

“To Understand Me, You’ll Have to Swallow a World:” Understanding Rhetorical Confusion in  
Transnational Literature

by

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This thesis aims to define and explore the concept of rhetorical confusion as a pattern that exists within transnational literature. Specifically, rhetorical confusion is defined as a trend within transnational texts in which necessary information or clarification is not provided to a reader, in regards to a country’s history, politics, or language. As a result, readers may experience discomfort as they read. Understanding and codifying rhetorical confusion, however, allows the opportunity for the unfamiliar reader to garner a better sense of understanding of a text’s subject country or culture. The application of rhetorical confusion is demonstrated by exploring the ways in which Salman Rushdie’s reimagining of India’s history in *Midnight’s Children* may be beneficial or detrimental to the unfamiliar reader. Additionally, NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* establishes how rhetorical confusion can provide a reader with a greater sense of empathy for protagonist Darling. This thesis progresses to demonstrate the need to continue the conversation surrounding rhetorical confusion by examining Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West*.



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Transnational Literature

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by

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Katie McWain, a woman who shined light on others while she fought to keep her own lit. She showed me how to have confidence in my writing, in my work, and most importantly, in myself. Without her, this thesis would not have been completed, or at the very least, it would not have been completed well. I will miss you every day, dear friend. I hope I make you proud.

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## INTRODUCTION

Transnational literature prompts several opportunities for readers to experience confusion as they read. Commonly, the confusion emerges in the form of a refusal to translate words or phrases in a primarily English-written text. A notable example of this refusal is Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*. These texts that refuse to translate indicate a trend that showcases the political nature of language and induces reader confusion. In addition to this confusion, an English-only speaking reader may experience feelings of discomfort or isolation from the text, feelings that may result in readers rejecting the text altogether if they do not attempt to work through their confusion. This concept of confusion is not limited simply to language; rather it can also exist as an encompassing experience that utilizes a text's characters, plot, and geographical setting. A trend exists among transnational texts that are originally written in English in which moments of confusion arise for the unfamiliar reader. This trend is identifiable through what I refer to as rhetorical confusion. By observing and codifying rhetorical confusion, we can better identify a reason why readers often struggle with or turn away from transnational literature. Furthermore, a greater understanding of rhetorical confusion will more likely encourage readers to work through such confusion to reach a point of understanding with the text that can then lead to a greater sense of meaning and appreciation for the text's subject country or culture.

Confusion as a functional tool within literature is hardly a new concept as it is frequently employed within drama. For example, John O'Neal explores the ways in which French Enlightenment thinkers often "used the notion of confusion in a progressive way to reorganize social classes, literary forms, metaphysical substances (such as the body and soul), scientific methods, and cultural categories. (O'Neal).<sup>1</sup> However, the conversation surrounding confusion



within specifically transnational texts is primarily limited to the simple acknowledgment that the text is in fact confusing at times for a reader unfamiliar with the text's subject culture or country. This conversation largely exists outside of scholarly discussion as the brief acknowledgments of confusion often stem from critics and book reviews. In his review of Vikram Chandra's *The Sacred Games*, for example, Paul Gray claims that "longtime Bombay residents will have an extra advantage, since they will know, without consulting a gazeteer or Google, why the city is now called Mumbai. Prospective readers who don't fit this profile will have some catching up to do" (Gray). Similarly, Michiko Kakutani states that the use of Jamaican slang in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* is "quite comprehensible to American ears and yet at the same time alien and compelling" (Kakutani). Gray and Kakutani are effectively warning the reader that they may experience challenges when reading the reviewed text, but the acknowledgment of confusion typically ends after such a warning. Little scholarship or discussion currently exists on the purpose and meaning behind confusion within a text or what readers should do if and when they encounter it.

There is a great need, however, to further this conversation on confusion because it is an observable trend within transnational literature. Robert Young claims this of postcolonial literature: "Postcolonial literature always makes a statement about something in the world, often disturbing our current assumptions and perceptions as it does so" (217). The same can be said of transnational literature as a reader's current assumptions and perceptions regarding the text's subject country or culture may be disturbed. Young further argues that reading texts from other cultures allows for a "quasi-anthropological" view of the culture, yet this only works "so long as the other culture is not represented as too different" (214). If the text is too different, the reader begins to resist or reject the text, possibly to the point of not finishing the text. Authors of

transnational literature, however, do not always adhere to making their texts easily accessible or without confusion; as such, there is a need to reconcile a reader's response to a differing culture, and thus, further suggesting a need to codify and examine the concept of rhetorical confusion.

To reach a definition of rhetorical confusion that is precise and clear, I reviewed and considered several texts that met particular criteria. Each text was originally written in English and considered transnational or multicultural based on the text's setting, subject matter, or use of language. The notion of identifying *why* something is confusing was a difficult undertaking, so I turned to the idea of foundational knowledge: what does a reader need to know to understand a text as they read it? Language use was the first, and most prominent, element that emerged as an answer to this question. If we are unfamiliar with a text's language, then we are unable to truly understand the meaning of the text. Transnational texts, even the ones originally written in English, invoke power with language by refusing to translate words/phrases, incorporating dialects, or indicating different speech patterns. Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* demonstrates this excellently through its use of Nigerian-Pidgin English; the subtitle of the novel being "A Novel in Rotten English." In his novel *Sacred Games*, Vikram Chandra incorporates Hindi, Urdu, and Marathi seamlessly into English sentences that first appear cumbersome to a reader who only understands English. Similarly, Elain Castillo includes Spanish, Tagalog, Pangasinan, and Ilocano alongside English within her novel *America is Not the Heart*.

Language, as indicated, is not the only contributing factor to a reader's confusion. A country's history and politics offers another element that may cause confusion for readers unfamiliar with the specified country. Although a native to that country may not know the exact details of history or every political scandal referenced within a text, an unfamiliar reader contains

an even smaller amount historical/political knowledge. Jennifer Nansubuga's *Kintu* offers an examination of Ugandan history through her fictional text. Similarly, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* explores Kenya's independence from Britain in the aftermath of the Mau Mau rebellion. A reader unfamiliar with Ugandan history or the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya face moments of confusion as they read these stories as they do not understand the context of conflict or historical references. This context has subdivisions as well including, but not limited to, religion (*Pillars of Salt* by Fadia Faqir), societal expectations (*Season of Crimson Blossoms* by Abubakar Adam Ibrahim), and mythology (*Maru* by Bessie Head).

Thus, a more salient trend began to emerge with this question in mind; transnational texts often lack historic, political, linguistic, religious, and geographical information that would offer more concrete meaning to an unfamiliar reader. When a text withholds necessary information from an unfamiliar reader, a statement is being made, albeit implicitly. The confusion a reader experiences disturbs their assumptions, perceptions, and expectations regarding a text and even broader assumptions made about the text's subject culture. In this way, such analysis of confusion in transnational texts offers a means to overcome habits of "othering" when a reader engages with transnational literature. Yet, withholding information occurs within western texts as well in the form of the allegories and allusions -- not every reader will recognize a Shakespearean or Biblical allusion, despite the commonality of both. The difference lies within the reader's awareness and response to the confusing moment. Whereas a reader may gloss over

a simple title allusion such as John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* or William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, they are more likely to pause and experience discomfort as they come across reference to the Sabarmati affair<sup>2</sup> or the phrase *salibonani*.<sup>3</sup> The reader is aware that they lack the knowledge to understand a particular reference resulting in their feelings of confusion. Rhetorical confusion is thus defined as a trend within transnational texts in which necessary information or clarification is not provided to a reader, in regards to a country's history, politics, or language. As a result, readers may experience discomfort as they read. Texts that demonstrate this trend are conscious of the confusion, and subsequent feelings of discomfort, potentially caused for a reader; however, the text is unapologetic for the tension caused within the reader.

Along with the definition of rhetorical confusion, there are a few additional terms that need clarification. The texts examined here do fall into the category of transnational literature as defined by Peter Morgan: "literary transnationalism can be understood broadly, in association with usage in social sciences, as a gloss on 'globalization', namely as the literary recognition and representation of the flow of people, ideas and goods across cultural and national boundaries"

(4). However, rhetorical confusion is not limited simply to texts that move across borders, and as such, the broader categorization of world literature should be acknowledged in the discussion of rhetorical confusion as well. Additionally, the reader who experiences rhetorical confusion must be identified. It is easy to assume that this reader is Western and can only ever be Western because these readers are typically considered outside of the canon of transnational or world

literature. The inaccurate assumption that a confused reader is only ever a Western reader discounts readers who are familiar with the text's country or culture, even when living in a western country. It also excludes readers outside of western countries who still face unfamiliarity with the text's country or culture. As such, the reader who experiences rhetorical confusion is described here as the unfamiliar reader. It should be noted that the unfamiliar reader is far from universal just as the reader's experience with rhetorical confusion is far from universal. The analysis presented attempts to nuance the experience as much as possible to account for variations in rhetorical confusion in order to acknowledge and codify the feeling that some readers experience.

The unfamiliar reader is aware that they do not contain the knowledge to understand a particular reference resulting in their feelings of confusion. Rather than avoiding their lack of understanding or remaining entirely unaware of the allusion/allegory, the presence of rhetorical confusion prompts the reader to confront the unfamiliar text before them and reflect on their own perceptions or biases as they attempt to reconcile with the confusion. Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* strongly demonstrates this same feeling in a western text. Burgess' creation of a slang language, commonly referred to as *Nadsat*, thrusts the reader into unfamiliar and confusing territory ("A Clockwork Orange and Nadsat"). The reader must reconcile with the fact that they have no guidance for this use of language as the text offers no definitions or glossary; they are unable to avoid the fact that there is information they do not understand.

Again, the reader learns how to read a text through the text itself, even one with a unique language such as *A Clockwork Orange* in which “exoticisms [are] gradually clarified by context” (“A Clockwork Orange and Nadsat”). The same is often demonstrated through texts that contain rhetorical confusion. As the reader works their way through a text, they may begin to understand - on a certain level - cultural references and language use. Furthermore, these moments of confusion possibly weaken the more frequently a reader reads a text or further researches the point of reference that prompted confusion, which offers the notion that rhetorical confusion can be a temporary concept.

While some readers may complete their own research into the text’s subject country or culture, it is also likely that they will only absorb the material at a surface level. As scholars of transnational literature, it is our responsibility to stress the importance of working through or processing the rhetorical confusion in order gain a better understanding of a text’s subject culture or country. Young argues that readers often turn to “simplistic” texts such as Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* and Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* (214). The texts offer significant value to an unfamiliar reader’s exposure to world literature, but they also offer more guidance to the reader. Satrapi’s *Persepolis*, for example, includes more explanation to the story’s historic and political context. Stories such as *Kite Runner* and *Persepolis* are still needed, yet they cannot be the end point for unfamiliar readers; they should act as introductory points to transnational or world literature before a reader encounters more challenging texts. However, the very challenge of

confusion may turn readers away from a text simply because they do not understand. If we are able to reconcile with this idea of confusion and offer means to assist this reconciliation, perhaps readers will be less daunted by the notion of confusion.

In order to better demonstrate the concept of rhetorical confusion, this study examines three specific texts: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. Each of these texts are originally written in English and centers on topics within various countries and/or cultures. These texts were chosen because each represents a different country/culture; each fulfills the primary components of rhetorical confusion – history, politics, and language; and each offers a distinctly salient characteristic of rhetorical confusion alongside an additional component such as religion, geography, or magic. Furthermore, they effectively depict challenging texts that withhold significant contextual information from the reader.

Although these texts do accurately demonstrate rhetorical confusion, it is also necessary to note that they are still largely connected to the western or English-only speaking reader. Salman Rushdie has received criticism for being complicit in the system he is attempting to critique (Teverson 332). NoViolet Bulawayo is frequently associated with the discussion surrounding African literature and expatriate writers who are successful within this genre but no longer live on the continent (Frassinelli 712). Mohsin Hamid is criticized for his notion that his generation grew up in a post-post colonialist period, completely free of the effects of Britain's

colonial rule over Pakistan (Jay 55). These criticisms are valid of each author and should be considered when analyzing their texts as they are within their respective chapters; however, the critiques should not diminish the contributions each writer makes to transnational literature or the concept of rhetorical confusion.

