Overcoming Marginalization and Discovering Identity through Literacy in Representative Works of Multi-Ethnic Literature

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In a study of multicultural literature, the dominance of ignorance and prejudice in propagating and perpetuating oppression and marginalization of others is all too common, as is the denial or suppression of the identity of decolonized peoples. We even see the rewriting of history in favor of those in power; whereas the ideas of the oppressed are suppressed, as is the truth. Furthermore, the African writer Chinua Achebe "has spoken of the imperative need for writers to help change the way the colonized world was seen, to tell their own stories, to wage 'a battle for the mind with colonialism' by 're-educating' readers" (qtd. in Boehmer 189). From the perspective of this thesis, there is far too much in common in the negative treatment of the oppressed, whether by slavery or colonialism and its after-effects. In both, however, we see literature as a common and important tool in coping with and overcoming the abuse and oppression faced by the marginalized. Examples abound of the power of literacy and literature in overcoming oppression from the American slave autobiography, post-slavery literary depictions of racism in the Jim Crow era, and the postcolonialism of India. This thesis examines three seemingly disparate postcolonial scenarios from the common angle of the power of the word as revealed in examining this literature from multicultural and transnational views.

Overcoming Marginalization and Discovering Identity through Literacy in Representative Works of Multi-Ethnic Literature

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Chapter 1: Literacy as Freedom: Overcoming Marginalization.

This introduction will establish that through the study of multicultural and transnational literatures produced by the authors below, these so-called "others," we can see they have identities, intelligence, and important histories of their own. Through an examination of their stories, we can hear their voices – the voices of the once oppressed who are now sharing their own points of view – and not that of the misguided, self-serving views of their oppressors' hegemonic control which denied their voices and humanity for so long. This thesis examines three distinct ways of dealing with postcolonialism through 1) literacy, 2) multicultural literature, and 3) transnational literature.

As posited by Ashcroft (and others) in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader,* "postcolonial theory involves discussion about experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy, and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these have come into being" (Ashcroft 2). Ashcroft asks the question: "how might a general postcolonial literary enterprise proceed?" (Ashcroft 4). He then answers, "To define our purpose then: we have taken as our limited aim the provision of an effective text to assist in the revision of teaching practice within literary studies in English and so have sought to represent the impact of postcolonial literatures and criticism on the current shape of English studies" (Ashcroft 4). This, to me, is a great concept. However, in my own experience, being educated in the 1960s during the Civil Rights era in the United States, I have found it to be lacking in my education. Despite being well-educated in the public school system, I was never introduced to the slave autobiography.

Furthermore, coming from and being educated in the southern United States in a racist state, town, and family, I had never heard of Frederick Douglass nor Harriet Jacobs. I had never read the works of Richard Wright nor Alice Walker, nor heard of the Imperial control of India by England in a negative way nor or its subsequent decolonization problems as depicted by Salman Rushdie. This personal experience has led me to the concept of "counter-discourse." As noted by Sara Upstone in her text, *Literary Theory: A Complete Introduction:* "Counter-discourse is the process of 'writing back' to classical colonial texts with postcolonial writings" (Upstone Loc 3823). Along those lines, as noted in the Smithsonian American Art Experience article, *Literacy as Freedom*:

> There was fear that slaves who were literate could forge travel passes and escape. These passes, signed by the slave owner, were required for enslaved people traveling from one place to another and usually included the date on which the slave was supposed to return. There was also fear that writing could be a means of communication that would make it easier to plan insurrections and mass escapes . . . Slave narratives from many sources tell us how many enslaved people became educated. Some learned to read from other literate slaves, while at other times a master or mistress was willing to teach a slave in defiance of the laws. Former slave and abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass was taught the alphabet in secret at age twelve by his master's wife, Sophia Auld. As he grew older Douglass took charge of his own education, obtaining and reading newspapers and books in secret. He was often quoted asserting that 'knowledge is the pathway from slavery to freedom.' Douglass was one of the few literate slaves who regularly taught others how to read. (Smithsonian)

In addition, as Upstone states:

> In her book *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* (1983), Elizabeth Ermarth examines how the realist novel encourages a certain agreement among readers: it drives plots towards a particular conclusion and encourages readers to accept its Eurocentric world view. As a result, many postcolonial texts provide alternatives to realism. The magical realist form is particularly prevalent in postcolonial novels, chosen for its ability to remake realism and infuse it with developing-world myths and traditions. Examples of magical realist texts include Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1998). An argument can be made that the postmodern form associated with Anglo-American innovation is heavily influenced by magical realist incursions into realism by world writers. (qtd. in Upstone Loc 3831)

By these examples this thesis unifies the power of the word in Multicultural and Transnational Literature in overcoming marginalization, whether by literacy (learning to read), the realistic descriptive literature of post-slavery writers such as Richard Wright and Alice Walker, or by the magical realist techniques of writers such as Salmon Rushdie who followed the precedent set by writers like Gabriel García Márquez and Isabel Allende from the Caribbean and Latin America, also centers of colonialism.

Oppressed peoples, marginalized in society, have successfully utilized the power of literacy and literature as tools in overcoming oppression, gaining voice, and finding identity as seen in a comparison of the lives and works of the African American slave autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, the post-slavery, Jim Crow era African American

writers, Alice Walker and Richard Wright, and in the lives of the characters of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* juxtaposed against the postcolonial history of the country and people of India.

In Chapter 1 of this thesis, through the examples of Frederick Douglass, one of the most eloquent and greatest orators who evolved from North American slavery, and Harriet Jacobs, we see the tools of **literacy** and multicultural literature as instrumental in gaining their freedom and giving them a platform for speaking out against the injustices of slavery from both the male and female points of view. They both learned to read as slaves and wrote their own autobiographies.

Next is an examination of what life was like for African Americans during the Jim Crow era that began after the end of the Reconstruction in 1877. Specifically, after the abolition of slavery in the United States, we see through the **multicultural** literature of Richard Wright and Alice Walker continued extreme racism and maltreatment of others, especially in the south where people, only because of the color of their skin, were treated less than human with voices suppressed and identities denied. False notions of inferiority were propagated due to greed in the use of people of color as a means of production and simply, scientific ignorance. This chapter compares the works and post-slavery lives of Wright and his novel *Uncle Tom's Children* with that of Alice Walker and her first novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland.*

Chapter 4 continues with **transnational** literature in postcolonial India, with the search for identity of the Indian people after the dissipation of British Imperialism in 1947 as they tried to find their own identities as individuals and as a nation and assimilate their own rich diverse cultures within a country of millions of people, many different religions, castes, and over 850 different languages. Saleem Sinai, the protagonist, narrates the jumble of fissured India from his

perspective as one of the children of midnight created with Rushdie's supernatural literary techniques in his novel *Midnight's Children* (Karlsson 3-4).

The thesis concludes with a reinforced notion of the importance of literacy and literature written by and/or about the marginalized for freedom and equality for every human being. The importance of literacy and literature written by the oppressed in the elimination of racism cannot be underestimated. Every human being has talent and worth to offer the world, to make it a better place and everyone should be able to avail themselves of the opportunities life presents. The opportunities need to be equally available to various cultures and countries. This is especially needed as our society becomes increasingly globalized. As the reading of literature promotes empathy, our world needs more of it, specifically, multicultural, and transnational literature.

