The term “Anglo-Indian”, emerging as early as 1806, originally referred to the British in India. In India today, however, the term is universally understood to refer to the mixed-race descendants of British-Indian liaisons. In between these two historical markers lies a complex history of changing notions of racial mixture and affiliations with colonial power. At the same time, the “half-caste” has been a perennial figure in colonial fiction, and continues to appear regularly in contemporary Indian writing in English. Discussion of the literary figure of the half-caste, however, has taken place (if at all) by and large in the absence of any acknowledgement of the history of this community. A literary analysis of the “half-caste” attentive to this history offers valuable lessons about the usefulness and limitations of such theoretical notions as “hybridity” by calling attention to the shifting historical valences of literal experiences of hybridity. As a case-study in such an approach, this essay examines the role of racial mixture in Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children, with due attention to the Anglo-Indian community in India. This reveals how racial mixture in the literary imagination often becomes a metaphor for something else, and in this process of metaphorization is alienated from the history from which it originates. This process has parallels in literary theory: theoretical abstractions such as hybridity have become rarefied and need to be reconnected to their geographical and historical contexts if they are to retain any efficacy in explaining the processes of identity construction they claim to describe.

In India, the mixed-race population was known as “Eurasian”, with “half-caste” as a derogatory term. By the late nineteenth century, however, “Eurasian” had likewise accumulated a pejorative connotation,
and the community to whom the term was applied began to agitate for recognition by some other term. Many advocated adopting the term “Anglo-Indian”, which met with active opposition from the British in India. This mobilization against the term “Eurasian” was indicative of a larger movement toward a demand for recognition from the colonial government. At the end of the nineteenth century, the mixed-race community petitioned the British government several times for official recognition as “Anglo-Indians”, but these petitions were denied. Finally, in 1911, “Anglo-Indian” was sanctioned to describe Eurasians in the national census.

The official definition of “Anglo-Indian” in the 1935 Government of India Act, repeated in subsequent Constitutions of India, is as follows:

An Anglo-Indian means a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India and is or was born within such territory of parents habitually resident therein and not established there for temporary purposes only.

This definition presents several difficulties. First, it is based solely on patrilineal descent. While this may reflect certain historical origins (British men fathering children with Indian women), it leaves entirely unclassified the children of women of “European descent” and non-European men. At the same time, however, the patrilineality of the statute’s definition oddly enough does not end up solely designating mixed-race individuals. If both parents are “Domiciled Europeans”, i.e., Europeans permanently residing in India, their children are apparently “Anglo-Indian”. And finally, the “Anglo” in this definition does not need to be British: anyone whose male progenitors were of “European” descent is “Anglo-Indian”. The failure of these official attempts to satisfactorily define a class of people makes clear that these formulations are not attempts at factual accuracy, but rather codifications of historical and social practices. Since these practices change with time and place, categories such as “Anglo-Indian” and “Domiciled European” are elusive, specifiable only within a given historical and geographic location. The ambiguities created by these competing terms are not merely semantic. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Anglo-Indian community actively struggled to lay claim, not only to the terms by which to define itself, but also to membership of the British society, with which it saw itself affiliated. Anglo-Indians spoke English as their mother tongue and were Christian by birth; England was “Home”, even for those who had never left India. These contested affiliations are part of a complex history of colonial rule, in which definitions of race and
nationality were, for these “hybrids”, matters of real material privilege or deprivation, citizenship or illegitimacy.

The regulations authorizing the self-serving capriciousness of the British government with respect to its mixed-race subjects often depended on the language of categorization, so that, for example, a 1791 order aiming to exclude Anglo-Indians from the military referred to “the son of a Native Indian”, whereas an 1821 effort to raise troops sought out “sons of Europeans born in India”. In practice, the execution of these orders applied to the same body of individuals. Similar situations existed in regulations governing employment, inheritance, marriage and land ownership. As one Anglo-Indian historian observed, Anglo-Indians “were British or Indian as the occasion advised. In any case they suffered the disabilities imposed on both, but never enjoyed the privileges of either”. This literal legal “in-betweenness” profoundly impacted on the ability of the Anglo-Indian community to prosper, a fact which must not be forgotten when we investigate how this legal and administrative subject-constitution is transformed in literature into cultural “in-betweenness”. As Ann Stoler points out, “The colonial politics of exclusion was contingent on constructing categories. Colonial control was predicated on identifying who was ‘white,’ who was ‘native,’ and which children could become citizens rather than subjects, designating who were legitimate progeny and who were not”.

