

**Violated Bodies:  
A Cross-Cultural Reading of the  
English-Language Fiction  
by Authors of South-Asian Origin**

**Roxana-Elisabeta Marinescu**

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**Introduction**

Contemporary society is defined and constantly redefined at the point of intersection of several concepts, by actively constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing its body: postmodernism, postfeminism (or rather gender studies, as they now take precedence, at the cross-roads between the different positions assumed by men –masculinity studies– and women – women’s studies), postsocialism, postcolonialism. Globalisation, the new communication era of fast information and IT channels, the global media power and the growth of cross-border systems of rapid knowledge exchange have clearly and definitely changed our understanding of the society we live in. The new world is among other things the world of multinational companies, of new trans-national forces, of political and military organisations, of global systems of telecommunications. The political decision to unite different states in larger groups (such as the European Union) is concurrent with other local movements towards decentralisation and devolution, leading to a regionalisation of nation-states. Massive movements of population take place in a world of internationalizing environmental and health issues. Today the crossing of physical borders (which creates economic and political migrants, refugees, immigrants of all kinds) happens at the same time with the individual or group conquest of cultural borders, and favours cultural exchange.

This cultural exchange could explain why we are witnessing a clear trend in the Romanian publishing houses' plans (more precisely this trend started around the year 2000) to be in line with the latest publications abroad, especially in the field of the novel. The English-language literary scene seems to be the one mostly favoured by these publishers, with an explanation in the educational and professional background of their main editors<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the authors of South-Asian origin writing in English have also been translated into Romanian, almost naturally following the trends in the international literature market.

Moreover, the explanation of the Romanian public's interest in the English-language novels by authors of South-Asian origin seems to be found in the fact that the Romanian context offers a perspective over the past which is similar to a certain extent to the South-Asian one, if we think of the Romanian "semi-colonisation" done in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by its Eastern imperial neighbour, The Soviet Union, under the claim of "liberation". This "semi-colonisation" implied the import of the ideological and political frameworks of the imperial aggressor, as well as its economic, social and cultural institutions and led to a violent change of historical direction. Also, the issues posed by the transition period in Romania (a political, economic, but also a cultural transition to a certain extent) seem to coincide up to a point with the ones visible in the South-Asian postcolonial context. The novels which describe it interest to a high degree both the cultural observers

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<sup>1</sup> The editors of the three publishing houses which published the translations of authors of South-Asian origin writing in English, Denisa Comănescu (former *Polirom* 2002-2005, now *Humanitas* since 2005), Bogdan Alexandru Stănescu, Anca Băicoianu (*Polirom*), and Livia Szasz (*Curtea Veche*), have a strong academic background in British and American literatures, as well as a constant interest in them.

and commentators of the international and of the Romanian markets, and the public at large. In this context Adrian Oțoiu's study "An exercise in Fictional Liminality" is relevant. In it, he seeks to draw a parallel between postcolonialism and postcommunism, based on the idea of liminality. Oțoiu argues that although the two have different ideologies and promote different types of rhetoric (the rhetoric of difference with postcolonialism and the one of sameness and egalitarianism with postcommunism), they intersect, exchange ideas and terminology and thus enrich "the effectiveness of their critical perceptions by widening their respective contexts". The result would be that "such cross-pollinations and theoretical hybridizations can benefit these two fields of reflection" (Oțoiu 91). Worth mentioning at this point is the research project entitled "Spațiul cultural românesc în perspectiva transatlantică. De la postcomunism la postaderare", which started in 2007 under the coordination of Dr. Rodica Mihăilă, with the Centre of American Studies, Department of Foreign Languages, the University of Bucharest. The aim of the project is to offer an interdisciplinary trans-Atlantic analysis of the Romanian cultural space dynamic from the postcolonial type marginality of postcommunism to the openness of post-accession global and transnational structures (Cf. Rodica Mihăilă, "Spațiul cultural românesc..."), with the identification of the American representation space as a significant one for the Romanian cultural identity in postcommunism. Although the general framework and the main theoretical concepts of the research proposals seem to coincide, the difference lies quite obviously in the identification of the American (rather than the British) cultural space to develop the analysis.