Furthermore, as noted above, I grew up witnessing the disparity of treatment of white people over people of color in my life and continue to witness the systemic racism in this country with the recent murder of Breonna Taylor by law enforcement in Louisville, Kentucky. Soon after, George Floyd would also die, this time under the knee of Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His cries of "I can't breathe" are still heard by all of us. For too long, many African American writers could not "breathe" and express, through literature, their true feelings. This is unacceptable and these two examples represent only a couple of cases of the continued police brutality against African Americans. Therefore, it is difficult for me not to relate this thesis to the current negative treatment which still oppresses African Americans in this country. Pundits and scholars alike have argued that should children of all races in the United States be exposed to the truth of our history embedded in the stories of slavery, lynching, all forms of segregation and oppression, and colonialism of those of a different color than white, the dangerous tide of white supremacy can be quelled and reparations started. Once people

understand the grisly history through literature of this brutal treatment by the people of the so-called land of the free and land of liberty, equality could yet reign. Frederick Douglass's story of learning to read seemed to me a pivotal moment in his life as he noticed its power simply because his master prevented his wife from teaching him to read. He sensed the power of literacy and taught himself to read. The story of Douglass's realization of the power of literacy became a significant moment for him.

For Harriet Jacobs the effective use of her ability to read and write, as this thesis shows in the subsequent chapter, influenced my desire to include her story as well as Douglass's.

Following this chapter on the slave narrative and the importance of literacy, the depictions of life for the African American peoples in the Jim Crow era also presented a strong influence on my choice to include these works in this thesis.

Furthermore, the juxtaposition of Salman Rushdie's diverse characters in *Midnight's Children* against the backdrop of the history of India's freedom from British rule rounded out a postcolonial example of transnational literature used to examine the lives of the previously oppressed nation and the mayhem caused by the sudden decolonization.

I have often considered how racism in this country and an understanding of imperialism would have turned out had these works been required reading for all at an elementary level. Would people be more empathetic and accepting of others with different skin color? Would it have had an effect on the systemic racism still prevalent in this country? Would our greater understanding at an earlier age of the experiences of the oppressed have made us better people?

There are other books in the realm of multicultural and transnational literature that I could have examined in this thesis, such as *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyne or *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak. Both of these examined the innocent against the ruthlessness

and oppression of Hitler of both the Jews and his own people; and are excellent examples of literature where people overcome oppression. But, due to space limitations, I chose to cover in this thesis, literature which had been written before my birth, with the exception of Rushdie's work which I chose for its representation of postcolonialism from a global viewpoint.

In the next chapter, this thesis examines in greater detail the effects of literacy and learning to read that I referred to in the first paragraph of this introductory chapter in an examination of the lives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. They were both profoundly impacted by literacy in learning to read and were able to tell the world and their fellow slaves about slavery and their own personal stories of overcoming oppression by producing multicultural literature in the form of their own respective slave autobiographies as postcolonial writers engaged in counter-discourse.

Chapter 2: The Power of Literacy in the Lives/Works of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs.

Chattel slavery is, without a doubt, the biggest stain on American history. Driven by greed and replete with hypocrisy for a nation espousing "freedom" and "liberty", not to mention the supposed ideals of Christianity, this nation was literally built on the backs of the oppressed slaves. As noted in the chapter “The Literature of Slavery and Freedom 1746-1865” in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature,* "The grotesque inconsistency between the United States' championing of 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' in its own Declaration of Independence and its sanctioning of the crime of chattel slavery furnished early African American literature with its most enduring theme" (Gates and Smith 78).

Fortunately, despite the practice of not allowing slaves to learn to read or write, in order to sustain white hegemony, the systemic and willful suppression of another culture born out of greed and ignorance, we have the literature of the slave narrative. As noted in the chapter “The Literature of Slavery and Freedom 1746-1865” in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature,* “The engendering impulse of African American literature is a dedication to human dignity. As resistance to tyranny and dedication to human dignity became increasingly synonymous with the idea of America itself in the latter half of the eighteenth century, early African American writers identified themselves as Americans with a special mission” (Gates and Smith 75).

As historical sources, slave narratives document slave life primarily in the American South from the invaluable perspective of first-hand experience. Increasingly in the 1840s and 1850s they reveal the struggles of people of color in the North, as fugitives from the South recorded the disparities between America's ideal of freedom and the reality of racism in the so-

called "free states" (Andrews). “Most of the major authors of African American literature before 1865, including Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, and Harriet Jacobs, launched their writing careers via narratives of their experience as slaves” (Gates and Smith 83).

One of Frederick Douglass’s accounts, his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, “was unquestionably the epitome of the antebellum slave narrative.” (Gates and Smith 328).

Similarly, “Harriet Jacobs was the first woman to author a slave narrative in the United States” (Gates and Smith 221). Her autobiography*, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, “represented no less profoundly a black woman’s indomitable spirit” (Gates and Smith 221). The narratives of Douglass and Jacobs were very similar in that they both had to explain how they came to be able to read and write in order to provide credibility to their life narratives and who had ultimately achieved their freedom by escape; they differed, however, in that their works were written in times of differing political circumstances and from the contrasting gender views of a man and a woman, especially in a patriarchal society.

One of the similarities between the lives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs is the fact that when they wrote their respective autobiographies, they both were able to read and write. Douglass tells in his narrative how:

> [v]ery soon after I went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Auld, she very kindly commenced to teaching me the A, B, C. After I had learned this, she assisted me in learning words of three of four letters. Just at this point of my progress, Mr. Auld found out what was going on, and at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me

> further, telling her, among other things, that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read. (Douglass 351)

This became a revelation for young Frederick, however, as he stated: "I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty – to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom" (Douglass 351). He was determined after this to continue reading and learning as much as he possibly could. "I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read" (Douglass 351).

Likewise, Harriet Jacobs, in her *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* recounts the fact that "[w]hile I was with her [her mistress], she taught me to read and spell; and for this privilege, which so rarely falls to the lot of a slave, I bless her memory" (Jacobs 227). Little did Harriet know then how useful being able to read and write would be for her later, after she decided to escape. "One of the most important elements that developed within the narratives was a 'literacy' scene in which the narrator explained how he or she came to be able to do something that proslavery writers often declared was impossible: to read and write" (MacKethan). As noted by MacKethan:

> Finally, one of the most important questions that both title pages raise concerns the claim 'written by himself' and 'written by herself.' Many of the narratives attest to the slave's authorship in this way, but why was such an announcement necessary? Is it believable, given all the prefatory statements by white sponsors that accompany the narratives? What power does the claim of being the 'Writer' of one's own story give to a slave author?" (MacKethan)

Their counter-discourse gives credibility and emphasizes that the stories come from the mouths and pens of the slaves who are telling the stories and have endured the horrors of chattel

slavery. For during slavery, the oppressor made sure that slaves like Douglass and Jacobs would have no "voice." The slave master knew that a decolonized mind, through literacy, would be counter hegemonic and dangerous to the oppressor's control. One example involves Mr. Hugh Auld, Sophia's husband. Once he found out that Sophia taught Douglass his ABCs, "he at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me further, telling her, among other things, that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read" (Douglass 351).

