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*Diana Câmpan, Gabriela Chiciudean, Rodica Chira, Sonia Elvireanu,
Maria-Ana Tupan*

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Colonized or Self-Colonizer: A Generational Journey Through Independence in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

Cassandra Galentine

Northern Arizona University, USA

Abstract

The British Raj was established in India by Queen Victoria in 1858, and Britain remained the dominant power structure until Indian Independence in 1947. Though many novels as well as works of critical scholarship attempt to capture elements of the British Empire's presence in India and its psychological effects on the citizens of India, less attention has been paid to the comparison of E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* to Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. When examining these two texts closely, it becomes clear that Forster's novel exists as a narrative of a single moment of British Imperialism, whereas Roy's novel presents a multigenerational approach to describing effects of the British Empire. These different perspectives and historical contexts affect the characters' ability to transcend the continuous cycle of colonizer turned colonized. The juxtaposition of a colonial text composed by an English author with a postcolonial text written by an Indian author within the context of Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, provides an illuminating perspective on the evolution of the intertwined colonizer/colonized relationship and displays the potential to mitigate the lingering psychological effects of imperialism.

[**Key Words:** Albert Memmi, colonizer, colonized, postcolonialism, British Empire]

Introduction

Both *A Passage to India* and *The God of Small Things* were written about the British Empire's presence in India and share similar psychological themes throughout. However, the two novels develop representations of the colonizer and the colonized through strikingly different narrative backgrounds and forms. E.M. Forster's approach to a critique of imperialism comes from a colonial, British perspective, and addresses one brief period of time in the history of Anglo-India, whereas Roy's text approaches the subject from a postcolonial, multi-generational narrative form. This fundamental difference between

the two authors creates many crucial points of variance in the expression of the colonizer/colonized relationship when placed in comparison postcolonially. This comparison exposes the psychological effects of colonialism which are illuminated by the reactions of the Indian characters in each novel—in particular, Dr. Aziz, and the Nawab Bahadur from Forster's text, and Pappachi, Baby Kochamma, Ammu, Rahel, and Estha from Roy's text—to their Western colonizers and their ability or lack thereof to blend British and Indian identity.

A. Memmi: The “mythical portrait of the colonized”

To better understand the terms of comparison, it is useful to first establish the concept of the colonizer and colonized. French-Tunisian author Albert Memmi, in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, briefly addresses his own relationship with the colonization of Tunisia. His deeply personal experience with colonialism lends credibility to his text, but he then applies his experience to create a description of imperialism and its effects in general terms. Broadening the scope allows Memmi’s text to be applied to all colonial legacies beyond Tunisia. Memmi’s text is useful when assessing the effects of British rule in India within Forster’s and Roy’s novels. Crucial to such an examination is Memmi’s description of the “colonized” and their reaction to a long history of colonization.

In describing the colonized, Memmi argues that much of the colonized identity is generated by the colonizer. This is what he describes as the “mythical portrait of the colonized,” to which he devotes an entire chapter (Memmi 80-89)¹ The identity that the colonizer imposes upon the colonized is the most crucial part of colonization because the threat of the colonizer and their imposed identity on the colonized results in “a certain adherence of the colonized to colonization” (88). Though this is an integral part of successful colonization, Memmi does not believe it to be the final step in the process. He states that

It is not enough for the colonized to be a slave, he must also accept this role. The bond between colonizer and colonized is thus destructive and creative. It destroys and re-creates the two partners of colonization into colonizer and colonized ... Just as the colonizer is tempted to

accept his part, the colonized is forced to accept being colonized (89).

Thus, Memmi suggests that the colonized must identify with the colonizer at some point. This stage is what he considers to be the final act of the colonized preceding revolt. The colonized’s acceptance of colonization is reflected through several characters in *A Passage to India* and *The God of Small Things*. Memmi’s philosophy, when applied to these characters, allows for a historical, critical approach to exploring the overarching legacy of colonialism, and whether the Indian characters from either text successfully reconcile both British and Indian facets of culture into their own personal identities, or if, in the process, the colonized characters inevitably identify with the colonizer as Memmi predicts.