Apart for the parallelism between the Romanian and the South-Asian historical backgrounds, the discussions on the acceptance of multiculturalism and political correctness, and



also of promoting affirmative action as a balancing instrument of past inequalities, are extremely relevant in this country at the present moment. We should only think of the space taken by debates on these concepts in cultural media, but also in the symposiums and conferences proposed by Universities or other cultural bodies or non-governmental organisations, and we will see how many resources are gathered to address these issues, considered therefore relevant<sup>2</sup>. Theoretical books that deal with

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<sup>2</sup> I will mention only a few of the latter from the period 2006-2008:

- The Annual Conference of the English Department, the University of Bucharest: “Modernity: The Crisis Of Value And Judgement” (Bucharest, 1- 3 June 2006)
- The Bucharest University of Economics, The Annual Conference Of The English Department: „Teaching Foreign Languages In *The Global Village*” (Bucharest, 22-23 September 2006)
- Info Project International Center for Adult Education and Training: “Promoting KEY COMPETENCES in formal and nonformal education – a way to ensure professional and personal success in the European Knowledge Based Society” (Baia Mare, 25-27 May 2007)
- The Annual Conference of the English Department, the University of Bucharest: “Alterity and Identity: Geographies of the Mind” (Bucharest, 31 May – 2 June 2007)
- The University *Politehnica*, Bucharest: “Language, Culture and Civilisation at the Beginning of the IIIrd Millenium” (Bucharest, 7- 8 June 2007)
- Ovidius University, Constanța: “(Ex)Patriation” (Constanța, 20-22 September 2007)
- Faculty of Letters of Craiova, Department of British and American Studies and Faculty of Letters of Besançon, Laboratory “Littérature et Histoires des Pays de langues européennes” : “The 6th International Conference “Language, Literature and Cultural Policies – Obsessive Discourse” (Craiova, 25-27 October 2007)
- Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, the University of Bucharest: “Centrality and Marginality” (Bucharest, 26-27 October 2007)

these issues, both translations long overdue<sup>3</sup> or published immediately after the first edition<sup>4</sup>, and original ones written by Romanian authors<sup>5</sup>, have been published in Romania in the past few years, and opinions (sometimes polemical ones) have found a visible place in cultural media; they have crossed the border of academic debates and have become of interest for the general public. These books have created a special kind of movement of ideas and opened the intellectual market to new and controversial issues. Suffice it to mention the polemical public stands taken by two well known and intellectually solid publications (*Dilema Veche*<sup>6</sup> and *Observator Cultural*<sup>7</sup>) on

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- The Annual Conference of the English Department, the University of Bucharest: “Writing the Self: Modes of Self Portrayal in the Cultural Text” (Bucharest, 5-7 June 2008)

<sup>3</sup> Such translations include George Sorel *Reflexions sur la violence*, a text which appeared for the first time in 1908 and was published in Romanian in 2003, *Mythologies* by Roland Barthes, published in 1957 and in Romanian in 1997, or Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, published in 1951 and in Romanian in 2006.

<sup>4</sup> For example, to name just three, Fukuyama’s book *State - Building Governance and World Order in 21<sup>st</sup> Century* was published in Romanian in the same year (2004) as at Cornell University Press, Noam Chomsky’s *Imperial Ambitions*, published in the same year (2005) as in the US by Aviva Chomsky and David Barsamian, or Roger Scruton’s *The West and the Rest*, published in Romania in 2004 and at ISI Books in 2002

<sup>5</sup> Some of these books include Lucian Boia: *Mitul democrației* (2003) and *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească* (2002), Adrian Gavrilescu: *Noii precupeți* (2006), Sorin Adam Matei: *Boierii minții* (2004), Victor Neumann: *Neam, popor sau națiune* (2004), Horia Roman Patapievici: *Despre Idei și blocaje* (2007), Levente Salat: *Multiculturalismul liberal* (2001), Radu Surdulescu: *The Raping of Identity* (2006)

<sup>6</sup> To quote only one of these articles, Andrei Pleșu, one of the most prominent voices in the Romanian intelligentsia nowadays, writes about the dangers of multiculturalism; according to him, simply juxtaposing different mentalities in a common space will not automatically lead to social solidarity and fraternity, as the ethnic enclaves will not easily communicate with one another. On the contrary, states Pleșu, a minimal set of values

concepts and notions such as “multiculturalism”, “affirmative action”, “political correctness”, with a more conservative view supported by the former and a more liberal one by the latter.