Douglass further notes:

> Whilst I was saddened by the thought of losing the aid of my kind mistress, I was gladdened by the invaluable instruction which, by the merest accident, I had gained from my master. . . The very decided manner with which he spoke and strove to impress his wife with the evil consequences of giving me instruction, served to convince me that he was deeply sensible of the truths he was uttering. (Douglass 351)

Another similarity between Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs is that they both, indeed, did achieve their freedom, through escape, from the oppression of the white slave-owners. Two intelligent, strong, and powerful souls such as these could not be held in slavery for long. As Christopher Klein noted in his article, "Frederick Douglass Escapes Slavery":

> Never had Frederick Douglass been so nervous. The butterflies in his stomach fluttered with every bounce of the carriage over Baltimore's cobblestone streets as he approached the Baltimore and Ohio railroad station. The slave, then known by his birth name of Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, was embarking on a perilous journey with New York—and freedom—his intended destinations. After Douglass' attempt to

> escape slavery two years prior was betrayed by a fellow slave, he had been jailed, sent to Baltimore by his master and hired out to work in the city's shipyards. Undeterred, Douglass vowed to try to escape again on September 3, 1838, although he knew the risk. (Klein)

Furthermore, "In spite of the obstacles, Douglass arrived safely in New York less than 24 hours after leaving Baltimore. Although on free soil, Douglass was not legally a free man" (Klein). And "[t]o better conceal his identity from slave catchers, the escaped slave changed his last name from Bailey to Douglass. His supporters eventually raised enough money for Douglass to purchase his liberty and become a free man in the eyes of the law" (Klein).

Likewise, Harriet Jacobs escapes as well, albeit different circumstances. She was afraid of being raped by her master at the young age of fifteen. Dr. Flint had been harassing her constantly. As Andrews notes:

> Though barely a teenager, Jacobs soon realized that her master was a sexual threat. From 1825, when she entered the Flint household, until 1842, the year she escaped from slavery, Harriet Jacobs struggled to avoid the sexual victimization that Dr. Flint intended to be her fate. Despised by the doctor's suspicious wife and increasingly isolated by her situation, Jacobs in desperation formed a clandestine liaison with Samuel Tredwell Sawyer, a white attorney with whom Jacobs had two children, Joseph, and Louisa, by the time she was twenty years old. Hoping that by seeming to run away she could induce Flint to sell her children to their father, Jacobs hid herself in a crawl space above a storeroom in her grandmother's

> house in the summer of 1835. In that ‘little dismal hole’ she remained for the next seven years. In 1842 Jacobs escaped to the North by boat. (Andrews)

As Blight notes regarding Douglass:

> After having achieved his freedom and moving north: Douglass immortalized his formative years as a slave in the first of three autobiographies, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave,* published in 1845. This and two subsequent autobiographies, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) and *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881), mark Douglass's greatest contributions to southern culture. Written both as antislavery propaganda and as personal revelation, they are universally regarded as the finest examples of the slave narrative tradition and as classics of American autobiography. . . Douglass achieved international fame as an orator with few peers and as a writer of persuasive power. In thousands of speeches and editorials Douglass levied an irresistible indictment against slavery and racism, provided an indomitable voice of hope for his people, embraced antislavery politics, and preached his own brand of American ideals. (Blight)

Douglass was growing from his literacy. He stated, “It was impossible for me to repeat the same old story month after month, and to keep my interest in it. . . for I was now reading and thinking. New views of the subject were presented to my mind. It did not entirely satisfy me to *narrate* wrongs; I felt like *denouncing* them” (Douglass 395).

For Harriet Jacobs, on the other hand, as noted by Andrews:

> [i]n Rochester (she) met and began to confide in Amy Post, an abolitionist and pioneering feminist who gently urged the fugitive slave mother to consider making her story public. After the tumultuous response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Jacobs thought of enlisting the aid of the novel's author, Harriet Beecher Stowe, in getting her own story published. But Stowe had little interest in any sort of creative partnership with Jacobs. After receiving, early in 1852, the gift of her freedom from Cornelia Grinnell Willis, the second wife of her employer, Jacobs decided to write her autobiography herself. In 1853 Jacobs took her first steps toward authorship, sending several anonymous letters to the *New York Tribune.* (Andrews)

More importantly, "[p]raised by the antislavery press in the United States and Great Britain, *Incidents* was quickly overshadowed by the gathering clouds of civil war in America. Never reprinted in Jacobs's lifetime, it remained in obscurity until the Civil Rights and Women's Movements of the 1960s and 1970s spurred a reprint of *Incidents* in 1973" (Andrews).

Possibly more significantly, as Martha Cutter notes of Jacob's work as discussed by Audre Lorde:

> The problem Jacobs faces in her narrative, then, is how to use language as a way of achieving liberation, when language itself is a large part of her oppression. How can Jacobs use her literacy in a way which liberates her from the dominant discursive practices of her society? To speak in the 'master's' language is to remain trapped within a system of discourse which denies her subjectivity. Audre Lorde has said that 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house'. (qtd in Cutter 99)

Perhaps one of the biggest differences in the lives and narratives of Douglass and Jacobs lies in the fact of the gender differences of the era. Men and women were most definitely and clearly treated differently. “Unfortunately, few scholars have systematically examined the role of gender-related differences in these themes. However, given the pervasive impact of the ‘social organization of the relationship between sexes,’ gender influenced even the way in which bondage was experienced; men and women experienced it in different ways” (Morgan 74).

The slave autobiographies of Jacobs and Douglass suggest that they were responding to their period's significant themes for the marginalized: individualism, community, resisting oppression, striving for freedom, gaining voice. Douglass exemplified his ability to speak in public as well as to read, write, and think. Through his use of his literacy and language, he strove to demonstrate his place as men among men. And he did an exemplary job at it. “On the other hand, in common with other women narrators, Jacobs emphasizes her womanliness. Women narrators related to feminine culture of their time, and that involved telling their stories in terms of relationships” (Morgan 76).

Furthermore, noted by Morgan:

> Telling his story in his three autobiographies became Douglass's means of understanding his experience and that of other African-Americans. This is why, as his understanding evolved, he had to keep rewriting his story. With his ‘story’ to communicate, Douglass could begin to connect with those who could become his community at large. Language and control of that language became both his opportunity and his vehicle. (Morgan 80)

For example, Douglass notes, “In a little less than four years, therefore, after becoming a public lecturer, I was induced to write out the leading facts connected with my experience in

slavery . . . thus putting it in the power of any who doubted, to ascertain the truth or falsehood of my story of being a fugitive slave" (Douglass 396-97).

Also, as Morgan notes regarding Jacobs:

> Harriet Jacobs's narrative differs significantly from Douglass's autobiography. While Douglass's narrative emphasizes his acquisition and development of written language, Jacobs depicts a network of relationships on which she depends and to which she contributes; her most important relationships evolve from bonds of love. She respects and fears but, above all, she loves, her grandmother. She loves her children, her brother, her uncles, and aunts. In *Incidents* bonds of affection support and nourish the individual and contrast with the contrived and unreasonable bonds of slavery. Unlike Douglass, who tries to connect with and control his relations with both white and black communities through his manipulation of language, Jacobs already feels closely connected with family and friends. The support she receives from family and friends nourishes her; it assures her of her own worth; it impels her to take a role in the larger world. (Morgan 84)

For example, in New York, after obtaining employment as a nurse for the English lady Mrs. Bruce, Harriet noted:

> I had entered this family with the distrustful feelings I had brought with me out of slavery; but ere six months had passed. I found that the gentle deportment of Mrs. Bruce and the smiles of her lovely babe were thawing my chilled heart. My

> narrow mind also began to expand under the influences of her intelligent conversation, and the opportunities for reading, which were gladly allowed me whenever I had leisure from my duties. I gradually became more energetic and more cheerful. (Jacobs 91)

In conclusion, in comparing the new literature of the slave era in the slave narratives of these two great human beings, we can get a glimpse now into the lives of what it was like to be a chattel slave in America in the mid-nineteenth century. That is not that long ago, yet it seems like centuries. The similarities regarding their love and drive for literacy and the indomitable will to escape slavery bond these two individuals forevermore. Their differences highlight their individual means of coping as a man and a woman in such conditions as we have seen above.