The first chapter will center on Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. This novel weaves together the life of Saleem Sinai into India's independence in 1947 with Saleem entering the world at the stroke of midnight on the day of independence. *Midnight's Children* incorporates India's history, politics, linguistic and religious conflicts, and geography into this extravagant fictional biography, causing rhetorical confusion for the unfamiliar reader. Rhetorical confusion in the context of *Midnight's Children* demonstrates the ways in which the confusion may be simultaneously beneficial and dangerous for an unfamiliar reader. The reader is exposed to a history and culture that was once unfamiliar to them, particularly if they complete additional research. In this way, the unfamiliar reader begins processing the rhetorical confusion and begins working towards understanding and meaning by using Rushdie's text to educate themselves. Comparatively, the reader may view Rushdie as an authoritative voice that should be instinctually trusted as the unfamiliar reader has less knowledge of India and its politics. As such, the unfamiliar reader that fully accepts Rushdie's reimagining of history makes themselves vulnerable to a version of history that is not entirely accurate.



Chapter two focuses on NoViolet Bulawayo's debut novel *We Need New Names* and its child narrator, Darling's coming-of-age journey from Zimbabwe to the United States. Bulawayo withholds information from her readers such as the novel's setting and political context, and she punctuates the confusion by creating uncertainty in the foundational knowledge a reader *does* contain. Bulawayo never refers to Zimbabwe by name within the novel, nor does she give a precise time reference within the first 130 pages of the text. This lack of context as well as the vague references to politics makes the underlying conflicts appear more abstract to an unfamiliar reader. Most significantly, Bulawayo employs a blend of foreign and familiar concepts such as names, locations, and cultural references. These elements, along with rhetorical confusion, combine to project Darling's own experiences with confusion onto the reader in such a way that likely encourages empathy for Darling and her friends. Not only will a reader be able to work towards understanding as they do while reading *Midnight's Children*, the unfamiliar reader also gains a greater sense of emotional understanding or empathy as they work through their rhetorical confusion.

Lastly, chapter three will explore Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* and its ambiguous articulation of a refugee story. A country is never named and the exact conflict is never described, yet, Hamid's aim for the vague context seems to be a recognition of universality. *Exit West* can take place in nearly any location, causing the reader to focus on the characters within the text and possibly imagine the events of the novel taking place somewhere familiar to them.

While *Midnight's Children* and *We Need New Names* base their references in factual, historical events, *Exit West* relies on the metaphoric, symbolic nature of the unnamed conflict. The examination of rhetorical confusion in this chapter demonstrates the ways in which the provided definition of rhetorical confusion is not concrete or absolute. Rhetorical confusion in Hamid's text may serve the same function of educating or invoking empathy in the reader, but it also indicates the true diversity in which the concept of confusion may appear.

When examined together, these three texts demonstrate a starting point for the concept of rhetorical confusion for the unfamiliar reader. Each example withholds contextual information surrounding the subject country's history, politics, and/or language, effectively prompting a sense of confusion and subsequent discomfort. By working through such confusion, the unfamiliar reader becomes closer to understanding not only the text itself, but the text's subject country as well. It is necessary to examine these examples in conjunction with one another to highlight the similarities and vast differences of rhetorical confusion.

CHAPTER ONE: REIMAGINING INDIA IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

The multifaceted concept of rhetorical confusion demonstrates a wide variety of functions that surpass merely confusing the unfamiliar reader. Within Salman Rushdie's fictionalized retelling of India's history, rhetorical confusion emerges through the inextricable link between Saleem Sinai and post-independence India through the political and cultural events that take place in India from 1947 onward. The rhetorical confusion in *Midnight's Children* allows Rushdie to reshape a nation's history and to create a new mythology for the nation's independence, making room for his own critique of that nation. As such, Rushdie appears to command a voice of authority throughout the novel, enabling the rhetorical confusion within the text to potentially be both educational and detrimental to the unfamiliar reader.

Although *Midnight's Children* received the Booker Prize in 1981, the Booker of Bookers in 1993, and the Best of Bookers in 2008, indicating the text's success and longevity, the novel, and its author, are not without criticism. Salman Rushdie, of course, received fame and notoriety in 1988 with his controversial fourth novel *The Satanic Verses*; however, *Midnight's Children* first drew critical attention when it was published in 1981, largely stemming from the question of Rushdie's audience. Laura Buchholz frames the criticism concisely when she asks "does Rushdie write to the colonizer or the colonized, the English or the Indian?" (339). Similarly, Andrew Teverson establishes that Rushdie frequently becomes complicit in the very system he is attempting to critique and reconfigure (332). Scholars such as Harish Trivedi and Liam Connell have also critiqued Rushdie's linguistic and magical realism choices, both of which will be expounded upon later in this chapter. These questions and critiques demonstrate the ways in which rhetorical confusion within *Midnight's Children* has the potential to mislead readers

should the reader accept the fictionalized versions of Rushdie's altered history. If the reader accepts Rushdie as an authoritative voice, they may freely embrace his narrative without realizing flaws within the narrative, and thus, leaving the reader with an inaccurate representation of India. This tracks alongside David Price's claim that our sense of credibility becomes strained by the end of the text (91). Conversely, one must ask if a reader in this position is even aware that they are receiving false representations or that their credibility may be strained, therefore making the reader more accepting of Rushdie's retelling.

Saleem's story begins before he is born as he writes his memoir and reads it to his friend and admirer, Padma. This narratological function is the first instance of confusion that the reader slowly adapts to and processes. Rather than beginning with his birth, Saleem starts with his grandfather's, Aadam Aziz, journey to becoming a doctor and falling in love with his patient Naseem Ghani. Their marriage results in three daughters, Alia, Mumtaz, and Emerald. After her first secret marriage to Nadir Kahn ends with him fleeing, Mumtaz marries Ahmed Sinai and changes her name to Amina. Amina and Ahmed give birth to a son at the stroke of midnight, the day of India's independence, initiating the start of her son's history-linked life. Another woman, Vanita, gives birth at exactly the same moment to a son of her own, Shiva. Amina's midwife, Mary Pereira, however, switches the sons, creating the novel's core rivalry between Saleem (the son born to Vanita and raised by Amina) and Shiva (the son born to Amina and raised by Vanita's husband, Willie). The reader attempts to keep track of the complex Aziz/Sinai family dynamics and relationships while also potentially facing rhetorical confusion at the same time through the connection between Saleem's history and that of India's. The characters of Rushdie's creation fuse with the characters of India's politics, leaving the unfamiliar reader to question

which events are based in reality, which can lead to possible discomfort when they cannot decipher fact from fiction.

The confusion surrounding reality is furthered by Rushdie's incorporation of magical realism within the *Midnight's Children*. Saleem and Shiva both experience strange, magical abilities due to their historic births, abilities that is shared among 1,001 other children born within the first hour of India's independence. The abilities of the *Midnight's Children* vary between each child, and for Saleem, this ability takes form in telepathy, allowing him to hear the thoughts of anyone he chooses. Saleem begins the *Midnight's Children Conference* to connect the children across India, providing comfort and friendship for each other as they grow with their country. The Conference waxes and wanes over the course of the novel, though it eventually grows silent as Saleem becomes fearful of Shiva and loses his telepathic ability. Saleem's journey continues to match the history of India as he experiences and influences events such as the India-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971 and various regional partitions; throughout the novel, his personal experiences overlapping greatly with the public history of the country. The *Midnight's Children* and Saleem face an end during the Emergency in 1976 when all but 420 of the Children, now in their thirties, are sterilized at the hands of The Widow and her son, revealed to be Indira and Sanjay Gandhi (Rushdie 505). These magical elements within the text may further the sense of confusion. Real events that already likely produce confusion are carried out

through magical means or with an air of fantasy in a way that makes them seem unnatural and all the more confusing.

While the other two texts examined later cultivate rhetorical confusion by withholding identifying information, Rushdie withholds context. A reader familiar with India's independence, the Partition, and the Emergency may easily locate the majority of Rushdie's references, metaphors, and allusions, yet an unfamiliar reader likely would not understand each reference made. As such, the allegory of *Midnight's Children* is lost on these readers and instead they experience rhetorical confusion. Not only is there confusion surrounding the subject country's history, politics, and language, Rushdie's text includes layers of confusion with its references to religion, geography, and social traditions. Furthermore, the extensive familial history and narratological choices in the novel produce moments of uncertainty for the reader as well. Most of this text demonstrates rhetorical confusion, though, through the defined characteristics of withholding information surrounding a country's history, politics, and language.

In fact, a much larger project could be devoted to deeply analyzing every aspect of Saleem's complicated life, yet for the space allotted here, the most notable moments of the text or the moments more critically reflecting rhetorical confusion are analyzed. These moments of confusion do not make the text unreadable for the unfamiliar reader; however, there are certain elements to Rushdie's allegorical critique that do not necessarily come across to an unfamiliar reader. Angelica DeAngelis defines this best when describing a chronological mistake within the text:

If one accepts that the book was meant primarily for a Western audience, the date of the murder of the Mahatma would have most likely been unknown to many readers, and had Saleem not brought it to their [sic] attention, would have gone unnoticed. Indian readers, and those familiar with history, would have noticed the mistake and cited sloppiness on the part of Rushdie or his editor. (42)

DeAngelis argues, however, that these particularities likely do not register with an unfamiliar reader. While they may not notice errors in such particularities (as with the error of Gandhi's assassination date), the reader is aware that the text is making a reference that they are unfamiliar with, thus producing the discomfort associated with rhetorical confusion. Rushdie's text abounds with such examples. In addition to the text being a historical or political allegory that utilizes a range of different languages, Rushdie incorporates a mix of religions and regions without guiding context, resulting again in confusion for the unfamiliar reader. This exploration of history, politics, language, religion, and geography all amount to a reconsideration of Indian identity that serves as the core of Rushdie's text.

While rhetorical confusion is not necessarily the intended or expected outcome of Rushdie's endeavor of reshaping India's history, the unfamiliar reader's experience with rhetorical confusion makes them vulnerable to Rushdie's reshaping. The unfamiliar reader has little knowledge of the original context and are, therefore, more open to the changes that Rushdie incorporates. It is easier for them to accept the fictionalized or altered history as they have little to no experience in regard to the original history of India's independence or the events to follow in subsequent years. As Joyce Wexler claims, "since Rushdie is a member of the culture he writes about, his novel acquires the authenticity of realism," suggesting that the unfamiliar reader likely associates a degree of authority to Rushdie's writing (150). Yet, this ease of acceptance is simultaneously complicated by the unfamiliar reader's lack of knowledgeable context because

the unfamiliar reader does not entirely grasp the meaning behind Rushdie's changes, nor do they necessarily understand the identity he is attempting to reimagine.

Rushdie easily establishes the connections between Saleem and India over the course of the novel. At school Saleem's teacher, Zagallo, even claims that Saleem's face is actually a map of India; his large nose represents the Deccan peninsula, the stains on his face are Pakistan, and two particular birthmarks represent the East and West Wings of the country (Rushdie 265). The parallels between the young boy and young country are meant to inform each other or as Joyce Wexler states "fiction plays an important role in establishing the commonality that is essential to national identity" (141). When the reader faces rhetorical confusion, however, they only observe the overt imagery and do not necessarily retain the underlying nuance or symbolism that Rushdie includes. As Buchholz and Teverson suggest, Rushdie writes to both an audience of colonizers and the colonized and is often complicit within the very system he is attempting to critique. The symbolism that the reader is able to detect may prompt them to further research India's history and the changing geographical landscape of the nation, and in doing so, the reader has the opportunity to educate themselves on both Rushdie's and historians' versions of India's history.

Saleem's connections to India's history not only guides the narrative, but they also demonstrate the parallels between Saleem's quest for identity and the nation's struggle to find identity as an independent nation. In an essay written for his collection *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie ruminates on the idea of a united India: "in all the thousands of years of Indian history, there never was such a creature as a united India...And then, that midnight, the thing that had never existed was suddenly 'free.' But what on earth was it? On what common ground (if any) did it, does it, stand" (*Imaginary Homelands* 27). Rushdie's questioning of India's identity and unity informs his exploration of India's search for an identity as an independent country



throughout the novel. Before Saleem is even born, Rushdie establishes a connection between his life and India's independence to indicate the deep roots that link the two together. Saleem's birth, of course, takes place at the stroke of midnight as the power is transferred to an independent and free India, solidifying the connection between character and nation (Rushdie 129). Hours after his birth, though, Mary Pereira commits her crime of switching Saleem and Shiva, thus prompting Saleem's need to rectify his identity. However, India's need for identity is less precise for the unfamiliar reader, despite the nation's parallelism to Saleem. While Saleem's crisis grows more overt as the character learns of the infant switch, India's lack of a united identity is hidden behind history and politics that are foreign to an unfamiliar reader. The reader only absorbs the surface level of each historic or political reference and the feeling of discomfort associated with rhetorical confusion, nor do they fully realize the fictional impact that Saleem has on such events

The rhetorical confusion experienced due to this lack of political context allows the unfamiliar reader to be guided along by the text, accepting and unquestioning. An unfamiliar reader may not understand this component on their own. The first book of the text builds to India's independence (and Saleem's birth), interspersing clues to its arrival throughout. Moments in history are mentioned in passing, such as Brigadier Dyer's authorized killing of 1500 unarmed Indians or a brief mention of *Satyagraha* demonstrators in Jullundur (Rushdie 34). The significance of these mentions does not necessarily register with an unfamiliar reader even if they know that the text is building to India's independence; they do not necessarily understand how the events scaffold into India's eventual independence. Similarly, an unfamiliar reader may recognize a degree of significance at the mention of Marathi language-marchers who get their protest chant from Saleem, but it is less likely that they will understand the full meaning behind these marchers (Rushdie 219). These protestors aim to represent the language riots in Bombay

that called for a separate Maharashtra, eventually leading to the partition of the Bombay State (Ramone). Furthermore, these language riots demonstrate a nonunified India, one of many languages that is split by partitions. The inclusion of the language marchers at the time that Saleem is testing the boundaries of his new telepathic abilities showcases the joint search for identity, yet an unfamiliar reader would only understand half of that search. The slight awareness the reader may exhibit while reading potentially produces discomfort or frustration as they struggle to make sense of the portions that confuse them.