B. Forster, Roy and Mirror Civilizations

Both Forster and Roy’s Indian characters represent facets of Memmi’s critical text. However, Memmi’s description of the colonized’s affinity for the colonizer, is more easily identifiable in Roy’s text because the novel was written postcolonially and includes three generations of characters that bridge the gap of Indian independence. *A Passage to India* still resonates strongly with Memmi’s text, but was published in 1924, twenty-three years before India’s independence from the British Empire. This difference in historical context as well as the “moment in time” nature of Forster’s book vs. the “generational” nature of Roy’s, shows individuals within the nation of India in two different stages of colonial identity. *The God of Small Things* demonstrates a nation that consists of a blended conglomeration of colonizer and colonized. Roy accomplishes this by incorporating voices of a pre-independence generation, an independence generation, and a post-independence generation within her text. Contrastingly, Forster’s novel captures the British Empire and the Indian people

¹ Memmi’s text also devotes separate chapters to detailed definitions of ‘the colonizer who refuses’ and the ‘colonizer who accepts’ in his text.

through the European gaze and sets up a starker dichotomy of colonizer and colonized.

A Passage to India, though focused on an acute moment in history, maintains a critique of the British Empire throughout. The most prominent character and protagonist of the novel, Dr. Aziz exists as a colonized subject. His close friendship with Cyril Fielding and his eagerness to please his supposed friends Mrs. Moore and Adela is what first forms his relationship as the colonized with the colonizer. Dr. Aziz ingratiates himself with Mrs. Moore and Adela in his constant attempts to fulfil their wish to see “the real India.” Throughout the entire beginning of the novel, Aziz’s goal is to “unlock his country for her” (Forster 73). Though he is still proud of his country, Aziz attempts close friendship with Fielding, Mrs. Moore, and Adela. Though Aziz becomes less of an Anglophile as the novel progresses, particularly after Adela’s rape accusation, he can be seen desiring that which is English throughout the first half of the novel.

When associating with English guests in a building of British style, “Aziz thought of his bungalow with horror. It was a detestable shanty near a low bazaar ... I [Aziz] wish I lived here” says Aziz when examining the structure “with little rooms, now Europeanized ...” (73-4). Though he lives comfortably as an Indian man in India, he covets the British orderliness and is embarrassed by his own home. He displays Memmi’s theory that “Now the colonized’s institutions are dead or petrified. He [the colonized] scarcely believes in those which continue to show some signs of life and daily confirms their ineffectiveness. He often becomes ashamed of these institutions ...” (Memmi 103). Dr. Aziz is ashamed of his own home when he compares it to British orderly style despite the fact that Indian architecture is one of the only remaining signs of life for Indian identity.

Not only is Aziz’s material passion for what is British highlighted in the novel, his intense desire for the friendship of Mrs. Moore is also alarming. He seeks the colonizer’s approval and states that “She [Mrs. Moore] was perfect as always, his dear Mrs. Moore ... There was nothing he would not do for her. He would die to make her happy” (Forster 145). Dr. Aziz’s veneration of British architectural style and his intense need to please Mrs. Moore demonstrates Memmi’s idea of the colonized’s movement toward identifying with the colonizer. Though Dr. Aziz does seem quite taken with the English, he still maintains doubts about their presence and their opinion of India. Aziz feels that “When his spirits were up he felt that the English are a comic institution, and he enjoyed being misunderstood by them. But it was an amusement of the emotions and nerves, which an accident or the passage of time might destroy; it was apart from the fundamental gaiety that he reached when he was with those whom he trusted” (56). This suggests that Aziz’s affinity for the English is not result of real friendship and trust of them, but rather a nervous reaction to their imperial might. This tenuous relationship between Aziz and the Englishmen/women he encounters in the text foreshadows the marring of his identity and his distancing from the English after Adela’s rape accusation.

