediation on the conditions of migrancy and displacement. The recapitulation of one's history (and not just the re-invigoration of myth) leads to a confrontation with the narratives of imperialism itself. Where the old diaspora's myths were, after all, commensurate with the imperial narratives of totality (insofar as these myths were considered to be equally forceful from the subject's point of view), the new diaspora attempts to penetrate the history of the centre through multiple secularisms. When, however, the interventions into secularity threaten an earlier memory, diasporas turn to versions of millenarian rememorating and retreat into an essentialist discourse, even though they know full well that the past can no longer redeem.

It is in this context that I would like to explore the intersection of the radical agenda of diasporas and the idea of the sacred. No reading of The Satanic Verses can be complete without considering the reception of the text in terms of the sacred. The sacred, in this instance, refuses to accept the aesthetic autonomy of the text and connects the narrator's voice unproblematically with that of the author. In his defence—and in the defence mounted on his behalf by the world literati—i t is really the relative autonomy of art that has been emphasized. What this defence raises is a very serious question about whether a diasporic text that celebrates hybridity and rootlessness can be defended with reference purely to the

privileged status of the aesthetic order. In the ensuing debates, the British South Asian diaspora has been read as a group that does not quite understand the values of a civic society and has the capacity to relapse into barbarism, precisely the condition that gave the Empire its humanist apology. If I return to the saturated discourses surrounding the Rushdie Affair, it is because the discourse reminds us of yet another kind of privilege, and one that questions the non-negotiable primacy of modernity itself.

Conclusion

The work comprises individual images that represent fragments of narrative, leaving enough ambiguities for the viewer to create their own story. Rather than offering a definitive narrative thread, the story instead seeks to reflect the sense of internal crisis and dislocation that America experienced during this period up until the near dissolution of the political landscape with the Watergate scandal.

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