There is likely no difference between historical characters such Brigadier Dyer and the fictionalized Rani of Cooch Naheen to such a reader, nor is there great significance to the language riots. Therefore, the unfamiliar reader is more likely to accept Rushdie's text as a fairly accurate account of India's history. As such, the reader may experience a range of responses in accepting this account. To a lesser degree, the reader will think nothing more of the text than a fantastical story that entertained them, and to the more extreme, a reader may falsely believe depictions of a country's history if they do not complete any of their own research. Yet, this seems in part to play to Rushdie's aim for the novel. DeAngelis indicates that Saleem "realizes that there is not one truth, but several versions that exist in conjunction with, or in opposition to, each other" (46). Rhetorical confusion, then, aptly carries out Rushdie's notion of multiple histories, and the unfamiliar reader is potentially unaware that they so astutely demonstrated this notion.

As the unfamiliar reader learns how to read the text and understands the parallels between Saleem and India, they are able to make greater assumptions than they are at the beginning of the novel, demonstrating a certain level of temporality to rhetorical confusion in which the confusion potentially fades or lessens over the course of reading. For example, during the India-Pakistan

War of 1965, the majority of Saleem's family is killed in bombings and he views the destruction of his family as the war's sole purpose (Rushdie 392). An unfamiliar reader does not need the details of this war to connect the destruction within the country to the destruction within Saleem's life. He even identifies it for the reader: "the terrible fatalism which had overcome me of late had taken on an even more terrible form; drowning in the disintegration of family, of both countries to which I had belonged" (Rushdie 390). DeAngelis notes that as the country is divided and split apart, so too does Saleem's family until both are changed and nearly unrecognizable by the end of book two (59). An unfamiliar reader may not understand the precise politics behind the war, but they understand the damage caused both on Saleem and the nation. As such, they are more sympathetic towards the character as they recognize generalized effects of war.

Comparatively, the India-Pakistan War of 1971 is more prominently featured and the parallels between Saleem and India are less clear to the unfamiliar reader. Saleem is in a state of confusion himself, having suffered amnesia from a blow to the head, and he does not remember his name or anything regarding his past (Rushdie 404). Here, an unfamiliar reader cannot make a clear assumption about the state of India based on Saleem's experiences past the guess that the country was also facing confusion during the war. The political context that *is* provided does little to give a larger, contextual image for the reader. Saleem provides the number of refugees that fled during 1971, and he names the Mukti Bahini<sup>4</sup> guerrilla force and Tiger Niazi,<sup>5</sup> but this information does not indicate the reasoning for the war, nor the effects of the war's aftermath (Rushdie 411). Furthermore, the return of Saleem's memory seems significant, yet the reader does not know if this significance extends beyond the context of the novel as a historical reference. The period in which Saleem and three of his fellow soldiers are trapped in the

Sundarbans forest is by far the most fantastical section of the novel, yet, the reader feels confusion as they attempt to grasp the meaning behind Saleem's revelations and the connections to India.

Underneath the political conflict and discovery of telepathic ability is the lingering confusion associated with Saleem's interactions and conflict with The Widow. Although the mysterious figure is mentioned throughout Saleem's life, her true identity is revealed as Saleem describes the Emergency: "Yes, Padma: Mother Indira really had it in for me" (Rushdie 484). Saleem and the Midnight's Children are subjected to kidnapping and sterilization at the hands of Indira and her son Sanjay, an effort that appears, in the text, to specifically focus on the Children. As Rushdie has done throughout the novel, the sterilization of the Children tracks historical events of India. During the State of Emergency in 1975, 6.2 million men were sterilized in an effort of state-sponsored population control (Biswas). The unfamiliar reader who does not realize the reality within the campaign against the Children do not understand Rushdie's symbolic criticism of the Gandhis and their dark efforts during the Emergency. Yet, they do not need to have the factual framework in mind to detect Rushdie's overarching critique of sterilization or the fact that the primary target of such sterilization were people living in poverty. Rhetorical confusion is present for an unfamiliar reader, but the deep connections between Saleem and India assures that such a reader will observe that the horrors occurring to Saleem hold a certain level of national significance, even if they are not fully aware of the exact significance.

While rhetorical confusion may lead the reader to only see Rushdie's depiction of history, the confusion can also result in a productive interference that prompts the reader to complete their own research. Even a cursory search can reveal to the reader which characters and events are fictionalized and which are based in truth. The reader can also better observe Rushdie's

metaphoric commentary by comparing the text with the version of history told by researchers and scholars. With this outcome, the reader gains an educated sense both of India's history and the careful line that Rushdie walks with his reimagining; furthermore, the rhetorical confusion likely begins to fade as the reader continues to research as they work through their confusion and discomfort.

*Midnight's Children* covers such an extensive span of India's history, though, that the task of researching may appear to be a daunting undertaking. This is made all the more difficult due to the blended aspects of both Saleem's and India's individual and shared identities. Rushdie employs several Hindi and Urdu words and phrases throughout his text that is originally and primarily written in English, demonstrating the language component of rhetorical confusion. At times, he does provide explanation to these phrases (such as when he explains that Takht-e-Sulaiman translates to Seat of Solomon), but more commonly, the phrases are interspersed with no guiding context (Rushdie 28). Much like the multi-layered and diverse India that Rushdie is attempting to unite, *Midnight's Children* exhibits the same blend of languages as Rushdie mixes English with vernacular and a variety of languages (DeAngelis 39). Rushdie's efforts, though, are debated among critics of the text. Harish Trivedi, for example, states that *Midnight's Children* is specifically written for the "unilingual English-language readers," claiming that translations are always provided within the text (Kortenaar 4). While the text is written primarily in English, Trivedi's claims do not necessarily consider the decolonization efforts of the text's use of language. DeAngelis suggests that Rushdie's mix of English and vernacular expressions aims to combat the English/Western hegemony rather than catering to it as he bends the rules and traditions of Standard English (39). Regardless of which scholar more accurately identifies Rushdie's linguistic intentions, the unfamiliar reader still experiences moments of rhetorical

confusion at the hands of the language use throughout the text as there are several vernacular phrases that are not offered translation.

Furthermore, the unfamiliar reader is likely unable to distinguish the difference between the Hindi and Urdu phrases, nor do they have knowledge of the controversy between the two.<sup>6</sup> While Trivedi claims that Rushdie's text is for the English-only reader, there is not a clear acknowledgment of a reader's response to these untranslated terms, particularly as Trivedi asserts that a translation is always included, which is not quite the case. The rhetorical confusion may fade slightly over the course of the text as the unfamiliar reader absorbs meaning (or rather assumed meaning) through context, but there is still an existing awareness within the reader that they are unfamiliar with the phrases. Additionally, the reader is unsure of the language that the characters are intended to be speaking: is the reader to assume that the characters are speaking English or rather a native tongue that is unnamed and unidentified? During the language marches, protesters urge Saleem to speak Gujarati. Saleem's inner monologue informs the reader that his "Gujarati was as bad as [his] Marathi; [he] only knew one thing in the marshy tongue of Kathiawar" (Rushdie 219). Not only does the reader lack the knowledge of the language conflict, they do not understand the distinctions between the languages that Saleem lists. They also do not have context for the chant that Saleem provides to the protesters that is designed to "make fun of the speech rhythms of the language" (Rushdie 219). Although the text is written primarily in English, there is enough unknown conflict surrounding language use in India to prompt confusion in the unfamiliar reader.

In addition to a diversity of languages, India has a complexity of diverse religions. This breaks away from the three defined components of rhetorical confusion - history, politics, and language - demonstrating that the concept is fluid enough to capture more than what has been

previously defined. There is underlying tension between Hinduism and Islam throughout the text as well as references to Christianity and Buddhism. An unfamiliar reader may pick up on these tensions, but they do not necessarily have the full context or understanding to realize the significance. Ashgar Ali Engineer claims that ruling classes in post-independence India used “religion to divide the people and to perpetuate their exploitative class structure” (3). Again, the unfamiliar reader observes this divide between classes (Saleem slides between social classes throughout the text), but there is an existing history within the caste system and between Hinduism and Islam that the reader does not detect just by reading Rushdie’s novel alone.

Saleem’s journey to Pakistan is a clear example of the unfamiliar reader’s surface-level awareness of such conflicts. He moves from the Hindu-dominated India to the Muslim-dominated Pakistan, and he finds himself impure in the Land of the Pure. His connection to India is disrupted by this immigration; this disruption is not only physical, but symbolic as well as he becomes exiled from the *Midnight Children* (Rushdie 325). Through the two India-Pakistan Wars, Saleem loses the majority of his family, finds purity, and claims to become a citizen of Pakistan, yet the reader does not quite understand the significance of a Hindu-raised Indian going through this process. Similarly, Saleem is referred to as “the buddha” throughout his time in the Pakistani army. Though Rushdie is clear to point out that “buddha” pronounced with hard Ds means old man while “Buddha” pronounced with soft Ds refers to the enlightened figure of the religion, the unfamiliar reader will likely still make the connection to the religion. As such, further connections and history are drawn from this nickname that the unfamiliar reader may observe but not understand.

As a result of the rhetorical confusion surrounding the use of language, religion, and the conflict between these two, the reader may experience discomfort. These elements serve as

reminders to the reader that they are firmly outside of the text's country and culture. Therefore, they are sharply aware that they do not understand the references that are made towards these cultural conflicts, and it is this awareness that produces the subsequent feeling of discomfort within the reader. If the discomfort is too strong, the reader may reject the text, which can be considered an unproductive interference as it exists opposite of the productive response of research.

Additionally, the unfamiliar reader experiences confusion due to the conflicts between characters that do not appear to be overtly referencing anything political or historical. Saleem and Shiva are identified rivals, but their rivalry expands past the *Midnight's Children* and past the conflict of the Emergency. Patrick Hogan identifies that Saleem and Shiva personify the two differing modes of thought between the Hindu nation and the disrupting Muslims, another subtle reference to the often-conflicting religions. Hogan identifies this as separatism undermining the central government, or Shiva's overpowering, brute force compared to Saleem's view of hope and peace within India ("*Midnight's Children*" 512-13). Hogan's interpretation, of course, is not the only viable interpretation of Rushdie's feuding characters, but it is a view of the text that likely goes unnoticed by the unfamiliar reader who lacks familiarity and understanding of the intricacies of India's government and the influence of religions. To the unfamiliar reader, Saleem and Shiva's rivalry appears contained within the story itself, yet rhetorical confusion emerges as they suspect a larger, symbolic meaning behind the conflict, due to the established connection to India's history.

Underneath the political, social, and religious conflicts within the text, geography contributes greatly to the reader's lack of understanding. The land itself is divided, partitioned, at various points throughout the text, echoing the social conflicts that emerge. The landscape



changes from the beginning of the text and evolves with each new disruption of order, yet there is little information provided regarding the geography of India or these changes. Furthermore, new, independent nations form as the result of the text's conflicts, including Bangladesh, but the details of these nations are withheld from the unfamiliar reader. This lack of geographical information follows Rushdie's continued efforts of rebuilding India's national identity. Rather than resting the concept of identity solely on the geographical makeup of the country (or its everchanging landscape), Rushdie navigates identity through the characters themselves and encourages the reader to do the same.