As we still live in times of racism and sexism, as well, for that matter, it is important for these texts to be read, in my view, by as many people as possible. This is not a matter to be brushed under the rug of history. Both of these narratives should be required reading at every middle and high school in America if not the world. These are the stories that need to be told. "Brilliant, heroic, and complex, Douglass became a symbol of his age and a unique American voice for humanism and social justice. His life and thought will always speak profoundly to the dilemma of being black in America" (Blight).

Regarding Jacobs, Morgan notes:

> [t]he events of her story show that not only 'ownership' of human beings is unjust; more important, but the institution of slavery is also evil because it perverts all relationships between men and women, children and parents, slaves and free people. The institution of slavery encourages a relatively good man such as Mr. Sands to keep his and Harriet's children in bondage. In addition, it destroys

> society's basic unit, the family. It poisons the Flints' marriage and condones Dr. Flint's attempted seduction of the adolescent Jacobs. As women narrators like Jacobs show their readers, slavery works to weaken familial relationships: those between husbands and wives, children and parents, brothers, and sisters. (Morgan 85)

The written slave narratives are important to our history and the knowledge of the barbarity of slavery itself as they testify. They became more important in the abolitionist movement. As noted by Morgan, regarding the slave's autobiographies:

> Written slave narratives flourished with the abolition movement. At abolition meetings, male ex-slaves were known to bare their scarred backs as testaments to slavery's cruelty. Written slave narratives extended that oral testimony by relating both the physical and psychological cruelty experienced by slaves. Readers encountered the individual, a fellow human being wounded by the system. Women fugitives, like men, told their stories because they believed that publication furthered the abolitionist cause. But for women, abolishing slavery meant more than achieving atomized, personal goals. Ultimately, in telling their stories, women were motivated by the need to build communities and—by extension—the commonwealth. (Morgan 91)

Furthermore, he states:

> The slave narratives of male and female writers together, given the emphasis on literacy and control in the former and on relationships and interdependence in the latter, offer insight on balancing individualism and community. Women narrators emphasized implicitly that sexual abuse and the break-up of their families

> violated the community. Women slaves regarded this as more destructive than the withholding of education. (Morgan 91-92)

Next this study will now consider in the following chapter the fiction of two great post-slavery African American writers: Richard Wright and Alice Walker; to continue this discussion unifying the concept of overcoming marginalization through literacy. Moreover, this thesis examines in their literature that, despite emancipation, the African American man and woman were indeed still treated deplorably.

Chapter 3: Post-slavery Era Racism and Oppression Exhibited in the Multicultural Literature of Richard Wright and Alice Walker and a Comparison of their Lives.

Alice Walker and Richard Wright were both highly influential African American writers of the twentieth century. Though Richard Wright came to us as part of the Chicago Renaissance era, moving to New York in 1937 during the Harlem Renaissance, he did not consider himself a part of it. He was his own man, “distancing himself from the writings of the Harlem Renaissance” (Gates and Smith 119). Wright won international renown for his powerful and realistic depiction of the black experience. “His first published book, *Uncle Tom’s Children,* marked the beginning of what might be termed modern black ‘protest’ literature; furthermore, at the time it constituted the most unrelenting and rage-fueled critique of white racism ever to surface in fiction written by blacks directed toward a mainstream American readership” (Yarborough xii). *Uncle Tom’s Children* was a highly acclaimed collection of short stories penned by Wright that was published in 1938 in the Jim Crow era, before even a modicum of civil rights for the African Americans existed. "*Uncle Tom's Children* has its full share of violence and brutality; violent deaths occur in three stories and the mob goes to work in all four. Violence has long been an important element in fiction about Negroes, just as it is in their life” (Turner 1). Similar to Richard Wright, Alice Walker, in her own right, “is one of the most important African American writers of her generation” (Gates and Smith 1176). Born in 1944, “Alice Walker's first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, recounts three different experiences of racial and economic oppression in the South” (Cochran 79). She had this book published in 1970 on the cusp of the civil rights movement. Alice Walker presents the views of the African American from the eyes of a woman and from the views of the suffering of the women in her novel as well as the men. Both of these books depict racism vividly and

realistically from their own times and point of view, but both works contain elements of the dehumanization of black women, the theme of oppression and its effects, and elements related to the genre of the migratory tale.

First of all, the cruelty and lynching that took place in the south as part of the oppression of the black men and women, now freed slaves when these stories were written, really happened. In the story of *Big Boy Leaves Home*, for example, when two of the boys are shot for simply taking a dip in a swimming hole of a racist old man, Harvey, and his son in the deep south of Mississippi, we do not see much treatment of the women, except the white woman who instigated the event and Big Boy's mother and family who encourage him to head north with the delivery truck after all the trouble. The women largely remain behind the scenes in Wright's stories, in the role of servitude to the men in a patriarchal society. In Wright's work, it becomes clear that the black woman is the "other" and the black man is her occasional oppressor. Wright examines the white hegemony, but not without revealing the marginalization of the black female while the black man continues to deal with oppression/racism during the Jim Crow period.

In his opening essay, however, *The Ethics of Living Jim Crow,* Wright:

> [R]ejects the 'Jim Crow wisdom' his mother seeks to impart to him, an ethic that counsels one to never fight or resist whites, to accept that whites have the right to use violence against blacks who refuse to recognize the legitimacy of white supremacy, and to be grateful that whites give blacks a chance to make lives for themselves at all. (Wright)

And he rightly so rejected that wisdom. I think it repulsed Wright to think that way. Further into the essay, Wright told "how two white men he worked for beat a black woman bloody for not paying her bill at their clothing store. A police officer observes the assault yet does nothing."

This seems the typical male response in the Jim Crow era. Furthermore, as Shelby notes: "when Wright tells his black coworkers about the incident, instead of being outraged or expressing empathy, one of them says, 'Shucks! Man, she's a lucky bitch! . . . Hell, it's a wonder they didn't lay her when they got through'" (Shelby 518).

This was the state of affairs for women in the era of Richard Wright when it came to treatment by white men. The black men were powerless to do anything about it or they would be killed. As far as family life goes, however, I think the women of the households held the families together for the most part. They cooked the day's food, mended the clothes, and did anything that needed doing around the household. They were also brave when they needed to be. For example, in the story *Bright and Morning Star* Wright places the protagonist, Aunt Sue, in a domestic environment. "Her hands followed a lifelong ritual of toil" (Wright 222) as she cleans and cooks. Interestingly, Aunt Sue is the only heroine in all of the four stories, and she shows a different type of bravery than that shown by the male characters depicted. She is brave in the face of the loss of her two sons. She is brave as she does not show weakness to the white men who attempt to force her to tell her son to talk as they torture him. She is killed by the sheriff and never tells him any of the information he is trying to extort from her. This is certainly a noble portrait of a woman in defiance.

From the view of Alice Walker, on the other hand, we see a type of black woman character "who was exploited both physically and emotionally, whose lives were narrow and confining, and who were driven sometimes to madness, such as Margaret and Mem Copeland" in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (Gates and Smith 1177). Another type of black woman character, though, Walker contended, "are those African American women who, despite the

oppressions they suffer, achieve some wholeness and create spaces for other oppressed communities" (Gates and Smith 1177).

