Chapter V

Conclusion

I’m talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I’m talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one’s identity and heritage. I’m talking about children who don’t know what their identity is. I’m talking about the feelings of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent. (Ali 88)

An astounding novel revolving around metamorphosis, aberration, and dislocation, The Satanic Verses goes deep into the diasporic experience of self-positioning, torment, adaptation, and resistance in a kaleidoscopic and contingent postmodern world. With the remarkable depiction of Gibreel’s schizophrenic hallucination and Chamcha’s enigmatic transmogrification as the major axis, Rushdie intends to think the unthinkable and to penetrate the impenetrable. It is a novel which sharply delineates the predicaments pungently experienced by diasporic subjects, including the adverse residential environment, diaspora’s nostalgic attempt to grasp the distant past of homeland, and the ambivalent yearning to transform themselves “from the sojourners to settlers” (Barker 204). In the main, the identity formation of diasporic subjects serves as a crucial and fundamental issue in the study of The Satanic Verses, for the entire novel is basically a migrant’s perspective on the world, as Rushdie admits in Imaginary Homelands (Rushdie 1991: 394). The text is involved with how diasporic subjects relocate themselves in this hybrid, unsettled, and fragmented world and how they appropriate and subvert the established norms of the imperial center. In consequence, the complicated issue of the diasporic identity turns out to be the underlying cornerstone in this thesis, and the key issue of the diasporic identity is examined
from three perspectives: the diasporic experience in a postmodern world of disintegration and
mutability, hybridity as an inevitable phenomenon, and the diasporic appropriation of the
heterogeneous space.

In Chapter II, “A World on the Mover: the Postmodern and Diaspora,” the concept of
postmodernity is thoroughly expounded in order to clarify the characteristics and appearances
of the contemporary world which diasporic subjects live in. Generally speaking, what the
postmodern consciousness suggests is that a time when the metanarrative dominates all has
come to an end at last. A time rife with myriads of contingent and conflicting small
narratives is just around the corner. The edification which numerous small narratives offer
the world is that a taken-for-granted and naturalized norm is no longer possible. Besides,
the condition of discrepancy, obscurity, and ambivalence will always remain. It is apparent
that Rushdie celebrates the collapse of authority, totality, and absoluteness and that The
Satanic Verses “dissents most clearly from imposed orthodoxies of all types” (Rushdie 1991:
396). Under the influence of the postmodern consciousness, identity that is uncertain,
mutable, and hybrid becomes the discursive routine in diasporic study. As Gibreel, a
migrant plunging into Proper London, spits out the rhythmic and penetrating dictum, “We are
creature of air, Our roots in dreams And clouds, reborn In flight,” (Rushdie 1988: 13) the
earthbound and steadfast identity is relentlessly interrogated and challenged. Thus, it can no
longer characterize the contemporary world. The spirit of the postmodern is best
represented in the diasporic condition, because diasporic subjects who undergo the process of
frontier crossing witness the uncertainty and changeability produced by the experience of
displacement and dislocation. In Chapter II, the concept of diaspora and its historical
significance is under careful consideration. The classical form of diaspora is concerned with
compulsory migration, exile, and a subsequent sense of loss. As a result of the forced
movement, classical diaspora casts a spotlight on “[t]he sense of attachment, or in some way,
connection to the land from which exile was forced” (Kalra 10). With “a blockage to
‘return’” (Kalra 10) as its primary keynote, classical diaspora associates itself with the experience of trauma and alienation in the host country. However, the concept of diaspora nowadays turns to emphasizing “supermobility and flexible identities on the part of transmigrants” (Ma 6). Although it is still involved with nostalgia for homeland, diaspora re-establishes, re-defines, and re-articulates the idea of home. That is to say, diasporic subjects may taste the sense of dislocation, but they also enjoy the freedom of fluidity and transience which arise from the process of frontier crossing. In *The Satanic Verses*, the harsh life in London and the disparate states of mind of diasporic subjects are meticulously scrutinized.