The most prominent friendship that is destroyed in Forster’s text is that between Aziz and Fielding. Despite Fielding’s tolerant nature and desire to maintain his friendship with Dr. Aziz, the relationship is severed in the end of the book. Aziz expresses his belief that a friendship between the two of them would only be possible if the British Empire withdrew from India. Scholar, Ahmad Baker expands on the dissolution of Fielding and Aziz’s friendship. Baker describes the idea that the land and environment of India reject friendships between Indians and the British. He uses the failed friendship between Aziz and Fielding to illuminate his point. Baker

focuses on the passage in which Fielding questions, “Why can’t we be friends now ... but the horses didn’t want it—they swerved apart; the earth didn’t want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file ...” (315-16). The colonizer/colonized relationship has become so deeply, psychologically rooted that “Forster acknowledges the need for India to be free before such a friendship can take place ...” (Baker 72). Scholar Sara Suleri also examines this passage in a chapter of her book *The Rhetoric of English India*. In her work she cites Forster’s statement that “When I began the book I thought of it as a little bridge of sympathy between East and West, but this conception has to go, my sense of the truth forbids anything so comfortable” (as cited in Suleri 132)² Ultimately, Aziz fulfills Memmi and Forster’s prophecy and is unable to maintain his Anglophilia, falling out of friendship with Fielding, Adela, and Mrs. Moore who all return to England.

Another character within Forster’s novel that shows Anglophilic tendencies is the Nawab Bahadur. He is a wealthy, Muslim, Indian who spoils his generosity on the English. When he hires a chauffeur to pick Ronny and Adela up on the roadside, he is described as,

Trying to look and feel like a European, the chauffer interposed aggressively. He still wore a topi, despite the darkness, and his face, to which the Ruling Race had contributed little beyond bad teeth, peered out of it pathetically, and seemed to say, “What’s it all about? Don’t worry me so, you blacks and whites. Here I am, stuck in dam India same as you, and you

got to fit me in better than this (Forster 98).

Though parts of the Nawab Bahadur remain Indian, for instance, his Indian hat, he believes that he is “stuck” in India as well. This suggests that he would rather not be there and that perhaps he would prefer a place like Britain. Upon interacting more with Ronny and Adela, he becomes more uncertain of his own identity. He feels that

“When English and Indians were both present, he grew self-conscious, because he did not know to whom he belonged. For a little he was vexed by opposite currents in his blood, then they blended, and he belonged to no one but himself” (98).

The text suggests that the Nawab Bahadur, in this moment, successfully creates his own identity by combining East and West. However, he becomes a key financial asset to Aziz’s trial at the end of the novel and chooses to give up the title that the English gave him in response to their treatment of Dr. Aziz. This would suggest that his blending of cultures is not sustainable.

The many attempts to unite Indian and British culture within *A Passage to India* fail, suggesting that, particularly at that point in the history of the British Empire, it was impossible. However, if examined through a different perspective and during periods of India’s relationship with Britain, it is interesting to see how the colonizer/colonized relationship develops. The comparison of Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* to Forster’s text helps put this development on display. *The God of Small Things* is written in a non-chronological fashion from different characters’ perspectives, and in doing so, creates a unique generational lens through which the reader can experience British imperialism and its lingering psychological effects. Part of understanding the damage colonialism has on India in Roy’s text hinges on the relationship between the colonizer and

² Suleri also explains her own take of Forster’s novel and the possibility of friendship between East and West during colonialism. She states that “If *A Passage to India* attempts to engender an illusion of cross-cultural conversation, then it is a dialogue that is highly conscious of the limits rather than the expansiveness of cultural sympathy” (Suleri 132).

the colonized and its progression through the pre-independence, independence, and finally post-independence generations.