Black women in the mid-twentieth century expressed themselves in cooking, gardening, storytelling, and quilting. Walker, herself, began writing as a release from the powerlessness she felt after becoming pregnant at college, especially since abortion was not allowed or legal in those days. Personally, I believe that allowed her to mature and grow as a person and writer. "Her focus on southern African American women's voices helped galvanize an explosion of black women's creative and critical expressions" (Gates and Smith 1177).

In this novel, however, we see the exploitation and oppression of the women as a result of the frustration of the men. In the novel, Walker, like Wright, creates another dynamic of the black man playing the colonizer and the black woman in the unfortunate position of the "colonized". For example, Grange and Brownfield are oppressive to their wives. They do not show them any respect and are stuck in cycles of oppression with the sharecropping landowners in the south. The women bear the brunt of the depression and unhappiness of the men throughout.

Furthermore, regarding the theme of oppression prevalent throughout the stories of Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children,* we see the unevenness of the law in the treatment of the black man, which I think is still prevalent in today's society to a degree. For example, in our earlier example of *Big Boy Leaves Home,* we see the indiscriminate killing of Big Boy's two friends at the swimming hole – with NO repercussions. The law did not prosecute white men in any fashion for the oppression or killing of a black person. This practice signified white supremacy over the blacks. In *The Ethics of Living Jim Crow*, Wright "dramatizes the arbitrary violence of whites, the explosive sexual component of racism, and the struggle of blacks to

accommodate themselves to constant injustice and humiliation while maintaining a modicum of personal dignity – all of which serve as unifying themes for the entire volume" (Yarborough xxiv). Shelby notes "the stories are about how the oppressed, from the standpoint of ethics, should respond to the injustices that weigh so heavily upon them. Specifically, I think Wright is attempting to sketch a set of values that he believes the oppressed ought to live by as they struggle to survive and hope to overcome their oppression" (Shelby 516). In his *Blueprint for Negro Writing (1937),* Wright considers aporically, "Today the question is: Shall Negro writing be for the Negro masses, molding the lives and consciousness of those masses toward new goals, or shall it continue begging the question of the Negroes' humanity?" (qtd in Shelby 516).

Blacks obviously had few options in their dealings with the whites in the Jim Crow era. The oppression they experienced was relentless. No amount of discourse in Washington seemed to alleviate this madness of white hegemony. Even Wright himself suggested "in these stories that choosing the terms of one's own death in a world that refuses to let you live as a human being constitutes an existential triumph of no small order" (qtd in Yarborough xxvi). There were simply not many options available to the African American. "And where Mann's decision in *Riverside* entails the simple act of running from the white troops who have him in custody, Silas, in *Long Black Song* actually engages in armed combat with whites, determined to extract as dear a toll as possible before he is taken" (Yarborough xxvii). When presented with the irreparable damage of the violation of trust by his wife, Silas knows it is the end. Fed up, he reacts violently after finding out his wife had sex with a white salesman. "Silas's militant resistance even in the face of apparently empty options dramatizes Wright's belief that one must finally impose his or her own meaning on reality. And doing so in the face of death is, to Wright, heroic" (Yarborough xxvii). Silas is a perfect example of how oppression impacted both black men and women.

In Alice Walker's *the Third Life of Grange Copeland,* we see the lives play out of three generations of the Copelands, a black family of sharecroppers: Grange, Brownfield, and Ruth. Both Grange and Brownfield are abusive men. "In beating their wives, Brownfield and Grange redirect the aggression they feel as a result of their own subjugation. Therefore, domestic violence, creating brokenness in their homes, is the only way they can sustain the brokenness of their lives in the sharecropping system" (Cochran 84).

First, I see Walker's use of the metaphor of a sharecropper in rural Georgia as a near-slavery form of oppression. Sharecropping, another form of slavery, in a sense, is designed so you have to work so hard in the field to pay the owner, that you cannot survive and end up more in debt each year; a permanent cycle of oppression that is hard to break. That is what happens to Grange until he finally breaks away, migrating north, leaving his family. In fact, Grange becomes "decolonized" as he goes through three phases of his life. His abusive ways in his first life of sharecropping, give way to events that take place when he migrates north. Like Big Boy, Grange's escape to the North is necessary and it is there that he gains an epiphany during the drowning of a white woman. In her death, he gains life and a heightened awareness that he employs in the third phase of his journey, one that takes him back to the south to protect his granddaughter, Ruth.

Brownfield follows him at age 15 but ends up meeting his future wife, Mem, and they ended up having a daughter named Ruth. Brownfield ended up blowing her brains out in front of their children.

This brings to mind one major difference of oppression between this novel and the collection of short stories by Richard Wright and that is the fact that most of the physical violence happens in this novel by black people against each other in the same family or

community due to the frustration in their lives caused by the brutal treatment they get from the whites.

In Wright's stories it is always the white man oppressing the black man and being able to get away with physical violence like beatings, tar and featherings, lynching and shootings. By the time Walker wrote *The Third Life of Grange Copeland,* I do not think a white man could get away with the things they could 30 years prior.

Nevertheless, in Walker's novel, Grange is oppressed by the sharecropper, Shipley, to never be able to overcome his debt to him. Depressed due to Shipley having sex with his wife, Margaret, he takes it out on Margaret by beating her. This is very similar to what we saw by Silas in Wright's *Long Black Song.* She commits suicide when he leaves. His time up north does not work out for him either, so he ends up returning south. A Cochran notes:

> Just as each week in the sharecropping homes follows a cycle of depression and violence, so too does the lineage of the characters continue a pattern. Abandonment by the father is an integral part of the cycle. While nothing is said about Grange's father, that perhaps only underscores the theme of abandonment -- the absence of Grange's father foreshadows Grange's abandonment of Brownfield and Brownfield's abandonment of his own children. (Cochran 84)

Desolation, oppression, poverty, and despair are key themes in this novel, and it becomes a cycle for the family. Though the novel purports to be about Grange mostly, we see a lot of the lives of his family as well, especially Brownfield: "Brownfield's childhood is ruled by fear. He fears his father, fears the white men who frighten his father, fears never getting out of the South. That fear is toughened by his growing bitterness and proclivities to violence. His resentment and

bitterness increase as his oppression is fueled by being unable to understand his father's abandonment" (Cochran 86).

Another commonality between these two works of literary art stems around the migratory tale of the African Americans away from the south, which was where a lot of vicious chattel slavery took place and, of course, the civil war those states fought over the issue of slavery.

The south remained the most racist of the states of this country – and probably still is today. In Wright's stories, we see in *Big Boy Leaves Home* that, after the murder of two of his friends and the tarring of his other friend, Big Boy and his family see his *only* choice as to flee north and start a new life. He was being hunted and would be killed if caught so his family arranged through a delivery driver to take him to Chicago – that is where that story ends.

Richard Wright, however, was born impoverished on a plantation in Mississippi. "From his impoverished and barren early years to his achievement as a favored literary touchstone and ancestor figure, the details of Wright's life constitute the stuff of legend" (Gates and Smith 119). But let us make further note that "in 1927 Wright migrated to Chicago, along with masses of other blacks who fled the racism, poverty, and lynch law of the rural South" (Gates and Smith 119). So, Wright migrated North himself. Unfortunately, "following the publication of *Black Boy,* Wright expatriated to Paris, where he remained until his premature death in 1960" (Gates and Smith 119). For clarity, it is unfortunate in the view of this thesis, that he died prematurely, not that he expatriated to Paris.