Rushdie's efforts to redefine the identity of India is largely tied to his use of mythology and magical realism. Laura Buchholz more accurately refers to the text as an unnatural narrative, asserting that: "postcolonial literature often engages in positing in what [Alber, Iverson, Henrik, Nielsen, and Richardson] describe as "unnatural storyworlds," "unnatural minds," and "unnatural forms of narration" through many vehicles, including achronicity, magical realism, and meta-narrative strategies" (333). Buchholz continues to suggest that "readers are therefore challenged to various degrees depending upon exactly how the narrative 'deviate[s] from real world frames.'" (335). Magical realism or the overarching categorization of an unnatural narrative is already a confusing or challenging element within a text as it shifts the reader away from what is anticipated or expected. Yet, in texts such as *Midnight's Children* there is an additional layer of confusion because the reader does not necessarily understand the reality that Rushdie is commenting upon through his use of magical realism. As such, the unfamiliar reader may question how the magical elements fit into the overarching narrative, questioning how these elements fit into the story of India's independence. Although the fantastical components may

make the plot more enjoyable, there is also the potential for discomfort as the reader questions the purpose.

The Midnight's Children themselves are the most prominent example of magical realism. There are mythical and fantastical elements in the text prior to Saleem's birth and the realization of the Midnight's Children, namely Amina's encounter with a prophesizing fortune teller, but the arrival of Saleem's abilities (by way of a pajama-cord jabbed painfully up his famously large nose) introduces the prominent mythical aspect of the text, the Children themselves (Rushdie 184). The unfamiliar reader knows there is significance to Saleem's newfound ability and the community he finds, but the meaning behind this community and their purpose may not be as clear. Similar to the historic and political events, the reader questions if there is a greater purpose for the magical Midnight's Children. Surely there must be as the text derives its name from the group; Saleem himself spends a large portion of the novel searching for the true meaning and purpose behind the Midnight's Children.

Despite the supposed prominence and significance of the Midnight's Children, they are frequently in the background of Saleem's story, missing from large portions of his life as he cuts them out entirely. DeAngelis identifies that the Children develop the plot of the text rather than act as the primary subject matter, but in doing so, the Children represent a hope that has not been realized by India (62). Saleem's repeated efforts to determine the Children's greater purpose reflects this notion of hope; once the purpose is recognized, theoretically this would lead to the recognition of hope. Furthermore, Rushdie's association with the mythic Children and the identity of India suggests a hopeful outlook for his reimagined mythology of India. However, this hope is wiped away with the sterilization of the Children: "sperectomy: the draining-out of hope" (Rushdie 503). The unfamiliar reader may detect the symbolic nature of the Children and

the meaning behind their forced sterilization, yet they do not necessarily connect these symbols to the larger context of Rushdie' critique of the sterilization forced upon India's poor. The loss of hope expands much further than the Children, but Rushdie's specified focus garners more sympathy from the unfamiliar reader, even if they do not understand the full context of the horrors during the Emergency. The reader has followed Saleem's story and feels sympathy towards his experiences, much more so than they would towards the unnamed masses.

The mythical elements of the Children demonstrate a further layer of rhetorical confusion, since the unfamiliar reader only marginally understands the subtle differences between the fictional elements and the mythologized aspects. Rushdie incorporates components of traditional mythology throughout the novel alongside his creation of the Children. Saleem's rival, Shiva, is named for the Hindu god. Saleem's adopted son, Aadam, (Shiva's biological son) is described as having immensely large ears, bearing resemblance to the elephant-headed god Ganesh (Caughran). An unfamiliar reader may recognize these gods and recognize their names, but their full mythology may be foreign. The god Shiva is married to the goddess Parvati,<sup>7</sup> much like Rushdie's Shiva has a relationship in the text with Parvati-the-witch. The deity forms of Shiva and Parvati are the parents of the god Ganesh, not unlike baby Aadam (Caughran). Rushdie is utilizing an existing mythology to create his own, transformed mythology. DeAngelis points to C. Kanaganayakam's claim that "the inversion of myth emphasizes the dichotomy between the harmony of the past and the chaos of the present" within *Midnight's Children* (53). However, the unfamiliar reader who does not understand the original myth that is being inverted complicates this notion as they may not observe the connections to traditional Indian mythology, let alone recognize the dichotomy between past and present.

Rushdie incorporates conventions of mythology alongside the common mythic characters to round out his new mythology of India. Amina Sinai receives a prophecy when she is pregnant with Saleem (really Shiva) from Ramram Seth that warns of a two-headed child (Rushdie 96). Each claim the seer predicts comes true, yet Amina reveals that he is employing a cheap trick of levitation, a blend of reality and fantasy that perfectly captures Rushdie's brand of magical realism. DeAngelis claims:

The entire novel is an attempt to rewrite, and thus recreate, the story and history of India. In order to do this, he unites aspects of everyday [sic] life with complete fantasy, moments of magic and beauty with horror and destruction, because for Saleem it is these things and many more that come together to form the country, and the concept, called India (52).

However, if the use of mythology confuses the unfamiliar reader, there is a question of value: how does this reader understand the value of Rushdie's established dichotomy if they do not understand the source text that he is manipulating? The lack of understanding, in this sense, is beneficial towards Rushdie's goal of rebuilding traditional myth; the reader does not know the original and readily accepts the new. A new, separate identity for India is forged by Rushdie and the unfamiliar reader embraces this identity. While this exposure to an Indian identity may be beneficial for a reader who has no prior knowledge, Rushdie's reimagining may overpower more accurate accounts of India's history.

The tensions that present themselves throughout the text are palpable to the unfamiliar reader, regardless of the clarity of context or finer details. While this reader may not research the greater history or context behind such tensions, Rushdie's aim is to present a new view of these historic events altogether, bringing the significance of the original context into question. The unfamiliar reader does not need to understand the details of the India-Pakistan Wars to observe their effects on Saleem, nor do they need thorough knowledge of India's history to follow Rushdie's timeline. They are able to absorb Rushdie's messaging despite the feelings of

discomfort they may experience as the result of little context. While they may not fully comprehend Rushdie's commentary on India's independence or post-independence society, the reader can likely still find value and enjoyment within the text and Rushdie's new approach to Indian history.

As established, it should be acknowledged that not all embrace or celebrate Rushdie's reimagining of India's past. Harish Trivedi is critical of Rushdie's linguistic approach to the text, and furthermore, Trivedi expresses resentment toward western academics who suggest that Rushdie gave a voice to India (Kortenaar 4). Additionally, Liam Connell suggests that the use of magical realism revitalizes exoticized stereotypes of the East in the mind of a Western reader (Wexler 149). Trivedi and Connell's critics of Rushdie's work express legitimate concern in regards to the perception of the text. In the novel's introduction Rushdie expresses "In the West people tended to read *Midnight's Children* as fantasy, while in India people thought of it as pretty realistic, almost a history book" (xiii). Rushdie's observation seems to support the criticism that Trivedi and Connell raise in regards to the stereotypical representations of the fantastical magic in the East. Further, it is necessary to question whether or not rhetorical confusion plays into the unfamiliar reader's stereotypical view of India; does the fantasy of a new national identity overwhelm the symbolic nature of Rushdie's critique?

In response to Connell's commentary, Wexler warns against the literal or realistic interpretations of Rushdie's magical realism. Wexler suggests that "if readers interpret magical events realistically, they fall into primitivist stereotypes," which implies that the reader may simply exoticize Rushdie's work (149). While it is possible that the unfamiliar reader approaches Rushdie's symbolism with a literal eye, having no guiding context in their confusion, it also diminishes the abilities of the unfamiliar reader to assume that such a reader would not look past

the literal interpretations of the magical realism. Wexler states that magical realism “makes the contingencies of history resonate with meanings” (151). Despite the unfamiliar reader’s confusion or lack of exact understanding, they are still able to detect Rushdie’s commentary to a certain degree, looking past the surface level of the fantasy.

This trust elicits criticism from those like Connell and Trivedi who question Rushdie’s role as a “voice” for India. A degree of credit, though, must be given to Rushdie for his ability to expose an unfamiliar audience to the history and political past of India, even if it is through mythical and reimagined means. While there remains this level of danger in misleading the unfamiliar reader, there is enough truth alongside the reimagined history within Rushdie’s text to provide solid guiding points to the unfamiliar reader to complete their own research to process any rhetorical confusion that may emerge. In this regard, the unfamiliar reader has the opportunity to face their discomfort and truly educate themselves about the various histories and identities of India.

## CHAPTER TWO: NAVIGATING THE FOREIGN AND THE FAMILIAR IN NOVIOLET

### BULAWAYO'S *WE NEED NEW NAMES*

Rushdie's connection between character and country are clear, explicit even if the reader does not fully understand each reference. Yet, an author may make similar metaphoric references without explicitly identifying the country or event that is referenced. Such is the case with NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. The text invites its readers into the life of Darling, a ten-year-old living in an unnamed African country<sup>8</sup> amidst an underlying unnamed conflict before she immigrates to the United States to avoid this conflict, establishing the opportunity for rhetorical confusion as there is little to no context for such conflict. These moments of rhetorical confusion at times blend with Darling's own childhood confusion or fade with Darling's assimilation. The feeling of discomfort that often arises from rhetorical confusion may pose a challenge to the reader, but Bulawayo's masterful exploration of a blend of familiarity and foreignness presents the opportunity to reassure the reader. Furthermore, rhetorical confusion in a sense becomes a means to project Darling's experiences onto the reader who is normally outside of her circumstances. The rhetorical confusion surrounding this projection of experiences may cause discomfort in the reader, yet it is the same confusion that allows the reader to find familiarity with Darling and a sense of empathy for the character.

There is a noticeable pattern within the scholarship surrounding Bulawayo and her debut novel. Scholars often point to Bulawayo's reframing of postcolonialism tactics, her similarity to authors such as Chimamanda Adichie and Taiye Selasi, and the criticism that draws attention to her privilege and accuses her of poverty porn for depicting cliched and harmful images of an African country (Habla; Fasselt 235; Sibanda 76). Most significant is the observation of irony found throughout Bulawayo's novel. Rocío Cobo-Piñero indicates that irony is "evident" within

Bulawayo's text as "knowledge takes on imperialistic connotations in a postcolonial setting" (21). Similarly, Polo Belina Moji indicates that Bulawayo employs satire through the use of a child narrator (186). These scholars<sup>9</sup> posit that Bulawayo's use of irony and satire are abundantly clear to readers, yet while the reader might be able to understand the surface level notions of these elements, it is not a guarantee that readers will understand the greater context behind such irony or satire as demonstrated by the analysis of *Midnight's Children*. Perhaps it is not necessary for an unfamiliar reader to understand Bulawayo's connections, but there is little in the way of scholarship to suggest critical attention towards moments of confusion within the novel.

The novel opens with Darling and her friends, Bastard, Chipo, Godknows, Stina, and Sbho on their way to Budapest in order to steal guavas. Budapest, in the context of the friends, is the wealthy neighbor that is just outside of their shanty village of Paradise. These familiarly named yet foreign locations first introduce the unfamiliar reader to Darling's experiences growing up in Zimbabwe.<sup>10</sup> The episodic chapters of the novel's first half reveal the day-to-day lives of Darling and her friends as they play their made-up games such as "country game," "Andy-over," and "Find Bin Laden" and, of course, steal guavas. Throughout this first portion of the novel, Bulawayo carefully reveals more solemn elements to Darling's story. Her friend Chipo is pregnant at the age of eleven (later revealed as the result of her grandfather sexually assaulting her); the children find a hanged woman and steal her shoes for bread money; and a young man, Bornfree, is brutally murdered at the hands of a gang. These darker components largely stem from the underlying political tension that characterizes the first portion of the text as well as Darling's migration to the United States.

When Darling immigrates to Michigan to live with her Aunt Fostalina, a new sense of foreign and familiar emerges for the unfamiliar reader as they are more likely to recognize



Darling's setting, but her experience is potentially one that they have not experienced themselves. The undercurrents of political tension subside considerably as Darling becomes physically removed from Zimbabwe, and they give way to the tension of Darling's immigration experience as she balances her newfound duality of living in the United States and feeling a connection to Zimbabwe. The feelings of confusion do not fade simply because the reader is now closer to the inside in terms of setting; rather, they are still firmly on the outside of Darling's culture and experience. The feelings of discomfort similarly linger as the reader comes across experiences within their own country that are potentially entirely foreign to them. This chapter follows Darling's coming of age by first examining the political conflict in Zimbabwe that creates the tension throughout the first portion of the novel. Darling's migration to the United States is then explored followed by an analysis of her life in Michigan. Next, the use of language throughout both the Zimbabwe and the United States sections is discussed, drawing attention to Bulawayo's use of English and Ndebele and Darling's growing assimilation. Lastly, the novel's abrupt and somewhat violent end is examined to demonstrate the dynamics between rhetorical confusion and multiple textual interpretations.