The original translations of some of them appeared immediately after the novels’ first publication in Britain and were followed by second editions (sometimes hard copy ones), showing a real interest of the public and availability in purchasing more expensive editions of the same novel. The authors include of course the well-known and acclaimed Salman Rushdie, and the 2006 Man Booker Prize winner Kiran Desai, but also authors highly praised on the British literary scene, although not so widely read abroad, such as Hanif Kureishi, Hari Kunzru and Monica Ali<sup>8</sup>. The interviews with

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valid for all, will only protect them and put them in contact (Cf. Pleșu, “Multiculturalism”)

<sup>7</sup> In his turn, Victor Neumann supports the idea that the trans-cultural dialogue, as segregated multiculturalism (be it racial, ethnic, religious, or linguistic) is irrelevant; the most important role to play is held by intellectual elites (Cf. Neumann, “Multiculturalismul în analizele filozofice”)

<sup>8</sup> The greatest part of the English-language novels by authors of South-Asian origin translated into Romanian are by Salman Rushdie: *Rușinea*. Trad. Cornelia Bucur, Iași: Polirom, 2001, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition hard copy 2008, *Ultimul suspin al maurului*. Trad. Dana Crăciun. Iași: Polirom, 2002, *Harun și marea de povești*. Trad. Dana Crăciun. Iași: Polirom, 2003 2<sup>nd</sup> edition hard copy 2008, *Pământul de sub tălpile ei*. Trad. Antoaneta Ralian. Iași: Polirom, 2003, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition hard copy 2008, *Copiii din miez de noapte*. Trad. Radu Paraschivescu. Iași: Polirom, 2005, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition hard copy 2007, *Shalimar clovnul*. Trad. Dana Crăciun. Iași: Polirom, 2006, *Versetele Satanice*. Trad. Dana Crăciun. Iași: Polirom, 2007. Also the collections of essays *Orient, Occident*. Trad. Dana Crăciun. Iași: Polirom, 2005, *Dincolo de limite*. Trad. Petru Dulgheru. Iași: Polirom, 2006. By Hari Kunzru there are translations of his two novels: *Virusul*. Trad. Rareș Moldovan. Iași: Polirom, 2005 and *Iluzionistul*. Trad. Ileana Dinu. Iași: Polirom, 2006. The only novel written so far by Arundhati Roy was translated into Romanian: *Dumnezeul lucrurilor mărunte*. Trad. Luana Stoica. București: Humanitas, 2004. Hanif Kureishi was translated by Humanitas, with a collection of

the editors and translators<sup>9</sup>, as well as the reviews published in weekly cultural journals<sup>10</sup>, but also in daily newspapers<sup>11</sup> show the constant preoccupation of both the publishing houses to create the context conducive to a good reception of their

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short stories and two novels: *Intimitate și alte povestiri*. Trad Elena Ciocoiu. București: Humanitas, 2003, *Darul lui Gabriel*. Trad. Elena Ciocoiu. București: Humanitas, 2005, *Buddha din Suburbie*. Trad. Oana Avornicesei. București, Humanitas, 2007. Monica Ali has a translation of her novel *Brick Lane*. Trad. Ondine Cristina Dascalita, Sanda Aronescu București: Curtea Veche, 2006. The translations into Romanian include the 2006 Man Booker Prize winner Kiran Desai: *Moștenitoarea tărâmului pierdut*. Trad. Vali Florescu. Iași: Polirom, 2007 and *Zarvă în livada de guave*. Trad. Cătălina Necula. Iași: Polirom, 2008

<sup>9</sup> Two of the most extensive interviews were published in *Observator Cultural* nr. 152 (410) from 14-20 February 2008, and are with Bogdan-Alexandru Stănescu and Anca Băicoianu, editors of Polirom. In them, they both explain the reasons for choosing to publish *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie (one of the most interesting novels concerned with the issues of migration and identity formation, according to the second interview), and also the responses of Polirom and its management to the threats, mostly sent by e-mail, which followed the announced publication of the novel, which was to ignore them (Cf. Șimonca, “Privirea critică” and “Nu poți face teoria literaturii”)