In Alice Walker's *the Third Life of Grange Copeland,* we see a prime example of the migratory tale when Grange tries to break the cycle of hopelessness by leaving the south and moving north. It did not work out for Grange. "He had come North expecting those streets paved with that gold, which had already become a cliché to the black people who had come before him

and knew better, but who still went down home every summer spreading the same old rumors" (Walker 191). He returned back home to Josie, Ruth, Mem, and Brownfield. "And so, he had come back to Baker County, because it was home, and to Josie, because she was the only person in the world who loved him, and because he needed even more money than he had to buy the rock of his refuge" (Walker 205). But, in the *Third Life of Grange Copeland* he seems to have learned from his choices, married Josie, bought the farm. "A farm far from town, off the main road, deep behind pines and oaks. He raised his own bread, fermented his own wine, cured his own meat. At last, he was free" (Walker 205). And together they raised Ruth as Brownfield, her father, was serving 7 years for killing Mem. The conflict within this family seems to dominate the theme of this novel as Grange ends up killing his own son Brownfield when he gets out of prison and ends up on the run, at the end – getting killed by the white authorities.

In conclusion, although these African American literary works were written in different time periods, we can see similarities regarding the abusive treatment and dehumanization of black women, the oppression of black men and women, whether in sharecropping, or living with lynch laws in those times, and the migratory tale of the African American being played out.

These are all common characteristics portrayed in different types of circumstances with the short story genre in Wright's 1938 collection and Alice Walker's novel in 1970. Richard Wright is the master at telling the realistic stories of oppression that the black race has suffered at the hands of the whites in this nation. "In terms of subject matter, *Uncle Tom's Children* reflects the diversity of sources upon which Wright drew throughout his career in constructing his fiction. Not only did he mine his own firsthand knowledge of the South for material, but he also incorporated information gathered from his journalistic research" (Yarborough xxi). His works created an immediate sensation. "With regard to style, narrative strategies, and themes, *Uncle*

Tom's Children demonstrates Wright's voracious assimilation of a wide range of literary influences" (Yarborough xxi).

Similarly, Alice Walker "remains what she has been for more than forty years: a gifted and prolific writer, a bold thinker, and a woman who is determined to confront and embrace the contradictions of her life and the paradoxes of our time" (Gates and Smith 1179). Alice Walker is still living today and is an American novelist, short story writer, poet, and social activist. She wrote the novel *The Color Purple* for which she won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. She remains one of the most gifted writers of our times. In her own words:

> I believe in the soul. Furthermore, I believe it is prompt accountability for one's choices, a willing acceptance of responsibility of one's thoughts, behavior and actions, that makes it powerful. The white man's oppression of me will never excuse my oppression of you, whether you are man, woman, child, animal or tree, because the self that I prize refuses to be owned by him. Or by anyone. (Walker 318)

This thesis considers the wise words of Alice Walker in the year 2021. It seems there is still racial oppression in the form of systemic racism. There is still the control of the world by the rich and white of the world. Our previous president, constantly got away with racial slurs, stirring up divisions; getting away with comments toward women of color as he went about undoing the progress that we have made in the last ten years or more. Why are the prisons full of just black men – or the largest portion? It appalls me that it has been so long since these things existed, yet this country still has so far to go for racial and sexual equality.

This thesis now turns its attention to the unifying concept of overcoming marginalization in Rushdie's postcolonial novel and his use of magic realism in order to depict the destruction of

the decolonization of India after British Colonialism. As Hart and Goldie note, “Postcolonial literature often addresses the problems and consequences of the decolonization of a country, especially questions relating to the political and cultural independence of formerly subjugated people, and themes such as racialism and colonialism” (Hart and Goldie, 155). This relates the racialism and oppression examined in the previous two chapters with Rushdie’s postcolonial depiction of India’s break from the hegemony of British control.

Chapter 4: The Postcolonial Search for Identity in India as seen in Salman Rushdie's Transnational Novel, *Midnight's Children*

Salman Rushdie wrote *Midnight's Children* in 1981. This Booker Prize winning novel of transnational literature tells the story of Saleem Sinai and his family's history from within the framework of India's transition from Colonialism to independence from British Imperialism which ended in 1947 and the partition of India.

More specifically, it was August 15, 1947 and Rushdie uses that date to center this novel from the point of view of the main character, Saleem Sinai, who was born at midnight on the same date as India's Independence along with 1000 other children, all born with special powers and referred to as the children of midnight. Having been born at the stroke of midnight, Saleem is the most powerful of the children, and leads us along the journey of his life in postcolonial India.

Although fiction, this novel is an allegorical depiction of postcolonial India presented against an historical and political background. It touches on and is centered around major issues of the politics and a myriad of issues in the history of modern India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. These issues of India, a nation in possession of nearly a thousand different languages, millions of people, multiple classes and castes, and dozens of accepted religious views, set the background for this transnational novel.

Saleem, our main character, the central figure representing the children of midnight, born on that fantastic eve of freedom from British rule, and blessed with the powers of telepathy and an uncanny sense of smell, narrates most of the story to his wife, Padma. In fact, Rushdie uses the life of Saleem to explore Indian postcolonial experience from many angles, factually and

fictionally. As Saleem tells Padma, and us, the readers, "All over the new India, the dream we all shared, children were being born who were only partially the offspring of their parents – the children of midnight were also the children *of the time*: fathered, you understand, by history. It can happen. Especially in a country which is itself a sort of dream" (Rushdie 118).

In fact, this novel was not written by Rushdie as "historical fact" but rather as a magic realism genre novel with a mix of supernatural events and real history. Due to the fantastical nature of the magical realism and his oral method of delivery to Padma, Saleem's devoted caretaker and future wife, the novel is not wholly factual in relation to Indian politics, but holds up well as a magically realistic story, well-written, deep, dense in detail and still tied to the historical allegory which forms the frame for Saleem's life's story.

As noted by Florence Labaune-Demeule, "*Midnight's Children,* which stands half-way between the genre of the Eastern tale based on the Eastern oral tradition on the one hand, relies on magic realism and hybridity as elements which make stylistic devices melt and fuse in a literary crucible thanks to imagination and fantasy" (Grant qtd in Labaune-Demeule 113). Furthermore, as posited by Mohsin Khan, "He [Rushdie] employs true historical facts by using magic realism to make history appear fantasy while the narrative is oscillating between fact and fantasy" (Khan, et. al. 328). And, as written by Oindrila Mukherjee:

> The magical realist novel is characterized by a whirl of language and a baroque accumulation of concrete and sensory detail. It is informed with deep self-conscious postcolonial irony that weaves together multiple narrative strands, and layers the political with the personal, the natural with the supernatural. (Mukherjee)

So, we see by the above notions of these critics that Rushdie's use of magic realism was an effective means of creating the atmosphere from which to tell his story of history from the framework of his character Saleem, or, you might say, the story of Saleem's life through the framework of the postcolonial history of India.

This chapter explores examples of Rushdie's multiple uses of magic realism from the purchase of the Englishman Methwold's home by his parents and its postcolonial influence, to the fragmentation of Saleem's memory tied to his heritage through his grandfather, to the relationships and powers of the children of midnight. In addition, this thesis examines, throughout this chapter, the parallel of Saleem's life with the history of India's independence and this country's striving to overcome the marginalization imposed by British rule.

First of all, when Saleem's parents decide to buy a villa from William Methwold a few months before Saleem is born, "Methwold's estate was sold on two conditions: that the houses be bought complete with every last thing in them, that the entire contents be retained by the new owners; and that the actual transfer should not take place until midnight on August 15th" (Rushdie 95).