The Ipe family resides in Kerala. This is an important choice of geographic setting because Kerala has a rich and complex history of colonization. The Ipe family identifies with Christianity, most likely as a result of Portugal's previous colonial and missionary efforts. Roy establishes that "Twenty percent of Kerala's population were Syrian Christians, who believed that they were descendants of the one hundred Brahmins whom St. Thomas the Apostle converted to Christianity when he traveled East after the Resurrection" (Roy 64). Despite their Christian practices, they still maintain some Hindu traditions as well. The family perpetuates the caste system despite the fact that as Christians, they should be casteless. Roy describes the psychological effect of this conglomeration of East and West as "having to sweep away your footprints without a broom. Or worse, not being allowed to leave footprints at all" (71). The synthesis of identity, in this case, leads to identity loss.

One character who perpetuates this synthesis is Pappachi, who is part of the pre-independence generation of the Ipe family. He exists very much in colonial India. He is a colonized individual who seems to accept British rule. Chacko, Pappachi's son, describes Pappachi as "an incurable British CCP, which was short for *chi-chi poach* and in Hindi meant shit-wiper. Chacko said that the correct word for people like Pappachi was *Anglophile*" (Roy 50). Pappachi affiliates himself with the English in as many ways as he can. He shows his Anglophilia by working for the government as an Imperial Entomologist. He answers to British rule, but when he discovers a new species of moth, his work is not recognized. The Englishmen in charge of taxonomic labeling claim that Pappachi's moth is a variation of a species that has already been discovered. However, they later give away the naming rights of the moth to another man who discovers it again. Though it

is unclear whether this second man is British or Indian, it is the Englishmen who control the naming rights and who take them away from Pappachi. The novel describes that "His [Pappachi's] life's greatest setback was not having had the moth that he had discovered named after him" (Roy 48). This is a prime example of Memmi's description of the "Situations of the Colonized." He explains that "As long as he [the colonized] tolerates colonization, the only possible alternatives for the colonized are assimilation or petrification" (Memmi 102). This psychological response further unravels Pappachi's identity and causes him to lash out more, physically and emotionally against his wife and family.

Along with Pappachi, Baby Kochamma lives most of her life within the era of the British Empire's occupation of India. Throughout the entire novel, Baby Kochamma cannot seem to reconcile both British and Indian identities, despite her self-righteous nature. She supports the caste system, as seen when she frames Velutha, the Paravan, for rape, but the caste system is Hindu and she claims to be Christian. Susan Friedman explains that "Roy's attack on the persistence of caste politics in Kerala begins with the irony of the Syriac Christian family's outraged response to the violation of the Hindu caste laws. As Christians, they should not share in the Hindu prohibition against touch" (Friedman 255). Yet, this pre-independence generation of the family all maintain connections to both.

Baby Kochamma's entire life is described as a battle between her Indian identity and the Western world view that was imposed upon her. She is more than simply the colonized who "accepts", in Memmi's terms. She is the colonized who embraces colonization. Baby Kochamma displays her Western tendencies frequently and unabashedly. She followed "American NBA league games, one-day cricket and all the Grand Slam tennis tournaments. On weekdays she watched *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara*..." (Roy 28). Baby

Kochamma's affinity to Christianity and American, as well as British television, illustrate Memmi's idea of the colonized adopting the culture of the colonizer. In his text, Memmi presents his own example of French colonization of Tunisia and how the Tunisian Jews "passionately endeavored to identify themselves with the French. To them the West was the paragon of all civilizations, all culture. The Jew turned his back happily on the East. He chose the French language, dressed in the Italian style and joyfully adopted every idiosyncrasy of the Europeans" (Memmi. xiv). Chacko admits this same response in his family as well. He applies Memmi's theory to the Ipe family and describes them all as "Anglophiles" and this is "because our minds have been invaded by a war. A war that we have won and lost. The very worst sort of war. A war that captures dreams and re-dreams them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves" (Roy 51-52). Baby Kochamma actively displays all of these characteristics of the colonized that both Memmi and Chacko describe.