<sup>10</sup> Among those we could name the debate in *Observator Cultural* nr. 152 (410) from 14-20 February 2008, which includes the articles “*Versetele satanice* între literatură și fundamentalism religios” by Ovidiu Șimonca, “Alb sau negru, nimic intermediar” by Claudia Postelnicescu, and “Ironizam. Cu o excepție” by Alexandru Hâncu. Whereas the first one focuses more on a literary analysis of the novel, underlying its merits, although mentioning the para-literary scandal surrounding the novel and its author since its first publication, in 1989 and the *fatwa* proclaimed on 14 February 1989 on Radio Teheran by Ayatollah Khomeini, the other two aim to explain for the Romanian public its circumstances and the arguments, as well as the consequences for the writer.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Silviu Lupescu, manager of Polirom critically comments on the reaction of the Romanian Orthodox Church, which protested against the publication of *The Satanic Verses* into Romanian and warns that a novel could be censored based on a Romanian law which is against universal human rights (Cf. Teodorescu, “Patriarhia blamează”)

publications, and also of the public, literary and general, to absorb these publications.

These international political, but mostly cultural and literary contexts, as well as a national and local openness created an important niche regarding the expected Romanian academic positions on issues such as national and ethnic identity, violence and Empire, hybridity from a postcolonial perspective. The cross-cultural reading I am proposing of the English-language novels by South-Asian authors takes into consideration the topic of “violated bodies” in order to argue for these novels’ importance on the British, South-Asian and Romanian intellectual markets. My selection of novels was done with one main content criterion in mind: their relevance for the chosen topic, and one temporal criterion: their publication after 1980, up to 2007, thus excluding a number of novels, otherwise valuable and important for the body of literature<sup>12</sup>. The cross-cultural dimension takes into account the influences that several cultures (especially their native one and the British and/or American ones) have had on the biographies of the writers under discussion and, consequently, on their work, as a result of their postcolonial experience. The multiple aspects of the interaction of these cultures and the ways in which the South-Asian authors writing in English transposed them in their novels represent a central point of my research. Moreover, the cross-cultural reading is completed to a certain

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<sup>12</sup> Two of the novels which appeared after 2007 were excluded from the analysis for the obvious reason of time pressure (actually they were shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2007). The novels are Indra Sinha’s *Animals’ People* and Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. One other novel, also excluded from my analysis for the same reason is worth mentioning here, for its author’s much appreciated writing style and the validity of its subject line for the demonstration (*Something to Tell You* by Hanif Kureishi).

extent by my own Romanian perspective, which is an additional angle from which the novels are examined.

The analysis seeks to examine the topic of the “body” and the multiple ways in which it has been violated in fiction, from a postcolonial perspective, with the use of the instruments of cultural studies and with a balanced gender view in mind. My hypothesis refers to a violation of the national and individual “body” of the colonised by the coloniser, within the logic of the imperial paradigm, which requests simultaneous imposition and acceptance of hegemonic roles in power relations. On the one hand different feminist theories (including of course liberal feminism and the subaltern theory) and on the other hand masculinity studies have been explored to underline the typical instances of violence for feminine, masculine and trans-gendered and hybrid bodies.

In my analysis, the “body” is the physical body of the characters in the narratives under discussion, but it is also metaphorically construed as the transgressed national body of the regions/countries/territorial units to be economically and politically re-invented by the British representatives of the Empire, while in postcolonial times the same national bodies attempt their own self re-invention, and while re-iterating the same process of violation this time against one another, they seem to be unable to escape the colonial project.

The same colonial project included a linguistic violation through the imposition of the English language over the so-called “local body of languages”; the postcolonial re-appropriation of English is done simultaneously with the official re-imposition of the local idioms. And it is through this very twisting of the imperial linguistic instrument of control that the “subaltern” learns to speak (in Spivak’s terms) for themselves. The first chapter, *Violated “Body of Language(s)”*. *The writers’ “voice”* makes extended use of the biographical