Methwold, first of all, represents the long-term effects of British Imperialism on India. Symbolically, he represents the British Raj and is eager to leave as the nation has gained its independence. Methwold expresses the British superiority to Ahmad Sinai: "Hundreds of years of decent government, then suddenly, up and off. You'll admit we weren't all bad: built your roads, schools, railway trains, parliamentary system, all worthwhile things" (Rushdie 96).

Methwold seems to brag about the sensibility of the British who after subjugating a whole nation to political colonialism, claimed to be the saviors of the subcontinent paving way for years of political domination. Rushdie also attributes metaphorically the violence at

independence to Methwold in a subtle way. His hair was perfectly parted down the middle, symbolically representing a vision of India unified and equally divided. Using the character of Methwold, Rushdie mixes history and magic realism to show the lasting effects of colonialism on India.

Like Saleem being the illegitimate son of Methwold (we find out), as he was switched at birth with Shiva, whose mother had an affair with Methwold, the nation of India is the illegitimate offspring of the English. Many of the children of midnight were born illegitimate with this dual lineage. Through this means, Rushdie shows that the postcolonial pattern will continue to delay real Indian democracy and progress until there is a real change in India. As Samir Dayal put it. "For the rest of their lives, the 'new owners' of the Methwold estate would struggle to shake off the now invisible, now oppressively visible, burden of the colonial 'owner.' The story told by Rushdie's narrator is a counternarrative to that strange allegory, a rejection of debilitating anxiety about the colonizer's influence" (Dayal 431).

Next, we see through Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz, from whom Saleem inherited his large nose and uncanny sense of smell, Saleem's circular and fragmented style of narration that Rushdie develops from the story of how his grandfather met his wife, Naseem. As stated by Khan (and others) in their essay:

> His grandfather being a trained medical practitioner was once invited to treat a young girl, but he was not allowed to examine the girl fully, instead the girl's female attendants held a sheet with a small hole in it. And the doctor was supposed to examine the patient through the hole. This is how his grandfather gains partial access to the girl's body. The whole episode covertly indicates the fragmentary image of India that Aadam Aziz has been carrying in his

> imagination. So, the hole in the sheet performs the role of a mediator between the patient and the doctor. The word 'hole' has been used symbolically on several occasions to clear out in the novel present situations which demand multiple interpretations. (Khan, et. al. 326)

Saleem relates the role of his fragmented memories similar to this fragmentary image that Rushdie presented of his grandfather and grandmother's meeting described so well above, "But now Padma says mildly, 'What date was it?' And, without thinking, I answer: 'Sometime in the spring.' And then it occurs to me that I have made another error – that the election of 1957 took place before, and not after, my tenth birthday; but although I have racked my brains, my memory refuses, stubbornly, to alter the sequence of events" (Rushdie 222).

Furthermore, regarding Saleem's grandfather, he relates his grandfather's death with the death of Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister, and sees it as his own fault lending credence to the magical realism Rushdie creates when Saleem says, "And my grandfather was the founder of my family, and my fate was linked by my birthday to that of the nation, and the father of the nation was Nehru. Nehru's death: can I avoid the conclusion that that, too, was all my fault?" (Rushdie 279). This is a brilliant example of Rushdie's use of magic realism in Saleem's linking of his life and heritage to the nation of India as a result of his birthday.

In addition, this chapter explores not only some of the other children of midnight and the power Saleem has of telepathy which he uses to bring them all together, but also some of the other magical elements Rushdie includes, pointed out by Anjali Roy:

> Saleem's gargantuan nose, the 1,001 children born on the midnight of August 15, 1947, … the boatman Tai who claims to have witnessed Mughal rule, the whore who claims to be 512 years old, Saleem's aunt who claims to see ghosts

everywhere, … and the 10,000 women who are in love with Shiva. (Roy 337)

First, consider Shiva. As Rachel Miller puts it:

> Shiva is undoubtedly Saleem's 'double' … Although Shiva, for the most part, is Saleem's counterpart (violent while Saleem is passive, Hindu while Saleem is Muslim, poor while Saleem is rich), their crossed lives due to their switching at birth forces the pair to act as one another's 'double'. (Miller 4)

As Saleem finds out, "his own continued privilege is predicated upon the disinheritance of Shiva, his *alter-ego* and arch-rival. Even though Saleem desperately seeks to avoid Shiva, it would seem that the enmity between the two of them is inevitable" (Rege 357).

Furthermore, Parvati-the-witch, another of the children of midnight, is Saleem's closest ally as a child and later becomes his wife. Despite her powers, she is unable to make Saleem fall in love with her and, as a result, embarks on an affair with Shiva that results in a child. In the Hindu religion, Parvati is the consort of Shiva. As explained by Rege:

> Still, Parvati-the-witch, who always believed in Saleem, remains open to the possibility of reconciliation. Even as Saleem dreads the return of Shiva, the principle of destruction, Parvati is able to see him as a principle of Creation as well; after all, he is the father of her child- Saleem's son-who-is-not-his-son-and the father of thousands more throughout the land. (358)

Through the relationships of the children of midnight, we see that "Rushdie's use of 'magical realism' is intimately tied to the concept of conflicting tensions between colonizing and colonized subjects" (Buchholz 333). Furthermore, "Saleem struggles to tell his story on his own terms. His narrative includes the history of his grandparents and parents, a supernatural connection to other children born between the hours of midnight and one that morning, and a

rivalry with another midnight's child who rightfully should have lived Saleem's life [Shiva]" (Buchholz 333). As Miller notes:

> Both characters [Shiva and Saleem] are chained to India's independence and to the children of midnight… Shiva and Saleem have an intense hatred for one another, neither one wishing to exist in the image of the other. For each of them, their double exists as something strange and familiar. They are connected, yet entirely separate…The discomforting uncanniness at the heart of the duo is reminiscent of the 'terror' driven by imperialist forces that attempted to forge 'doubles' of themselves within the lands they colonized. Furthermore, Saleem is a 'double' of postcolonial India itself. (Miller 8)

As Miller further posits. "The uncanniness they represent is discomforting, and reminds of the discomforting, recurrent psychological struggles for the formerly colonized" (Miller 8). She also notes in her essay "Colonial Trauma in Márquez and Rushdie's Magical Realism," that "Silence, solitude, and darkness are important factors in Márquez and Rushdie's portrayal of the trauma that haunts post- coloniality" (Miller 9). Additionally, noting that:

> Silence has a much deeper and much more intrinsic role in postcolonial expression, and particularly in magic realism…In the same way that magic and realism remain suspended, neither one managing to integrate successfully with the other, so too, the postcolonial present continues in a 'locked dialectic' with the trauma (the repetitive haunting) of the colonial past. (Miller 9)

For example, "Saleem's grandmother similarly embarks on a three-year campaign of silence. The silent relationship of Nadir and Mumtaz beneath the floorboards again reiterated notions of silence" (Miller 9). This gives us greater insight into why Rushdie uses magical

realism in the way that he does with the relationships he builds with the characters of this story: Saleem and Shiva, Naseem and Aadam, Nadir and Mumtaz.