As established, the first opportunity for rhetorical confusion occurs due to the unclear setting at the start of the text. Even if the reader knows that the novel is first set in Zimbabwe, they question their certainty at the mention of Budapest. Although it does not take long to learn that Budapest is a colloquium among the children, the geographical location of Paradise and time period of the novel remain uncertain or unclear within the text of the novel. This vague setting was done by Bulawayo to establish a sense of universality to the hardships faced by the characters (Concilio 39). However, the vagueness also contributes greatly to the reader's lack of understanding as they read the novel. They may face discomfort as they recognize names such as

“Budapest” and “Shanghai,” but they do not recognize where the children are actually located or the connections between the three locations. This confusing setting does not offer context for the reader to process their discomfort, and can lead the reader to question the reality of the novel’s events: is the conflict inspired by real political tension or has Bulawayo dramatized events in an unnamed country, again for the sake of universality?

To better understand Bulawayo’s text, a reader would need a level of familiarity with Zimbabwe’s political history, particularly the history of Robert Mugabe’s rule. There are references, both to politics and popular culture, that eventually indicate the novel’s time setting, and although Mugabe is never mentioned by name, these references, with the right knowledge, indicate the political landscape of Zimbabwe at the time of the novel. More specifically, the novel covers the decade following the year 2000, including the 2008 election that many hoped would bring change within the country and the failure of that election (Concilio 36). The re-confirmation of Mugabe is the core of the underlying political conflict throughout the novel’s first half, and it directly influences many of the decisions made by the characters and actions made against them; Darling’s immigration to the United States being the most prominent example.

A certain level of research may assist a reader in working through their rhetorical confusion, much like with *Midnight’s Children*, and such is the case of the Mugabe government. Robert Mugabe served as Zimbabwe’s president from 1988 – 2017, his presidency only ending as the result of a military coup. Despite a promise of peace and unity, Mugabe’s presidency committed violent acts such as the estimated 10,000 killed in the attempt to take down dissidents between 1983 and 1985 (Bromwich). The violence continued through the 1990s and early 2000s as Mugabe placed support in gangs seizing white-owned farms, causing a decline in the economy

(Bromwich). In the 2008 election, Mugabe's government and the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) sought to deter opposing voters from participating, at times through violent means. Human Rights Watch completed an investigation in Zimbabwe and found that local institutions "identified at least 2,000 beatings and cases of torture" and "at least 36 people [had] been killed" (Human Rights Watch). The violent campaign was successful as Mugabe stayed in power until 2017.

Bulawayo's novel begins just before these elections indicating that her critique is likely aimed at Mugabe's government. Yet, a reader unfamiliar with Mugabe would not be able to recognize the connections between the events of the novel and the political conflict. As previously mentioned, this conflict is the root of many decisions made throughout the first half of the novel. Several characters immigrate to South Africa and other countries for better opportunities and to escape the Mugabe government: "it was at that time when everybody was going to South Africa and other countries, some near, some far, some very, very far" (Bulawayo 93). If the Mugabe government and the 2008 election are so central to the novel's plot, one questions why Bulawayo did not specifically name these unseen forces. Bulawayo's reasoning for universality is certainly an explanation, but more precisely the rhetorical confusion a reader experiences is able to place the reader in Darling's position of childhood ignorance.

While the unfamiliar reader has likely not experienced political conflict such as the Mugabe government, being placed in Darling's position, or rather having her position projected onto the reader, allows the reader to empathize with Darling more clearly. Darling may demonstrate or a lack of knowledge because of her age, but the reader does not necessarily have age as an explanation for their confusion. Rather it is simply a lack of awareness or education surrounding Zimbabwean politics that likely causes the confusion; thus, a feeling of discomfort

may emerge for the reader as they realize that they do not understand the context and that their position is aligned with a child. However, if the reader is able to reconcile this discomfort and embrace the challenge of being confused, there is the opportunity for empathy as they learn about an experience that differs from their own.

The chapter “Real Change” best exemplifies the underlying political tension and associated confusion. Darling indicates how consuming the elections are when she states “we hear about change, about new country, about democracy, about elections and what-what” (Bulawayo 61). Her use of “what-what” suggests that she does not fully understand what is occurring, a doubt that is supported by Godknows questioning of what happens when the adults go to vote. Sbho responds by reminding him that the adults said change will happen after the vote; Godknows then asks, “but what exactly is it, this change?” (Bulawayo 61-2). The reader, along with the children, can sense that there is significance surrounding these upcoming elections, but there is not an exact acknowledgement of such significance. The importance of the election outcomes is initially missed by Darling and the reader alike, equating the knowledge of an unfamiliar reader, again, to that of a child.

Bulawayo utilizes the same effect of withholding information in regards to the violence associated with the Mugabe government. Darling and her friends watch as a gang seizes the house of a white couple with guns and machetes (Bulawayo 112-124). Although an unfamiliar reader may be able to sense the tension caused by race relations and colonialism, they likely do not understand the entire conflict. Similarly, the children realize the severity of the encounter, and to some degree, they understand the greater danger as Godknows guesses that the couple will be killed by the gang (Bulawayo 124). The children, like the reader, do not recognize the

overarching conflict that prompted this incident, nor do they realize that the event was not committed in isolation.

Violence rears its head again as Darling describes the funeral of a young man in their village of Paradise, Bornfree. His death is sudden and unexplained, initially, but during his funeral service, his mother, MaDube, claims that he was murdered (Bulawayo 140). Again, the children do not appear to understand the full weight of Bornfree's death. After the funeral, the children begin to play a new game in which Bastard plays Bornfree and the other children play his murderers. The reader learns of Bornfree's violent murder through the game as Darling describes the pretend violence against Bastard/Bornfree: "Then Godknows swings a hammer, making a straight line in the air. It hits Bornfree at the back of the head and I hear the sound of something breaking" (Bulawayo 143). The game and the true events blend together causing the reader to question what is real and what is fictional child's play. Their game ends in a similar blend of real and fiction as Darling states, "our weapons dangle at our sides, all bloodied. Our clothes are bloodied. The flag of our country is bloodied" (Bulawayo 145). This reference to the flag suggests a greater, national tragedy rather than a localized murder.

Indeed, the national tragedy referenced is the efforts of Mugabe and the ZANU-PF to suppress oppositional voters. Bornfree was murdered as he attempted to vote, and thus, his death represents citizens who were violently stopped from voting in 2008 as well as the death of change within the country (Concilio 40). The children recognize to some degree that Bornfree's death is related to voting, but again, they do not understand the broader scope of the government-sponsored violence. An unfamiliar reader can similarly spot that Bornfree's murder is not ordinary. BBC reporters are present at his funeral, his tombstone reads "died for change," and the children reference voting and democracy as they pretend to attack Bastard (Bulawayo 137, 141,

143). These references are enough to prompt awareness in a reader; however, there is not enough contextual information for a reader to fully comprehend if they do not understand the politics of Zimbabwe or Mugabe's government because neither are named throughout the text. These moments of violence are rhetorically confusing because the overarching causes are not specified; rather, a reader simply infers that the violence is stemming from political tension. The impact of Bulawayo's critique may be questioned for its lack of directness, yet, the reader's uncertainty tracks Darling's childhood innocence, allowing her character to project onto the reader.

Bulawayo offers an excuse for Darling's lack of knowledge through her childhood naivety; the unfamiliar reader, however, does not have such an excuse, again equaling the reader to a child.

The violence embedded within these examples likely prompts great discomfort in the unfamiliar reader. Within the text, the violence is often paired with humor or laughter from the children, such as the game played after Bornfree's death and the laughter that ensues after stealing shoes from a hanged woman. Polo Belina Moji identifies that the text lends itself to "a double reading where humour encodes tragedy" (186). This dark encoding is enough to invoke discomfort in a reader, yet the added elements of rhetorical confusion strengthen such discomfort. There is a risk that the reader will reject the text because of this discomfort and possibly fail to finish the text. However, if the reader is able to process and work through their confusion and subsequent discomfort, the reader has the opportunity to not only become exposed to an experience outside their own, they are also able to interact with these experiences in a way that is much more immersive than simply learning about the Mugabe government and the struggles of Zimbabwe through basic research. The reader has the potential to achieve a certain level of emotional connection to these events due to Bulawayo's text that may not otherwise exist.

The 2008 elections are not the only topic that Darling and her friends do not understand fully, and as a result, the reader often pieces together the context of a scene through Darling's descriptions. Scenes such as her mother's affair, her father's AIDS, and Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro's public sexual attack against a woman in the community all demonstrate her childhood ignorance to the reader (Bulawayo 66, 95, 42). The most alarming instance of this, however, is Darling and Sbho's decision to get "rid of Chipo's stomach once and for all" (Bulawayo 80). Along with another child, Freedom, the girls decide to play doctor, imitating characters from the American television show *E.R.* to get rid of the baby. Instead of confusion, the reader is more likely aware of what the children's intentions are within this chapter, particularly when Freedom works to straighten a rusty clothes hanger and describes what she intends to do with it (Bulawayo 87). When the reader understands references such as these, there is a feeling of familiarity and a sense of relief that they are able to identify with something within the novel. Bulawayo introduces these moments of relief amongst the confusion to strengthen the reader's relationship with Darling and avoid total isolation. As such, the reader may place more trust within Darling as a narrator and give more empathy to her as a character.

The violence and political tensions in Zimbabwe during this timeframe prompt Darling's migration to the United States halfway through the novel, and much like the underlying political tension, the reader may not necessarily understand the political context of the migrations within the text. Bulawayo uses three interlude chapters within her novel to migrate the setting from one location to another. The first, "How They Appeared," tells the internal migration of Darling's community to Paradise after their homes were bulldozed (Bulawayo 75). The second "How They Left" describes international migration and "How They Lived" details the experience of living as an immigrant/undocumented person (Bulawayo 147, 239). Each of these interlude chapters

contributes to the reader's overall sense of uncertainty due to the text's shift from the personal pronoun to the third-person plural. While the difference in pronouns is not inherently tied to the concept of rhetorical confusion as defined previously, it does signify a shift that potentially disrupts the reader's understanding by suddenly moving away from the pattern Bulawayo has already established. Furthermore, the reader is not initially certain how the interlude chapters fit into the overarching narrative.

The reader is also uncertain about the starting and ending geographic points of the migrations described within these sections. This withholding of specific setting context within these chapters allows Bulawayo to represent a wider group of people, all those affected by the mass migrations of the period rather than just Darling. Pier Frassinelli suggests that this use of 'we' "is the name of a community made of all of those who are different but share the experience of migration and the condition of exploited and illegal subjects" (720-21). While Bulawayo may be referring to Darling's immigration to the United States and her experience of being undocumented, the lack of specific context and the use of plural pronouns enables the wider community that Frassinelli describes. The unfamiliar reader is in part considered outside because they do not belong to this "we" community unless they have experienced immigration themselves. Although rhetorical confusion may cause challenges for certain readers, it is not necessarily a permanent barrier for the reader and it may result in the reader empathizing with the experiences of the unnamed immigrants in the first interlude chapter.

Such empathy assists the reader in discovering meaning outside of themselves and their local community. Ranjan Ghosh asks the following two questions in his explanation of "more than global": "1) How can meaning be generated beyond the "me" and invested in the "us"? 2) How can the me (local) find its meaning not in the other (global) but in us?" (115). Bulawayo



answers these questions within her immigration interlude chapters by shifting the projection of Darling. Previously, the reader's understanding tracked alongside the character's; her experiences projected onto the reader and they learned together. Bulawayo widens the perspective to the "we/they" community, and rather than learning alongside the reader, this community teaches the reader. Her aim is to show the reader the experiences of the community of immigrants to generate meaning beyond the "me." Simultaneously, Darling is finding more meaning in her local, her "us" rather than her global. The shared "we" community becomes Darling's local rather than Paradise or Zimbabwe. Darling might not know what awaits her in the United States in the short "How They Left" interlude, but there is already insight about what is to come: "they will never be the same again because you just cannot be the same once you leave behind who and what you are, you just cannot be the same" (Bulawayo 148). The knowledge of the "we" community comes through this interlude and again in "How They Lived," demonstrating that Darling's focus is honing into her local while the reader is finding more meaning in the global.