perspective and examines different incidents in the novelists' lives that are conducive to the conclusion of their connections with British culture and literature. Reclaimed by the corpus of this literature, studied in academia and awarded literary prizes, the novelists of South-Asian origin manage to invert the axis of the colonisation process and to disrupt the centrality of what could constitute the contemporary literary canon. Periphery brought to the foreground, marginal characters claiming their right to centre stage, identity formation and issues brought up by the migrant status, are only some of the topics that these writers' voice sing in unison. Together with offering them the floor and the (English) voice as concerns personal life experience, the historical perspective is also invoked to cast light upon some events in the claim that Britain has over some of these writers on the one hand, and in the reverse the claim they have on the English-language literature on the other hand. Using English completes the process of personal and national liberation from the Empire. Learning to speak, enriching the language of the colonisers with elements of the vernacular, and being heard in the language of the conqueror are interpreted as a final reverse conquest of the centre by the peripheral "other". While I aim to show the importance of the English language for the South-Asian authors and their literary career, the analysis is focused on its initial imposition on the subcontinent as a language of administration, education and culture. In colonial times, it was both an instrument of domination and control and a signifier of the imperial superior, but also of a local elite, which was created to be the intermediary between the colonisers and the colonised. Language then becomes a symbolic instrument of a reverse conquest.

Chapter two, *Raping the Mother Country*, deals with issues of national identity. It focuses on the national body

transgression by the imperial aggressor and starts from the definition of violence as an inescapable dimension of people's ordinary existence, with layers of meaning depending on the point of view of the actor towards an act of violence, which can sometimes be confusing (Nordstrom and Robben 1-7). The official discourse and the victims' stories need to be both explored in order to get not necessarily an objective view (as this is impossible), but several subjective ones. The victim's tale, together with its trauma, need to be included in the "Grand Narrative"<sup>13</sup> of the nation, although this grand narrative is obviously a changing process, rather than an immutable image, depending on the national project brought to the foreground in a certain time moment. Three novels by Salman Rushdie are explored to verify the creation of the South-Asian postcolonial national projects: *Midnight's Children*, which deals with the birth of the Indian state, *Shame*, which focuses on the formation of Pakistan (and to a certain extent of Bangladesh), and *Shalimar the Clown*, which analyses the dreams of national autonomy of the region of Kashmir. With the help of Benedict Anderson's theories from *Imagined Communities*, the national founding myths of the countries under discussion need to be explored both in the context of colonialism and of postcolonialism, as their multiple and controversial ancestry and the reality of their present time seem to lead to a blurred final image. As one of the characters in *Midnight's Children* says, "There are as many versions of India as there are Indians"

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<sup>13</sup> "Grand narrative" is commonly used as a synonym of "metanarrative", a term introduced by Jean-Francois Lyotard in his 1979 work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, which refers to the totalising, universal ideas about, and explanations of, historical events and evolution. Lyotard, as a postmodern thinker, regards metanarratives with scepticism (Cf. "Grand Narrative" and "Jean-Francois Lyotard")



(261), which can easily be applied to the other countries as well. Symbolic transgressions of the body of the mother country, both by the colonisers and by the different power groups in the region, as well as forging new national identities need to be analysed; the theoretical support of (among others) Arendt and Wieviorka (on violence), Foucault (on the body), Ali Behdad (on colonial narratives and the erotic) are helpful in the discussion of the three novels.

The analysis will move to the individual level in Chapter three, *Distorting the Individual's Ethnic Identity*, as the hybrids and “mimic men” of the Empire and the trans-national and cross-border identities of the post-imperial characters are both twisted images of multiple physical and symbolic aggressions. A double measure has to be used: on the one hand, I deal with the (in)famous Macaulay 1835 urge addressed to the Imperial conquerors to create the local elites able to support and augment their own presence and civilising role, and on the other hand with the so-called “dependency complex” in Fanon’s words, which made the aggression possible (Fanon 99). In the first part of this chapter, Homi Bhabha’s chapters from *The Location of Culture* “Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” and “DissemiNation: time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation” are used to verify their validity in the context of the novels *The Impressionist* by Hari Kunzru, *The Mimic Men* by V.S. Naipaul and *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie. The focus is on the versatile and chameleonic nature of a group of people chosen by the colonisers to be the local elites, the go-between themselves and the rest of the population, in Franz Fanon’s apt words, the “black skinned, white masked” people. Anglophilia as another type of more subtle mimicry and moral support for the aggressors is described in a number of novels, such as *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* by Salman Rushdie or