Also, as noted earlier, in this vibrant novel, are a variety of historical and political issues portrayed through the lives of the children of midnight, especially through the eyes of Saleem, our protagonist, and his family. As indicated by Buchholz:

> All the while, the events of his life and the life of his family are intricately meshed with those of India's history, from the Amritsar massacre of 1919, to the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965, and the ensuing administration of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her controversial decision to exercise unilateral power in the mid 1970's by calling an Indian state of emergency. (Buchholz 333)

Furthermore, we can see that, as Rege points out:

> *Midnight's Children* mocks its own melodrama but makes literary fireworks out of events which persistently refuse 'to remain life-sized.' Like India, Saleem Sinai finds himself cracking up in tiny pieces, like the pieces of his grandmother that his grandfather fell in love with and the pieces of his father that his mother tried to love; but like Partition, it seems, his eventual fragmentation is inevitable, just as his grandfather never succeeds in seeing his wife whole and his mother is never able to love her husband wholly. The urge of this work is to resist (however vainly) fragmentation and compartmentalization, providing a strong contrary current of inclusiveness… In this dynamic polarization lies the explosive success of the novel – and perhaps, also, Saleem's ultimate fate. (Rege 363)

As Miller concurs, “Throughout his exposition, Saleem possesses the growing feeling that he is disintegrating, and thus concludes his narrative by prophesying his own impending death, ‘reducing me to specks of voiceless dust’” (Rushdie 463 qtd by Miller 333).

In conclusion, Rushdie’s use of magic realism in this postcolonial transnational novel of India’s release from British hold and marginalization ranks with the works of other magic realistic authors like Latin American writers: Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, Isabel Allende, and the Czech writer, Milan Kundera, and others, who also used this strategy of magic realism in their fiction. Although, as noted in a definition of magic realism from the Encyclopedia Britannica:

> Magic realism is a chiefly Latin-American narrative strategy that is characterized by the matter-of-fact inclusion of fantastic or mythical elements into seemingly realistic fiction…. Some scholars have posited that magic realism is a natural outcome of postcolonial writing, which must make sense of at least two separate realities—the reality of the conquerors as well as that of the conquered. (Encyclopedia Britannica)

Rushdie’s use of magic realism blended fantastical elements that were accepted matter-of-factly as were the real elements of history and of Saleem’s life. *Midnight’s Children* was a dense book replete with Rushdie’s use of metaphor and symbols such as: spittoons, big noses, pickles, mercurochrome, and others, like Wee Willie Winkie’s accordion and wife, Vanita (Saleem’s real mother who died in childbirth), revolution (as perceived by Mary Pereira, who switched Saleem and Shiva at birth), Tai, the old boatman who ferries people across the Lakes of Kashmir, etc. All of these elements included by Rushdie serve to give us a glimpse of Indian Independence with a combination of magical realism and historical fiction. Rushdie, himself

considered both British and Indian, had the perfect background to produce such a profound novel composed of such disparate ideas and scenarios to tell this tale effectively, challenging the narratives expounded during the colonial era.

Chapter 5: Going Forward

In conclusion, as marginalization, oppression, colonialism, and now, systemic racism, may seem distant or foreign concepts to those not affected, they are far too real in this increasingly globalized society of ours to disregard. As the great Dr. Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. stated in his Nobel Peace Prize Lecture of 1964 regarding racial injustice and colonialism and not only its prevalence in the United States, but also throughout the world, "That period, the era of colonialism, is at an end. East is meeting West. The earth is being redistributed" (King's Nobel Price lecture). He was a man gone too soon, and well aware of the struggles of the marginalized. King emphasized that "mankind's survival is dependent upon man's ability to solve the problems of racial injustice, poverty, and war; the solutions of these problems are, in turn, dependent upon man squaring his moral progress with his scientific progress and learning the practical art of living in harmony" (King's Nobel Prize lecture).

We must all learn to live with each other. It is our moral responsibility as human beings to resolve these major issues. And, although King's speech was written in 1964, it seems we have made some progress, but it appears that we have so much further to go. Sadly, the powers in the U.S. government seem to be backsliding in many ways regarding racial injustice and outright systemic racism with the highly prevalent killings of unarmed young African American men such as George Floyd, and women, such as Breonna Taylor; innocent youth gunned down by our police for nothing. This cannot be tolerated.

The aim of this thesis in sharing examples of the power of literacy and more specifically, multicultural, and transnational literature, in overcoming marginalization and gaining voice and identity for the oppressed and ignored, is an attempt to empower our educators to tell history as it was – not the white-washed versions of western society. As Ibram X. Kendi notes in his *New*

York Times article, "An Antiracist Reading List," providing us with "books to help America transcend its racist heritage":

> To build a nation of equal opportunity for everyone, we need to dismantle this spurious legacy of our common upbringing. One of the best ways to do this is by reading books. Not books that reinforce old ideas about who we think we are, what we think America is, what we think racism is. Instead, we need to read books that are difficult or unorthodox, that don't go down easily. Books that force us to confront our self-serving beliefs and make us aware that 'I'm not racist' is a slogan of denial. (Kendi)

Going forward, we must educate our youth, of all colors and ethnicities, to the realities of racism and colonialism, poverty, and war. We must address equality and immigration fairly. With frightened, fatigued, and starving Guatemalan and Honduran refugees at our Mexican border scratching to get away from oppression and hunger and wars fought for the benefit of the rich military industrial complex to the detriment of the poor and innocent (so-called collateral damage), we must turn the massive military budgets to healthcare, food, and medicine for all equally and to achieving peace among our neighbors; nations such as Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Yemen, Afghanistan, Venezuela, among many others. Reparations for our brutal slavery of the African American should begin with free education for all of their descendants.

Education is the key, as noted by the challenge of the organization, Teach For America:

> No single solution will bring an equitable and excellent education to every child. Although we look to education to help children overcome obstacles like systemic racism and poverty, our school system was not designed for today's children who count on school to access opportunity in America. But people designed this

> system, and so people can reimagine and rebuild it to enable all children to reach their full potential. What will that take? It will take sustained leadership challenging the status quo from inside and outside the classroom. It will take a broad and diverse coalition—educators, advocates, entrepreneurs, policymakers, community members—fighting for the aspirations of children and their families by pushing for systems change. (TeachForAmerica)

As depicted in this thesis, the oppressed and marginalized have successfully utilized the power of literacy and literature as tools in gaining equality, voice, and dignity. Our nation must continue on this path of education and the study of multicultural and transnational literature until true equality and freedom for all of our people in this country and in this world is achieved. In addition, although this thesis has only touched on the lives and literature of five authors, there are thousands of stories of the oppressed that have not been told that are just as powerful and should be shared and become part of the canon of world literature moving forward to foster empathy and better educate our global population.

Studying literature such as this thesis depicts is very important from a global perspective. During slavery in America, we saw the obstacles faced by the colonized "others" like Douglass and Jacobs, who were prohibited by laws and slaveowners from learning to read. Despite being blocked from gaining literacy, they demonstrated powerful efforts to "decolonize" their minds in their fight for freedom. Unfortunately, not all slaves had the means or the strength to gain literacy, and, even after the Thirteenth Amendment, African Americans were denied equal access to jobs and education. Beginning with the Jim Crow period, oppression would continue to disenfranchise many African Americans until at least the 1960s when the civil rights era began. So, reparations are definitely justified because Jim Crow lasted too long in this country. The

chapters on the post-slavery literary choices in this thesis clearly show this. Richard Wright and Alice Walker, in their works, show us the sad repercussions of oppression, especially in the sharecropping system where blacks were not given adequate money or education. Globally, transnational works, like Rushdie's, are creatively written to expose the inequities of postcolonial systems. It is not a stretch to connect the threads between the experiences of the African American in the United States and the people of India who fought for and won independence from British rule.

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, I was not exposed to the slave narratives while growing up in the racist south, nor the literature of Richard Wright and Alice Walker. These works opened up my mind as I hope multicultural and transnational literature can help contribute to a more stable racial environment not only in this country, but globally. And, through the "power of transnational/global literature," as exhibited in the chapter on Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* all can be driven to the activism needed to combat hegemonic racism and overcome the marginalization of "others."

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