In Chapter III, “Neither the One nor the Other: Cultural Hybridity and Linguistic Hybridity,” the ineluctable phenomenon of hybridity and its latent capability to dismantle the authority of the West are meticulously scrutinized. By and large, not only the conventional hierarchy but also the rigid binary opposition becomes Rushdie’s target of reproach. He contends that the ossified thinking framework of dualism turns out to be inappropriate to portray the contemporary world. Thus, Rushdie exerts himself to crumble the impregnable dichotomy in Western epistemology and sticks fast to his belief in a condition that is “neither the One nor the Other but something else besides, in-between” (Bhabha 219). In this hyphenated and liminal space, boundaries between separate, discordant, and antithetical opposites are blurred. Incompatible and irrelevant elements are yoked together to create something new. Underscoring the untranslatability among diverse cultures, cultural hybridity transcends the inflexibility, stubbornness, and impenetrability of an either-or situation and brings to light the possibilities of a neither-nor situation. Due to the transnational migration, diasporic subjects are compelled to go through the experience of uprooting and dislocation. Moreover, they cannot but confront an in-between situation in which they belong to neither here nor there. However, the liminal space of intervention also represents a space of resistance, which offers diasporic subjects a great deal of alternatives
and possibilities. By the same token, the power of linguistic hybridity—a phenomenon taking place in the process of trans-territorial crossing—is also highlighted in *The Satanic Verses*. On the whole, language is an immediate means to exhibit one’s cultural identity and it often becomes a tool manipulated by the colonizer to dominate the colonized. With the collapse of the colonial system, the uncontrollable usage of “english” from the periphery is meant to counterattack the exploitation and intrusion of the imperial West. Rushdie mentions in *Imaginary Homelands* that “[c]entral to the purpose of *The Satanic Verses* is the process of reclaiming language from one’s opponents” (Rushdie 1991: 402). Besides, he demonstrates how diasporic subjects “[write] back to the center” (Ashcroft unpaged acknowledgements) by means of the aesthetics of stammer, untranslated words, and the deliberate transmutation of Standard English. Diasporic subjects’ stuttering out the imperial language betrays the unavoidable alienation between dominant English and the postcolonial tongue. The use of untranslated words is aimed not only to communicate the peculiar culture these words embody but also to shed light on the incommensurability among cultures. The reshaping and transmutation of Standard English is intended to estrange English words from themselves. Through these techniques, Rushdie displays the diasporic resistance to the imperial center.

In Chapter IV, “Thinking over Space: Heterogeneity and Diasporic Appropriation,” the heterogeneous nature of space and the spatial appropriation of diaspora are scrupulously investigated. The concept of space and its nature are elaborated so as to make clear the impact of the postmodern on the idea of space. Under the influence of postmodernity, space is depicted as a dynamic, indeterminate, and unstable arena, rather than a passive and undialectical “environmental ‘container’ of human life” (Soja 79). The urban spaces of London, Bombay, and Jahilia in *The Satanic Verses* are constitutive factors in intensifying the postmodern phenomenon. They are under no circumstances an inert and passive background in which the story develops. The accounts of the characteristics of these urban
spaces in the text convey that disparate spaces give rise to discrepant cultures, experiences, and spatial practices. As a social product, space is an area structured by ideology, politics, and power. Furthermore, the heterogeneous nature of space signifies that “different cultures had a unique sense of space” (Kern 138). Therefore, the “silenced spatiality” (Keith 17) of diasporic communities should not be disregarded, and the agency of diasporic subjects to create their spatial meanings should brought to the fore. The diasporic agency to appropriate and alter the space stresses that in a postmodern world, “one would search in vain for an urban sociological metanarrative, or any metanarrative” (Cross 9). Any “urban sociological metanarrative” (Cross 9) is likely to be overthrown, appropriated, and eluded. A space of power, domination, and manipulation is then transformed into a space of resistance and conspiracy. In *The Satanic Verses*, the detention center is primarily a place characterized by surveillance, rules, and domination. Nevertheless, it turns out to be a space in which diasporic subjects hang together to rebel against the inhuman treatment imposed by the imperial center. Social practices such as cooking serve as a way to break down the barriers which separate white English citizens from colored immigrants. In addition, Proper London is fragmented, transfigured, and distorted through diasporic subjects’ different perspectives. The imperial center is not a rational, civilized, and moderate place anymore. In short, diasporic subjects are capable of transgressing the oppressive rules and spatial orders of the imperial power. With underground tactics and guerilla attack, diasporic subjects search out their own space and create their own spatial stories.

The three aspects (the diasporic experience in a postmodern world of disintegration and mutability, hybridity as an inevitable phenomenon, and the diasporic appropriation of the heterogeneous space) help clarify how the condition of postmodernity inspires the diasporic condition, how the hyphenated situation opens up possibilities for diasporic subjects, and how diasporic subjects evade the established spatial orders and create their own configuration of space. By means of delving into these three aspects, this thesis holds an optimistic attitude
toward the diasporic condition and explores the agency of diasporic subjects to take advantage of their unsteady position and to open up endless possibilities.