*The God of Small Things*, by Arundhati Roy, with characters taking their real or imaginary positive portraits of the English and the descriptions of the English space to at times laughable extremes, with sometimes the reverse mimicry and praise of the East present in some of the novels (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, *The Buddha of Suburbia*) with the same effect on the readers. The second part of this chapter aims to explore the condition of the migrant, and starts from the analysis of Homi Bhabha's *Introduction to The Location of Culture*, and his claim that the issue of culture nowadays must be raised in the slippery realm of the beyond. The analysis of the split identity of the migrant and its continuous violation, both in the context of their host and of their home cultures, is made on some of the migrant characters in *The Satanic Verses* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* by Salman Rushdie, and *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album* by Hanif Kureishi, while the disruptive act of migration is compared with that of marital union (marriage to the new culture and divorce of the old one). Both assimilation and resistance to assimilation, and the way they function in the British multicultural society are examined, as they are depicted in these novels.

The issue of violated gender, both in the context of emigration and in the context of the home culture(s), together with gender hybrids constitute the focus of Chapter four, *Violated Gender*. Gender analysis from a balanced perspective is necessary to bring a complete image of the multiple violations of the characters' personality in the English-language fiction by South-Asian authors. Thus, by acknowledging the fact that gender cannot be regarded as separated from other identity components, such as nationality, ethnicity, race, class, caste or social group, the postcolonial analysis of gender in these novels takes into account different specific attitudes related to the colonial past and to the migrant

present, re-questioning and re-positioning the characters' views on these subjects. I will choose the topic of marriage which seems to be a central one to most of the novels, to look at the passage it presupposes not only into another temporal context (from childhood into maturity), but also a spatial one (from periphery to the centre of the former Empire), and a cross-cultural one. The disruption marriage (be it traditional, thus arranged, or love marriage, which from another perspective is also ethnically, socially or racially mixed) brings to character formation is interesting as identity marker. Feminism and empowerment, emancipation and sisterhood, as well as the so-called Third World women's right to speak for themselves will be analysed in relation to a series of novels, among which *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali or *Life Isn't all Ha Ha Hee Hee* by Mira Syal, *Transmission* and *Looking for Maya* by Atima Srivastava, *Fasting, Feasting* by Anita Desai or *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth. At the same time, the masculinity theories with the "new man" and "laddism", taking precedence over the already old-fashioned "man as nurturer" theories of the 1980s, find their correspondence in some of the novels under discussion. In order to analyse mixed marriages (for example in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy), of the utmost importance is Said's theory of the exotic and therefore desirable "Other", which in these novels can work both ways: while the British are attracted by the mysteries of the Orient and lured by its hidden beauties, the Asians are set to conquer the West and its feminine treasures, in a reverse "brown man's burden" exploit (as for example in *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie, *The Impressionist* by Hari Kunzru or *The Buddha of Suburbia* by Hanif Kureishi). Starting from Judith Butler's performative gender theory I aim to analyse how the novels by South-Asian authors include gender hybridity into

their narratives, and how for example cross-sexuality or trans-sexuality are represented.

The last two chapters seek to describe and explain the physical and symbolic violation at the level of individual bodies in the English-language novels by authors of South-Asian origin. Thus, whereas Chapter five deals with state and institutional aggressions (*State and Institutional Violence. Symbolic and Physical Forms*), Chapter six moves to the kind of violence some of the characters apply to the “other” and to the “self” (*The Violated Other and Self-Inflicted Violence*). The violated history of the region is discussed both in the colonial and postcolonial contexts, with a helping hand from cultural anthropology and the studies made to check the impact Partition or the Emergency period had on the lives and bodies of people (as described in some of the novels, for example in *Midnight’s Children* by Salman Rushdie). Consequently, Chapter five takes into consideration instances of violated history and their symbolic interpretation in some of the novels, as well as the impact this had on people’s bodies and the ways this was mirrored in some of the novels. Also I will analyse the way history is rendered in history books (including the British contemporary ones) and the way this is depicted in the novels, as well as the institution of public schools as formative of a colonial administrative and military elite, and the census as the subjective instrument of labelling the locals and placing them under clear-cut and inescapable categories (*The Impressionist* by Hari Kunzru, *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai or *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali). In terms of specific institutional body violations I aim to examine rape, *pardah*, wearing of the *burqua*, *sutee*, acid burns, wife battering, re-naming, as feminine experiences, and circumcision and sterilisation as typically masculine ones, as well as the connection between these experiences and their literary rendering.