Yet, while the unfamiliar reader may find meaning and they may find themselves less confused the more they read Bulawayo's text or as they complete their own research on Zimbabwe's past, they will never be able to fully comprehend the immigrant experiences described unless they themselves live through such an experience. Furthermore, Ghosh suggests that such discovery of meaning in local or global is not sequential but rather a form of circulation, occurring all at once (115). In this sense, the reader is finding meaning within the global (a community of immigrants – from the outside) as Darling puts meaning in her local (a community of immigrants – from the inside), which reflexively allows the reader to find such

meaning within the global and local. The circulation of meaning results in these short interlude chapters of migration that eventually lead to Darling in the United States.

When Darling finally makes it to “destroyedmichygen,”<sup>11</sup> her experiences again perpetuate the feelings of familiarity and foreignness. Rhetorical confusion potentially weakens somewhat when Darling first arrives in the United States, and by the novel’s end the confusion may be gone entirely, with the exception of the closing scene. To be clear, this does not suggest that rhetorical confusion only takes place in a setting outside of the United States. Rather, the gradual weakening of the confusion continues the projection of Darling’s experience. A reader who experiences rhetorical confusion may find it lessening as Darling assimilates into the culture of the United States, yet, there is still a potential underlying sense of uncertainty due to the blend of familiar and foreign. This stems from Darling’s continued practice of describing scenes in great detail without identifying the actual event. Similarly, the confusion largely comes from events that the reader has not personally experienced or witnessed.

While the unfamiliar reader faces confusion surrounding political and historical references made within the first portion of the novel, the United States section of the text returns the reader to likely familiar territory. Within the first chapter that Darling describes living in Michigan, she sees Barack Obama on the television and references his 2008 political campaign (Bulawayo 158). Unlike the previously referenced Mugabe presidency, the unfamiliar reader is much more likely to understand and assign meaning to the mention of Obama, particularly if the unfamiliar reader is located in the United States. The familiarity of these references, though, are muddled by Darling’s own confusion as she adjusts to her new life. She expresses discomfort when using silverware and she questions American social habits (Bulawayo 180, 176). Her experience shapes her perspective of the country, and she points to things that do not make sense

or offers critique of what is not right. The reader does not necessarily share the same feelings of cultural confusion that Darling is experiencing as the familiar begins to outweigh the foreign, a shift away from the shared confusion.

The reader may not even notice that Darling becomes less confused as the latter half of the novel progresses, indicating the subtleties of her cultural assimilation. The changes are more pronounced whenever Darling communicates with someone back in Paradise. When talking to her childhood friends, she slightly expresses how deeply the changes are affecting her:

How is Destroyedmichygen? Bastard says. His voice has broken and it sounds strange; it's like I'm talking to somebody I don't know. Destroyed what? Oh, Detroit! It's good, but I don't live there anymore. I live in Kalamazoo now, we moved not too long after I got here. (Bulawayo 209)

Darling's clarification of "Detroit" is small, so small that some readers may look over its significance. However, Darling once referred to the city by the same phonetic name, and her confusion of Bastard's use of the once familiar (to her) name demonstrates how she is pulling away from Zimbabwe through assimilation. Pier Frassinelli reinforces this by stating, "Darling's mastery of the American accent also turns into an indicator of supervened disconnection from her community in the motherland" (717). This disconnect prompts further struggle for Darling as she loses touch with her home, but she is not able to fully connect with her supposed new home either. An unfamiliar reader may understand the cultural references Bulawayo makes, but they are not able entirely connect with Darling's challenges of identity.

This is a shift from the Zimbabwe sections at the start of the novel in which the reader did not necessarily understand the references, nor do they necessarily connect with Darling's experiences. The confusion a reader possibly experiences does not automatically fade as soon as the reader understands a reference, however, because the references made in the U.S. section of the novel is filtered through Darling's perspective. In the first chapter set in Michigan, Darling

describes watching neighborhood children making something in the snow: “a thing that almost looks like a round person, and they have put a hat on it and a red rag around its neck and a carrot on its face. Maybe that is an American *tokoloshe*” (Bulawayo 159). Although the reader may infer that Darling is referring to a snowman, a level of confusion may remain at the mention of a *tokoloshe*,<sup>12</sup> prompting discomfort as the reader now finds confusion in what they would normally find familiar. The presence of confusion and discomfort here signifies to the reader that Bulawayo’s blend of foreign and familiar has migrated along with Darling.

As Darling assimilates into American culture, she strongly begins to personify this familiar and foreign blend that exists throughout the text. She identifies things that remind her of Zimbabwe and the familiarity it brings: “there are always moments like this, where it almost looks like the familiar things from back home will just come out of nowhere, like ghosts;” yet, these familiar elements are always paired with the realization of the foreign differences (Bulawayo 166). Darling acknowledges this blend of foreign and familiar as she experiences a sense of duality, a sense that longs for her past friendships and simultaneously feels a lack of connection with them (Bulawayo 212). The liminality of Bulawayo’s novel translates onto Darling as she becomes one without a home. Concilio classifies Darling’s struggles with identity in the United States as a “slow and gradual descent into hell,” a fall rather than a liberation (41). This implication is tangible to the reader as they observe Darling’s identity shift and reform; however, her struggle is no longer projected onto the reader as it was within the first half of the novel as the confusion has separated into two directions. Darling faces confusion in herself and her nation-tied identity while the reader lacks a true understanding of her experience. Rhetorical confusion has faded almost entirely within this text’s portion to give way to demonstrating an identity struggle the unfamiliar reader may never have to experience.

In both the Zimbabwe and the United Sections of the novel, language is subtly contributing to the rhetorical confusion throughout the text. As with all of the examined novels within this project, *We Need New Names* was originally written in English, yet there is indication that the children are speaking Ndebele<sup>13</sup> throughout the first portion of the novel. When Paradise is visited by a group of NGO (non-governmental organization) workers, Darling describes one woman's, Sis Betty, role as explaining "us to the white people, and them to us," suggesting that she is the translator (Bulawayo 54). This is one of the first implications that the children do not speak English, despite what language appears on the page. When the children begin to act up in front of the visiting group, Sis Betty begins scolding them in Ndebele, "maybe so that the NGO people do not understand" (Bulawayo 56). However, the screams are written in a blend of English and Ndebele, so that a non-Ndebele speaker/reader is not able to fully understand the scolding either:

What are you doing, *masascum evanhu imi? Liyahlanya*, you think these expensive white people came all the way from overseas *ipapa* to see you act like baboons? Do you want to embarrass me, heh? *Futsekani*, don't be buffoons *zinja*, behave at once or else we'll get in the lorry and drive off right this minute with all this shit! (Bulawayo 56)

The unfamiliar reader is able to sense Sis Betty's anger and the overall understanding of her threats, yet the Ndebele words prevent them from a complete understanding.

The lack of translation from Bulawayo prompts possible rhetorical confusion in the reader as they are made acutely aware that they do not fully understand sections that include Ndebele. The combination of these phrases with English, though, fulfills the blend of foreign and familiar exhibited throughout other elements of the text. In this way, the unfamiliar reader is able to view this particular scene through the perspective of both the NGO workers and Darling and her friends, allowing the reader to act as an observer to both experiences. Much like the interlude chapters on migration, these experiences are projected onto the reader, allowing a reader to

engage with an experience that they likely would never come across outside of the text. Here, the NGO workers and the children are both confused about the other party, and the reader can empathize with the confusion on either side as they feel a similar confusion with the NGO workers yet they have also started to understand Darling and her friends.

This use of another language blended with English is a common practice in transnational and world literature, and English-only speakers are more accustomed to this experience. Bulawayo, however, incorporates additional linguistic and grammatic elements that further embed the reader within Darling's experience in a way that can contribute to the reader's confusion. The reader first notices the lack of quotation marks blocking off dialogue. At times, the dialogue is indicated through speaker tags or individual paragraphs, but Darling's internal monologue and narration often blends with the dialogue between characters. This grammatical choice to remove quotation marks was popularized for English readers by the likes of James Joyce and Cormac McCarthy, yet Bulawayo accomplishes something much different. As the novel starts with a ten-year-old Darling, the blend between internal thought and external observation demonstrates the quick-thinking, short-held attention of a child. The dialogue reads quickly as the children talk over one another or simultaneously, which further immerses the reader into their lives. The fast-paced exchanges though and interjections from Darling, though, often leads the reader into feelings of uncertainty. Bulawayo, therefore, is able to make English an uncomfortable experience for her English-speaking readers. Language evolves, though, in the text and again, exemplifies Darling's assimilation and struggles of identity.

As indicated, Frassinelli suggests that the mastery of American accented English is the key to successful assimilation in the eyes of Darling (717). She demonstrates this by stating that the best way to combat the difficulty of speaking English to English-only speakers is to "sound

American” by watching various television shows and “imitating the accents” (Bulawayo 196). She uses the American words she learns as protection and wonders why her aunt does not do the same as it would make her life easier (196). The success of Darling’s assimilation and her “easier life,” however, brings her further disconnect from her childhood friends and her mother. They mock her on the phone for using an American accent, claiming she is trying to sound white (Bulawayo 206). As the text continues, there are fewer and fewer references made in Ndebele and the rhetorical confusion continues to fade for the unfamiliar reader. Darling’s language assimilates even more in the later chapters as she uses abbreviated text lingo to her friend Marina, demonstrating her further familiarity with American culture and the potential weakening of rhetorical confusion (Bulawayo 277).

Bulawayo’s novel comes to a close with the killing of Osama Bin Laden, a small indication of how long Darling has lived in the United States. Rhetorical confusion seems to have completely faded from the reader’s experience with the text, but it sharply returns in full force as Darling describes the first time she and friends played their game “Find Bin Laden.” The children rush after Bornfree’s dog, Ncuncu, turned wild, picking the dog as their targeted Bin Laden. Ncuncu is killed by an oncoming Lobels lorry and the novel ends with the description of Ncuncu’s remains. The reader, who was lulled into a sense of understanding, feels jolted by the suddenness of Ncuncu’s death and the gruesome details Darling provides. The reasoning behind this ending is not immediately clear; however, Isaac Ndlovu claims the death of Ncuncu mirrors the empty victory for the United States in the killing of Bin Laden (142). Although this is not immediately indicative of the defining characteristics of language, the unfamiliar reader does not necessarily recognize the parallels between Ncuncu and Bin Laden other than the connection to “Find Bin Laden.” Upon first reading, Ncuncu’s death could represent the same underlying

political tension throughout the first portion of the novel. Ndlovu does point to a connection to the first chapter's ending "where Darling and her friends are mirthlessly laughing as they rob a dead body of its shoes egged on by irresistible prospect of buying a fresh loaf of Lobels' bread," the same bread on the lorry that kills Ncuncu (143). Even if the reader notices this parallel between the first and last chapter, it is likely that they will have trouble identifying Bulawayo's precise meaning.

Alternatively, the death of Ncuncu may be interpreted to represent the political tension specifically within Zimbabwe rather than the international political tension of Bin Laden's killing. Fiona Moolla points to the significance of the Lobels bread, stating "Lobels was the major Zimbabwean bakery, whose demise in 2007 in some ways symbolized Zimbabwe as a 'failed state'" (224). Moolla's observation lends itself to suggest that the novel's ending demonstrates the way in which the failure of Zimbabwe (the Lobels lorry) greatly and harmfully effected its people (Ncuncu). As such, neither Ndlovu nor Moolla are incorrect in their understanding of Ncuncu's death; rather, their readings demonstrate the ways in which rhetorical confusion interacts and changes with varying understandings and interpretations of the text. For example, if a reader has more knowledge regarding the killing of Bin Laden, their understanding may be closer to Ndlovu's interpretation. Yet, as the reader learns more of Zimbabwe's history and politics to work through rhetorical confusion, their interpretation may shift towards Moolla's. These readings are not the only two interpretations of Bulawayo's closing scene, nor does the meaning have to be mutually exclusive as one or the other. Instead, they represent the multifaceted aspects of rhetorical confusion that are dependent on the reader's own experiences and approaches to the text. Rhetorical confusion is not one specific, generalized experience, but rather a unique feeling that varies among readers. How a reader experiences rhetorical confusion



influences the ways in which they empathize with Darling's story or engage with the experiences that are different from their own.