Baby Kochamma carefully maintains the cultural and economic benefits of being an unmixable blend of both a Brahman Hindu and a Syrian Christian—both top tiers of Eastern and Western hierarchies. Her incessant struggle to keep her family's social position is a result of "ancient, age-old fear. The fear of being dispossessed" (Roy 67). This is the same fear that Memmi describes in context to French colonization of Tunisia and the same fear that drives Dr. Aziz's desire to please the English. This fear of dispossession is what traps the colonized in a perpetual, deformed identity that eventually forces self-colonization and reiteration of their colonizer's ideals.

Baby Kochamma's inability to embrace the British and remain Indian also shows through her interaction with others in the novel. She resents anyone who resists the same cultural manipulation that she so readily embraced

and particularly. This struggle is especially apparent in how she feels about Ammu "because she saw her quarreling with a fate that Baby Kochamma herself felt she had graciously accepted" (44-5). The fate that Baby Kochamma refers to in this passage is that of a "Man-less woman", but her resentment is also more broad in nature. She dislikes Ammu because she displays signs of resisting hierarchy, and in turn, colonization. Her resentful attitude and the pleasure that she takes in the troubles of those around her is explained by Veena Shukla. Shukla states that "If we have a look at this rude behavior from a psychological perspective, we will find a binary opposition of exploiter/exploited working here" (Shukla 967). Baby Kochamma's constant affinity for the colonizer and the ruling class of the hierarchies that dominate her life is her fulfilling Memmi's psychological theory of the colonized turned self-colonizer.

The novel does not only show Baby Kochamma's and Pappachi's perspective. It puts on display the progression of identity struggle through three generations. Ammu demonstrates the effects of the generational evolution of ideals within the Ipe family as well. Ammu and Chacko grew up with their lives sandwiching Indian independence. Yet, they are not as deeply rooted in the psychological foundations of the colonized as Baby Kochamma and Pappachi are. Other characters, Baby Kochamma specifically, recognize this difference in ideology in Ammu throughout the novel. Ammu's mode of social resistance is described as her "Unsafe Edge" or the "air of unpredictability" (Roy 44). She is described as a woman attempting to fight for "an unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber" (44). Though Ammu's resistance comes initially in the form of being a "divorced daughter from and *intercommunity love marriage*," it is clear that she is fighting against the social hierarchies that were firmly instituted by her former colonizers and

perpetuated by the previous generation of her family.

This resistance of the formerly colonized takes its form, via Ammu, as an attempt to redefine identity. Ammu rejects social laws with her marital choice and, most tragically, through her affair with Velutha, a Paravan. Her desire for redefinition is more subtly displayed in the airport when the family picks up Sophie Mol. When Estha misbehaves by not asking Sophie Mol "How do you do", Ammu "felt somehow humiliated by this public revolt in her area of jurisdiction. She had wanted a smooth performance. A prize for her children in the Indo-British Behavior Competition" (139). Upon first examination, this passage appears to show Ammu's attempt to stomp out resistance in her children and train them to be Anglophiles. However, if examined in conjunction with Ammu's own resistance against the colonizer, it shows her attempt to redefine her family's Indian identity. Roy elaborates on this struggle in her book *Power Politics*. She describes that even "Fifty years after independence, India is still struggling with the legacy of colonialism, still flinching from the "cultural insult." As citizens we're still caught up in the business of 'disproving' the white world's definition of us" (Roy 13). If seen within the context of Roy's nonfiction, Ammu forces her children to speak English at the airport and wants them to behave politely because she is attempting to disprove what Memmi would call the colonizer's "mythical portrait of the colonized" as "inferior and wicked, lazy and backward" (Memmi 83). She is attempting to undo eighty-nine years of colonial damage.