Racism (in *The Black Album* by Hanif Kureishi, *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie, among others), together with different types of murders (political or crimes of passion), disease and different accidents as instances of violence against the other, and different forms of violence against the self, represented by suicide, from lack of food (Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* or Roy's *The God of Small Things*, among others), speaking (*Midnight's Children* or *The Buddha of Suburbia*, for example), washing (*Midnight's Children*), sex (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet*) to the more direct ones by hanging or shooting (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, *Shame* by Salman Rushdie) are the focus of Chapter six, *The Violated Other and Self-Inflicted Violence*. The response to this type of violence, symbolic killings (*Shalimar the Clown* or *Shame* by Salman Rushdie), and the reverse aggression of the dead over the living (*Midnight's Children*) are also present, with the general impression that violence in its different forms is clearly prevalent.

In order to examine the topic of the violated body I have explored an extended bibliography. Besides a greater number of novels than the ones directly discussed (in order to offer a larger context of study and a better understanding of the authors' literary and cultural aims), I also looked at some of the authors' non-fiction products, collections of essays, autobiographical materials, different articles published in literary journals but also in daily newspapers. Some of the authors' personal websites and/or blogs offer an interesting insight into their views on different issues of contemporary interest, but also on their understanding of the relationship they should have with their readership, be it academic or general.

In terms of the theoretical framework of my analysis I start from a number of landmarks in the field of cultural studies, which have been published since the 1980s up to the

present, and try to see how well they can be applied on my hypothesis of the violated personal and national bodies, as portrayed in the English-language fiction by South-Asian authors. Among them, I will mention here Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, on which I base the imagining of the nation and the founding myths of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Kashmir, explored in Chapter two, and Homi Bhabha's constant preoccupation with hybridity and the situation of the migrant for Chapters three and four (in *Location of Culture, Nation and Narration*, but also in a number of articles). Edward's Said's *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* clearly indicated the route for the analysis of mixed marriages in Chapter three, whereas Madan Sarup's ideas on colonialism and postcolonialism are referred to throughout. Criticism on the subject also includes a number of essays and articles from collective volumes or anthologies, and is instrumental in presenting an in-depth analysis of different aspects of postcolonialism I am interested in. For example, *Violence, Identity and Self-Determination*, *Violence and Subjectivity*, together with *The Body. Classic and Contemporary Readings* offer insights into the issues of violence and the body, which are staples in my demonstration. Ali Behdad's analysis of the erotic practices under colonialism as violent rituals aiming to dissolve the victims' identity, as well as the demonstration of the importance of taking into consideration the victim's tale in the accounts of institutional violence, in order to offer other alternatives to the official narrative, as made by Peter Van Der Veer in *Violence, Identity and Self-Determination* were starting points in my examination of the violence and confusion which accompanied national myth formation. The concepts of Nordstrom and Robben in the *Introduction to Fieldwork Under Fire. Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival*, of violence inherent in people's lives and therefore inescapable, as

well as the ones of Das and Kleinman of the site of violence as the space of the ordinary in "The Act of Witnessing. Violence, Poisonous Knowledge, and Subjectivity". (*Violence and Subjectivity*) helped me in my analysis of historic and symbolic violence over the national body. Also extremely important is De Vries and Weber's repositioning of violence in the contemporary world, no longer an act perpetrated by others, but increasingly practiced in the name of self-determination ("Introduction" to *Violence, Identity and Self-Determination*). Trauma, as examined by Kai Erikson in connection with the victim's narrative in the context of their community in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* fits my demonstration of how the postcolonial world deals with aspects of its violent past. For the gender theme, I will only mention here Judith Butler's "performative gender" theory, together with the studies on masculinity by Robert Bly or John Beynon, which set the framework for the discussion of gendered personal and institutional violence.

Bearing in mind these international and Romanian contexts I have presented so far, my primary aims are to offer a personal reading of the novels under discussion from a postcolonial cross-cultural perspective, and thus to contribute together with other papers in the area of postcolonial studies in Romania to a better understanding and a wider circulation of English-language South-Asian novels in our country, both in the academic space and in the cultural one.