Bulawayo's text may prompt confusion in readers, and the confusion may lead to a feeling of discomfort as the readers attempt to navigate the new and unfamiliar experiences of Darling. Through the blend of foreign and familiar, the reader works through their confusion alongside Darling's own moments of confusion, allowing and encouraging the reader to feel a sense of empathy for the character. The reader is able to engage with Darling's experience, and through their confusion, they find a much greater understanding of the novel's events. A lack of context allows the reader to narrow their focus toward Darling's specific experience to draw out empathy from the reader whereas Rushdie's text lack of detailed information allows him to reshape a nation to re-inform. Mohsin Hamid's lack of context, however, shifts away from both Rushdie and Bulawayo as he uses a fictional, unnamed city to universalize the experiences of his characters to educate the reader

### CHAPTER THREE: TOWARD A WIDER VIEW: BROADENING RHETORICAL CONFUSION IN MOHSIN HAMID'S *EXIT WEST*

The rhetorical confusion of *Midnight's Children* and *We Need New Names* maintains a significant connection to real history and real politics. Rushdie's Saleem is inextricably linked to India's history of independence while Bulawayo's Darling experiences the effects of Mugabe's government. To an unfamiliar reader, these events may register as a point of reference, but it is also possible that they will go unobserved. Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* offers a variation on the connection to a country's historic and political past. While Rushdie and Bulawayo make specific, metaphoric references to actual events, Hamid's text centers on a fictional, unnamed city that faces a fictional, unnamed conflict. Rhetorical confusion, therefore, contains different connotations within *Exit West*. Specifically, there is not concrete, contextual source material that the reader does not necessarily understand or misunderstand as with the previous two texts, but the reader may still experience confusion and discomfort as they navigate the fictional city and conflict. Such an examination of these varying connotations reveals the fluidity of the current definition for rhetorical confusion and the further need to develop the concept of confusion for a reader within transnational literature.

Although *Exit West* is emerging more so in scholarly conversation, it is still early for a significant amount of published scholarship at the time of this writing. The current limited scholarship on the text, however, does not detract from its significance to this project. The text has received significant praise for its demonstration of a hopeful future for refugees (Tolentino; Zaman). At times, though, Hamid has received criticism for the "post-post colonialism" elements within his work. Hamid suggests that his generation in a sense never had a colonial experience as he grew up in a Pakistan free of British rule (Jay 55). This notion of living in a time after the

effects of colonialism and even after the effects of postcolonialism is what Paul Jay refers to as post-post colonialism. More specifically, he defines it as an implied “clean historical break between the eras of colonialism and postcolonialism, on the one hand, and globalization, on the other” that represents a desire to “bypass” colonialism (55). Although this view of post-post colonialism is certainly problematic, – societies have not yet moved entirely past the effects of colonialism nor do they no longer have a need for postcolonialism – *Exit West* introduces an interesting element to the debate: the city is unnamed and fictional, and thus, essentially uninfluenced by the effects of colonialism as there is no existing history or implication of colonization.

Hamid is no stranger to the themes exhibited within *Exit West*; his previous work such as *Moth Smoke* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* center largely on the ideas surrounding national identity and global fiction. In *Exit West*, Hamid demonstrates a continuation of this exploration of national identity and globalization by removing the majority of national borders from the context of the narrative. The text instead focuses on Nadia and Saeed, two students who fall in love just before their city erupts into the chaos of war. The pair flee through a magical door that acts as a portal to a different country. These doors begin appearing as the conflict arises, and thousands of refugees use them to escape to various cities around the world. Nadia and Saeed encounter various refugee communities as they continue to flee, searching for a place to settle. Nadia and Saeed eventually fall out love and go their separate ways, reuniting only once as they return to the city of their birth. Mushtaq Bilal pinpoints these themes by asking in his review of Hamid’s novel: “is it possible for us to conceive of ourselves at all, except in juxtaposition to an ‘other’?” (Bilal). Much like Bulawayo’s text, Hamid invokes a strong sense of empathy within the reader in order to prompt questions such as Bilal’s. Yet, the reader must still work through

their discomfort and confusion within the text to reach such empathy, and Hamid's text poses a potentially greater challenge to the reader as there are no concrete reference materials to provide context to an unfamiliar reader.

As established with *Midnight's Children* and *We Need New Names*, a reader may encounter references that they observe, yet do not necessarily understand. The reader recognizes in these two texts that there are references related to *some* country, whether or not that country is named. A reader may make the assumption that the city in Hamid's novel references an actual city in a real country similar to Bulawayo's unidentified Zimbabwe. Hypothetically, this assumption can lead to rhetorical confusion or the feeling of discomfort as the reader attempts to navigate nonexistent references as they might attempt to determine real references as when reading *Midnight's Children* or *We Need New Names*. Although Rushdie's and Bulawayo's texts are open to various interpretations, there is an overarching framework of real countries and events that influence their writing. Hamid's fictional city and conflict do not offer the same framework to guide readers.

Furthermore, the reader is not necessarily immediately aware of these differences as they read each of these texts. To a reader who does not realize that Bulawayo is referring to Zimbabwe, there is likely little difference between the confusion they experience while reading *Exit West* and *We Need New Names*; a reader may assume that Bulawayo's setting is fictional or they may assert that Hamid's city is referring to a real country. Thus, Hamid's text complicates the definition of rhetorical confusion in its claim regarding withheld information in reference to a country's history, politics, or language. Can a text contain rhetorical confusion if the city or country does not exist? For the sake of the argument here, the answer to this question is yes; yet, the question itself indicates the need for further examination and research into the concept of

rhetorical confusion. As before, this chapter explores examples of rhetorical confusion within *Exit West* related to history, politics, and language, but this exploration approaches the examples with the intention of expanding the previous representations of rhetorical confusion.

Much like *We Need New Names* there is a prevailing sense of political tension within *Exit West*. At the start of the novel, the city is not yet immersed in the war that appears to be occurring as it is described as “a city swollen by refugees but still mostly at peace, or at least not yet openly at war” (Hamid 3). The first line of the novel suggests to the reader that war and refugees will be significant to this story (and they very much are). This war stays just on the edge of the story, almost as if it is in the reader’s soft focus, as very little detail is provided. The reader learns of forced curfews, bombings and shootings, and food rationing as they continue to read (Hamid 54, 51, 63). Militants additionally begin examining ID cards to check names to see if they were “associated with the denomination being hunted” (Hamid 85). While Saeed and Nadia are “lucky” enough to fall outside of this particular category, their upstairs neighbor is killed based on his name (85). This example does not provide much explanation for the war, though, as there is no additional information regarding this “hunted” denomination. The reader also cannot necessarily produce any theories stemming from religion-based conflict as they might be able to with *Midnight’s Children*. For all of the glimpses at the war and possible explanations, the reason for the war or its inflictors is never specified,<sup>14</sup> providing the possibility for rhetorical confusion. The reader may assume, perhaps, that the war is referencing an actual war or event, such in the way that Rushdie and Bulawayo utilize real events. In *Midnight’s Children*, the wars are based on real conflicts in 1965 and 1971 and are identified by their exact names, and in *We Need New Names*, Bornfree is murdered at the hands of a government-endorsed campaign that actually occurred under Mugabe’s government in 2008. These examples offer concrete answers

to the reader, even if some lingering questions remain. Hamid's war, though, does not stem from any specified conflict.

This war prompts confusion and discomfort in the unfamiliar reader on at least two levels. First, the reader may experience rhetorical confusion as they realize that they do not know what is occurring in regards to the conflict; they are simply waiting for or anticipating for explanation of the war to be revealed through the text. Second, they cannot find the answer or explanation even by completing research. Certainly, the reader will discover interpretations of the war's symbolic meaning through research, but a single specific war is not identified as the point of reference as one does not exist. The only additional amount of information, not symbolic in nature, is the notion that the war is in fact a civil war (although this is not necessarily indicated within the narrative itself). The reader is not given any context of political tension or conflict, that possibly led to this war as is the case with *Midnight's Children* or *We Need New Names*. In this sense, *Exit West* demonstrates rhetorical confusion in the same manner as the previously examined texts. The lack of a real event or location serving as a reference point, however, indicates the need to broaden the definition of rhetorical confusion to include language that better identifies rhetorical confusion as it appears in Hamid's text.

Similarly, the reader is not provided any specific guidance on the language within the text. Hamid's text is written in English, and Nadia and Saeed only speak English as they cross the globe to various countries. In fact, the only language mentioned by name is the Tamil language, which is commonly spoken in areas such as South India and Sri Lanka (Klöber 133). If the reader is familiar with this language and the regions where it is spoken, the inclusion of its name may provide context for the reader within that particular scene. However, if the reader does not recognize the name of the language, it may provoke a sense of confusion that is similar to

coming across non-translated words or phrases within *Midnight's Children* and *We Need New Names*. The reader is not inherently certain why this particular language is named nor are they necessarily aware of past conflict or tension related to this language that may provide context to its inclusion within Hamid's text, particularly when Nadia and Saeed do not travel to a region where this language is commonly spoken. The mention of the language is quite brief, yet it nonetheless indicates possible confusion for the reader as they attempt to connect this language to the context of Hamid's novel.

Additionally, there is little context to the history of Nadia and Saeed's city or even the country. Religion and social expectations are two components that provide slight guidance to the reader should they detect Hamid's inspiration. The city is largely assumed to be a majority Muslim city, despite the fact that the words Muslim and Islam do not appear anywhere in the text (Nguyen; Zaman). References are made to prayer throughout the text; Saeed grows increasingly devoted to the ritual of prayer as the text continues, though there is no specification to the exact prayers he is reciting or any further context to these prayers. One of the most cited examples for the presence of Islam, albeit assumed, is the black, conservative robe that Nadia wears throughout the novel. On their first date, Saeed questions her choice for donning the robe if she does not pray herself; she responds with the wry assertion, "so men don't fuck with me," yet, it is not specified that Nadia's robe is a hijab or niqab, removing any precise identification of religion (Hamid 17). Much like with the references made by Rushdie and Bulawayo, the unfamiliar reader may not immediately understand these implications and feel slight confusion when coming across such examples. Again, they may feel discomfort when coming across references that they are aware are being made, and yet, they do not understand them, leading to a possible rejection of the text.

Unlike the prior texts, though, there is no resolute research that can be conducted to confirm references and work through the confusion; rather, the references made in *Exit West* rely primarily on interpretation. A reader who assumes that Islam is at the core of the city and completes external research will find that Mohsin Hamid is from Pakistan, and the writer himself acknowledges that Nadia's robe is "perhaps religiously inspired" (PBS Newshour). These facts may guide the reader towards further assuming that Islam is indeed a part of Nadia's and Saeed's city, but they are not concrete points of reference as with Rushdie's and Bulawayo's historical references. In this example of religion, the answer seems easier to hypothesize; although the religion is not confirmed as Islam, it is the most logical interpretation. In the framework of rhetorical confusion, the reader is able to more easily work through their discomfort in the case of this specific example of religion. The unfamiliar reader's research will produce results; even if these results are not exact, they may provide a sense of satisfaction for the reader as an answer was reached in some form.

As the unnamed conflict begins to grow in severity, Nadia and Saeed are able to move through the novel by means of magical doors that begin to appear. The doors within Hamid's novel depict the same sense of magical realism that Rushdie exhibits, again fulfilling the description of an "unnatural narrative" that Laura Buchholz's describes (333). The doors begin to suddenly appear within the text as the conflict grows worse as they become a means for the citizens to flee. Militants frequently guard the doors, making passage difficult, and door agents often swindle citizens out of the money intended to grant them safe passage through a door (Hamid 90). Nadia and Saeed gather enough money to travel through these doors from their unnamed city to Greece, London, and finally San Francisco (Dorsey). To reiterate from chapter one, Buchholz states that "readers are therefore challenged to various degrees depending upon



exactly how the narrative “deviate[s] from real world frames” (335). The doors within Hamid’s text signify this deviation from a “real world frame,” and potentially demonstrate a confusing challenge to the reader when they first encounter the doors. Yet, the presence of something magical does not equate the presence of rhetorical confusion. Rather, magical realism or fantastical elements may simply contribute to a reader’s overall confusion.

Hamid is fairly explicit about his intentions with *Exit West* and the metaphor behind the underlying conflict and the symbolism of the magical doors. Inspired by conversations he had via phone or computer with people in different countries, Hamid began imagining what it would be like if we could physically move across the globe in the same way we communicate across the globe via technology (Dorsey 1). Combined with his own experiences with migration, this imagined moment inspired Hamid to create a story that was “about the migration apocalypse but hopeful” (Dorsey 1). The explicit interpretation tells the reader how to understand the text, and the additional guidance provided by Hamid may assist the reader fill in some of the missing context of the narrative. In an interview, Hamid states that he considered setting the story in Lahore, Pakistan, but he claims that it would break his heart to write about his home city being torn apart by war (PBS Newshour). From this, a reader may assume that the unnamed city is still set in Lahore or a similar Pakistani city. Additionally, Hamid clearly demonstrates that his intention is to encourage readers to find similarities with each other and with his characters, prompting a greater sense of empathy (PBS Newshour). Again, the reader may use this to inform the way in which they read *Exit West*. However, this can only be true if a reader researches Hamid and reads these interviews as this additional context is missing from the text itself, in the same that a reader may receive contextual information about *Midnight’s Children* or *We Need New Names* by researching the historical or political references made throughout the text.