This act, though incredibly important to understanding Ammu's desires, is merely a precursor to her final and monumental act of rebellious resistance—her affair with Velutha. This intimate act is a complete transgression of both the caste laws and colonizers' laws. Once again, Ammu makes the decision to act out against the establishment of hierarchy. However, this transgression is not only

important in and of itself; its placement at the end of the novel emphasizes the true magnitude of what hersand Velutha's abandonment of the 'Love Laws' implies. The scene is a beautiful depiction of their choice to eradicate the laws of touchability, if even just for a moment in history. The abandonment of "Love Laws" is initially addressed in conversation between Chacko and the twins much earlier in the novel. Chacko admits to Rahel when she asks if Ammu can love Sophie Mol more than her that "Anything's possible in Human Nature ... Love. Madness. Hope. Infinite joy" (Roy 112). These words are then repeated at the very end of the novel when Ammu and Velutha contemplate their decision: "Without admitting it to each other or themselves, they linked their fates, their futures (their Love, their Madness, their Hope, their Infinite Joy) to his [the small spider living in the History House]"³ (320). Both Ammu and Chacko understand (though only Ammu has the courage to act) that the acts of defiance against Hindu, Portuguese, and colonialist hierarchies is the only progressive step towards breaking the overarching legacy of colonialism. This suggests that though it did not remedy the struggle against colonialism in Ammu's life and did bring about the death of Velutha, these acts against the hierarchy remaining in a postcolonial society are necessary for the redefinition of Indian identity.

The final generation within the novel to express the hope of transcending the identity of the "mythical portrait of the colonized" is that of Rahel and Estha. Throughout the novel, both twins seem to dance around the border of the identity of the colonized. They were born after independence, but it is clear

³ The 'small spider' is one of the 'Small Things' that Ammu and Velutha find within and around the History House: "They chose him [the spider] because they knew that they had to put their faith in fragility. Stick to Smallness. Each time they parted, they extracted only one small promise from each other: *Tomorrow? Tomorrow*" (Roy 321).

from Memmi's book and from Roy's text itself that the colonizers' legacy does not simply disappear with independence. Scholar Aida

Balvannanadhan explains that when Estha is asked to testify against Velutah, he "is nameless, and therefore cannot give his version of the events as he belongs to a hybrid space, begotten in an intercommunity, inter-religious love marriage and living with a divorced mother who has not yet made her choice between her husband's or her father's name" (Balvannanadhan 99). Both Estha and Rahel have uncertain identities and are unsure to whom they belong. This directly illustrates the tragic and multi-generational effects of colonization on the identity of the colonized. The namelessness that the twins encounter is similar to the confused identity that the Nawab Bahadur and Dr. Aziz experience in Forster's novel. Yet, the twins continue to defy being defined whether conscious or not. Rahel's and Estha's most dramatic act of defiance also comes at the end of the novel, just before Ammu's. They engage in an intimate relationship in the second-to-last chapter. This stands out from the text as an act against a universally accepted incest taboo. This transgression functions for the twins and the novel the same way that Ammu's affair with Velutha does. The abandonment of the love laws and societal taboos demonstrates movement toward freedom from the lingering psychological effects of colonialism.

C. Call to Action

Each novel provides its own suggestion for the mitigation of the psychological damage that the British Empire caused. The call to action proposed by *A Passage to India* is the departure of the British from India. Forster's novel helps illuminate the psychological

struggle of the colonized, but because it was written pre-independence, it leaves the remaining question of how to deal with the long-lingering effects of colonialism and its hierarchical structure unaddressed. *The God of Small Things* answers through its generational approach. The novel shows that, though the victims of colonialist rule cannot escape the psychological damage that the colonizers inflicted in the past, acts of defiance against all hierarchy can provide brief moments of extreme beauty and pleasure in the present as well as empowerment for an identity outside of the framework of colonialism in the future.

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