Each of these moments of confusion can fulfill the specified definition of rhetorical confusion in the same context as demonstrated through Rushdie's and Bulawayo's texts. However, the lack of concrete reference material opens the text to wider interpretation, and as demonstrated by the last scene of *We Need New Names*, interpretation can influence rhetorical confusion. A more precise definition of rhetorical confusion or greater consideration for symbolic texts, like Hamid's, is needed to more accurately identify and analyze the confusion that exists for readers in such a text. Does a reader interact differently with rhetorical confusion in a text like Hamid's compared to how they interact with the confusion in Rushdie's text? Is one case easier to manage for reader?

As such, the symbolic nature of the war and the sudden appearance of magical doors do signify a different iteration of rhetorical confusion even if the reader reacts to it as they would with a reference to a real event. Hamid's text easily serves as a metaphor for the refugee experience within the context of a global migration crisis, seemingly aligning *Exit West* with other allegories that use fictional events to comment on the state of a society. Yet, there is a component to Hamid's text, much like in Rushdie's allegory for India's history, that separates it from other allegorical examples. Although Hamid intends to universalize the refugee experience the unfamiliar reader who has not experienced this themselves remain on the outside of what Hamid describes (PBS Newshour). Furthermore, the unfamiliar reader is not provided context for the history, politics, or language surrounding the refugee community within or outside of the text. The international community of refugees may take on a role similar to Rushdie's India or Bulawayo's Zimbabwe, acting as the nation that the unfamiliar reader does not necessarily understand and may experience discomfort as they face their confusion. As such, rhetorical

confusion deserves further research and discussion to broaden the presented definition to better encompass the true variety of what it can represent.

## CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF RHETORICAL CONFUSION

An unspoken trend weaves itself through transnational texts to readers who are unfamiliar with the subject country or culture. The reader's awareness of their lack of understanding or knowledge prompts particular challenges as they read a text. This experience of rhetorical confusion for an unfamiliar reader may result in feelings of discomfort, isolation, or potential rejection of the text that they are reading. Specifically, rhetorical confusion was defined as a trend in which necessary information or clarification is not provided to a reader in regards to a country's history, politics, or language. Without this contextual information related to these subjects, the reader realizes that there is an overarching framework that they do not understand or do not realize previously existed. Discomfort may surface for the reader as they are forced to acknowledge what they do not know or do not understand. These feelings may contribute greatly to the challenges of transnational literature in Western markets as readers potentially reject the texts that produce such obstacles. By acknowledging and codifying such this trend, readers may begin to understand why it is they face a challenge when reading transnational literature.

Defining this fluid trend provided a challenge in and of itself. How does one begin to decipher why something is or is not confusing? Or determining who may find it confusing? Yet, the challenge of pulling apart the confusion and what contributes to such confusion was a necessary step in understanding the reader experience of rhetorical confusion. To reiterate Robert Young's observation, reading transnational literature often provides a reader a "quasi-anthropological" view that is primarily successful as long as the text's depicted culture is not *too* different from the culture that the reader finds familiar (214). Yet, challenging and *too* different texts do exist and offer value to the unfamiliar reader, even if the value is buried among layers of confusion and difference. Understanding rhetorical confusion offers a bridge to process these

challenging texts and expand the scope of “acceptable” texts within transnational literature. The concept of rhetorical confusion is imperfect and incomplete, yet the first step rested on identifying and acknowledging the presence of such an idea.

The association of discomfort with rhetorical confusion is likely the strongest determination of a reader’s acceptance or rejection of the text. The reader who struggles to understand what is presented to them within a text may find themselves uncomfortable or isolated from the text itself. As a result, the reader may reject the text in a number of means such as strongly disliking the text, displacing their frustration onto the subject culture/country, or not finishing the text. Each of these forms of rejection as a result of discomfort or confusion are not inherently unavoidable by defining rhetorical confusion; however, by identifying and addressing the challenges a reader may face, the reader’s experience is validated and they may be able to recognize that they are not experiencing confusion in isolation. Furthermore, an acknowledgment of the confusion and discomfort can lead to a greater comprehension of such an experience and a greater ability to process and work through such confusion to better understanding of the text.

While each text examined here demonstrates how rhetorical confusion may emerge in various contexts, there is a common link through the lack of information that induces the confusion and subsequent discomfort. Rushdie withholds context surrounding India’s history, Bulawayo does not provide identifying information, and Hamid entirely removes any framework of reference by placing his narrative in a fictional city. Each text contains a different goal and purpose, yet the rhetorical confusion emerges with the same option for the reader. This withheld information very possibly can interfere with the reader’s experience, either productively or unproductively. A productive interference may lead the reader to complete research on the reference points of the text. Such research can produce a faded sense of rhetorical confusion and

perhaps a feeling of comprehension. From this point, the reader may approach the text from a different, renewed perspective, one that enables a greater sense of appreciation, enjoyment, or acceptance of the text. An unproductive interference likely aligns with the aforementioned rejection of the text or a continued sense of confusion and discomfort.

The productive, research-based interference response to rhetorical confusion is an ideal outcome for a reader experiencing rhetorical confusion; however, this result is not an indication of entirely “overcoming” rhetorical confusion. As demonstrated with *Midnight’s Children*, *We Need New Names*, and *Exit West*, there are often inherent experiential elements to the moments of confusion, largely linked to immigration in the case of these three examples. Research will not provide clarification for the unfamiliar reader in the context of experience-based confusion. A reader cannot entirely or completely understand Darling’s struggles with identity or Nadia and Saeed’s journey as refugees unless they themselves have undergone the same experiences. However, a lack of complete understanding of experience does not negate the value a reader may gain from the text through a greater sense of empathy. Rather, the acknowledgment of experience-based confusion may prompt a greater sense of empathy within the reader and an overall lessening of “othering” done by the unfamiliar reader.

A key element to this greater appreciation or acceptance of the text, though, is the fading of rhetorical confusion. A fading or weakening of rhetorical confusion for the reader may stem from multiple readings of a text, or the productive interference of reader research; the reader, to a degree, begins to find a greater understanding of the text. This is not to suggest that a reader must understand the majority of a text to enjoy or accept it, nor does it mean that a reader will automatically appreciate the text once they begin to understand it. However, the fading of rhetorical confusion may lead the reader to find meaning within the text that was previously

missing from their reading experience. A reader who learns of Mugabe's government may detect Bulawayo's criticism while a reader who begins to research the history of India's independence will be more likely to understand Rushdie's references.

Of course, these examples align with what is currently defined as rhetorical confusion, and as Hamid's text demonstrates, that definition is already in need of clarification or reshaping. *Exit West* shows a need for a more nuanced, considerate definition – should a fictional city be considered in the same way as an existing nation with a well-established history? Does a largely symbolic text change the way in which reader experiences rhetorical confusion? The definition of rhetorical confusion can also be expanded to include additional elements that often contribute to the reader's confusion such as religion, geography, and magic. History, politics, and language were selected as they are foundational to all of the texts surveyed when determining a definition, but they are not the only elements that can appear as confusing if a reader does not receive the necessary contextual information.

Various genres and mediums should also be taken into consideration when continuing the examination of rhetorical confusion. Yaël Farber's *Mies Julie*, for example, is a play adaptation of August Strindberg's *Miss Julie*. There is the opportunity for confusion if the reader does not understand the source material for the adaptation in addition to the confusion associated with the examination of South African society. Farber's adaptation of the Oresteia trilogy, *Molona*, also demonstrates confusion that can stem from adaptation and a lack of knowledge of a country or culture. Texts like Farber's plays can be examined with the current definition of rhetorical confusion, yet the analysis would be stronger with a slight reimagining of the concept of rhetorical confusion itself. Although it was originally written in French and does not fit the criterion of being a non-translated text, Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* demonstrates a form of

confusion that stems from the epistolary nature of the text. Again, the current definition may easily apply to texts that withhold information based on their genre or medium, but an adjustment to the definition may provide a stronger examination of the text. While the identified definition of rhetorical confusion may acknowledge a trend, there is a strong need to further explore the concept and study the ways in which confusion appears.

It is almost paradoxical to suggest that rhetorical confusion can lead to a better understanding of a text, yet it is the process that a reader takes once rhetorical confusion is experienced that guides them to understanding. Herein lies another direction to further explore the concept of rhetorical confusion. Once a reader experiences rhetorical confusion, how do they react? What steps does the reader take to process their confusion? Is it more likely for the reader to ignore their confusion or for them to research what they do not understand? These questions demonstrate the need to expand this discussion of rhetorical confusion to better explore what occurs *after* rhetorical confusion is acknowledged. Similarly, it is necessary to further examine what happens when rhetorical confusion weakens or fades. As suggested, it is possible that this will prompt the reader to accept the text or glean meaning from what they previously did not understand, but are these the only outcomes? If rhetorical confusion can present such temporality in that it fades, there should also be consideration towards the return of rhetorical confusion. Perhaps a reader does not remember the historical or political research they previously completed for a text: Does rhetorical confusion then exist in the same context that it originally appeared the first time a reader read a text? The current definition of rhetorical confusion does identify a trend within transnational literature, but there is far more to be studied in regards to the experience of the trend itself.



Finally, there should be greater care to distinguish rhetorical confusion from allegories and allusions. The relationship between confusion and allegories is largely co-dependent as shown in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*; an allegory can contain rhetorical confusion depending on the reader and rhetorical confusion is very similar to an allegory as a reader may or may not understand the full context of what is being presented to them. However, there is the specific notion of rhetorical confusion that is linked to the reader being unfamiliar with the text's country or culture. An allegory can prompt rhetorical confusion, yet not all allegories exhibit this specific type of confusion for readers. This distinction is another thread of rhetorical confusion that should be examined further to better showcase what can and cannot be considered rhetorical confusion and how fluid this line is at times.

Rhetorical confusion as a concept can provide challenge and reward to a reader's experience. As demonstrated, a reader who works through their confusion can likely reach a greater understanding of the text and possibly gain a wider sense of meaning. While this does not suggest that any and all tension will be resolved through rhetorical confusion, it does serve as a demonstration of the likely hegemonic unfamiliar reader adjusting their views and ideals to embrace the text, rather than the reader manipulating the text to fit the reader's standards or expectations of the text and the subject culture/country. In his argument for a "more than global" program of thinking, Ranjan Ghosh argues that a global approach needs just as much introspection as it needs an outward approach: "being global is not simply a reaching out constricted by the strengths of the reigning critical methodologies; it is also a reaching in, voyaging centripetally to form more global configurations of understanding" (119). By acknowledging, embracing, and understanding rhetorical confusion, the unfamiliar reader has the opportunity to reach in, as Ghosh encourages, and to be vulnerable with what they do not

understand. From this vulnerability, the reader allows themselves to learn from the cultures and countries they find themselves existing outside of, and thus, achieving a better understanding of what was once confusing.

## Notes

1. For more examples of confusion in drama, see O'Neal's full book *The Progressive Poetics of Confusion in the French Enlightenment*.
2. The Sabarmati affair is described in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. It is a fictionalized version of the Nanavati murder case that occurred in the 1950s.
3. Used by NoViolet Bulawayo's protagonist in *We Need New Names*. This phrase is a Ndebele greeting.
4. Mukti Bahini was the name of freedom fighters during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971. See Jamal.
5. Tiger Niazi is one of the characters in Rushdie's novel who is based on a real historical figure. Commander Lieutenant General Niazi led the Pakistan Eastern Command in 1971. See Gillani.
6. See Ali Ashghar Engineer for a detailed analysis of past Hindi and Urdu controversy and additional conflicts in India's history.
7. See Neema Caughran for an in-depth description of Shiva and Parvati.
8. The country is identified as Zimbabwe by Bulawayo as well as the novel's back-cover summary.
9. See also Arnett 155 and Moolla 231.
10. See note seven.
11. "Destroyedmichygen" is the name Darling and her friends give to Detroit, Michigan that later becomes a benchmark for Darling's assimilation to the United States.
12. *Tokoloshe* refers to the name of a Zulu mythological creature that is described as dwarf or sprit-like. See Fordred-Green for further explanation of the myth.
13. The name of the language itself is never identified within the text. Instead it is only referred to as "our language" by Darling.
14. The war is often identified in reviews as a civil war, and it is described as such on the novels' back-cover summary; however, the war is never referred to as a civil war within the text itself.

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