In the twentieth century, the historical attempts of Anglo-Indians to affiliate with the British became increasingly problematic, as it grew obvious that British control of India was drawing to a close. While Anglo-Indian leaders were fiercely protective of their “distinctive culture” – most notably in their demands for the protection of English language education – they at the same time recognized the need to reformulate that culture not as “in-between” India and Britain with a leaning toward Britain, but rather as undeniably Indian. These attempts to invent Indian identities for themselves in the newly independent nation were not received kindly in many quarters. After Independence, therefore, many Anglo-Indians with means immigrated to England, Canada and Australia. Others able to “pass” as British were absorbed into the European community in India, leaving behind a more impoverished visibly Anglo-Indian community. The 1965 displacement of English by Hindi as the national language of India prompted another wave of Anglo-Indian immigration, and the current movement by Hindu nationalists to rout “foreign” elements out of India continues to threaten the security of this indigenous minority. Nonetheless, Anglo-Indians remain a distinct, albeit comparatively small, presence in contemporary India. They continue to be identified as mixed-race individuals, who
consider English their mother tongue and Christianity their religion, with westernized ways of dress, personal habits, and social conduct.

Given, however, that the contemporary Anglo-Indian community is an infinitesimal fraction of the current Indian population of one billion, and resides in relative obscurity, it is odd that Eurasians remain so ubiquitous, not only in colonial fiction, but also in contemporary works, ranging from the Merchant Ivory film *Cotton Mary* and Ayub Khan-Din’s play *Last Dance at Dum Dum* to Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, I. Allan Sealy’s *The Trotter-Nama*, and Vikram Chandra’s *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*. The historical figure of the Eurasian, it seems, exerts a fascination on the literary imagination of India’s writers in excess of the community’s impact on Indian reality, past or present. The gap between the actuality of the Anglo-Indian community in India and its literary representation points to a similar gap between lived experiences of “hybridity” and metaphoric expressions of hybridity. The history of the Anglo-Indians suggests that the state of “hybridity” for this group is a shifting, contingent and often institutionally-defined subject position, whose imposition from “above” often produces economic and social marginalization. And yet, in literature, as in theory, what is most compelling to those drawn to the figure of the Eurasian is generally not this complex socio-economic history, but rather the questions of originality and authenticity suggested by “in-betweeness”.

The idea of the Eurasian as a bastard hybrid of two parent cultures is common, propagated first in British colonial fiction. This fiction inevitably figured Eurasians as the combination of “the worst of both races”, producing eternally self-divided mimics. This view, internalized by much of the Anglo-Indian community, was predicated on a biological model of hybridization in which two monolithic and opposing cultures combine equally to produce a third entity. And yet, investigation of the construction of racial mixture in colonial India makes clear that the “hybridity” of the Anglo-Indian is not adequately explained as the intersection of two oppositional cultures, but rather is a multiply constituted and unstable product of its changing political and cultural contexts. The literary transformation of this dynamic into a static image of the Eurasian as “caught between two worlds” reduces a complex colonial history to a model of hybridity as a sort of essentialized cultural schizophrenia – a model that does not adequately explain the reality of lived experiences of disparate hybridities. While such simplifications may be inevitable in the imaginative process of fiction-writing, recognizing this dynamic cautions us to be wary of the same phenomenon in our theoretical work.
Hybrids, Cosmopolitans, Postcolonial Theory

In discussing the significance of models of hybridity promulgated by *Midnight’s Children* and in postcolonial theory, we can usefully employ Timothy Brennan’s provocative characterization of “third world cosmopolitanism”. One trait of this “creative community” of third-world cosmopolitan writers, according to Brennan, is its championing of “cultural ‘hybridity’ – a hybridity claimed to offer certain advantages in negotiating the collisions of language, race and art in a world of disparate peoples comprising a single, if not exactly unified, world”.\(^{12}\) The cost for Brennan, it seems, of this “cosmopolitan embrace” is a loss of the means to differentiate between the complexities of historical experiences and the ambiguity of representation, leading to “a flattening of influences, which assemble themselves, as it were, on the same plane of value”.\(^{13}\) Brennan’s characterization of cosmopolitanism helps to name what happens to Anglo-Indian experience in *Midnight’s Children*: while Rushdie undoubtedly draws from the historical specificities of Indian history, his apparently indiscriminate use of those specificities produces a sense of the loss of the experiences of those who do not share his particular cultural hybridity.

Brennan’s critique of creative writers like Rushdie has parallels in the arena of theory, as Rushdie enacts imaginatively what Homi Bhabha, most notably, articulates theoretically. Bhabha’s theories of hybridity, perhaps the most influential in contemporary postcolonial studies, are at the same time the most problematic. His concepts are not only dense and elusively defined, they also change over the course of time, creating inconsistencies that remain unresolved in the presentation of *The Location of Culture* as a coherent treatise on hybridity theory. The essays published over the course of a decade (1983–1994) that became the chapters of *The Location of Culture* represent an important and unacknowledged shift in meaning from “colonial” to “cultural” hybridity.\(^{14}\) The failure to address this shift in converting the collected essays into a book introduces an incoherency into *The Location of Culture*, exacerbated by critics’ citing from amongst the chapters as if the forms of hybridity outlined in each were equivalent to one another. As a brief glance at the chapter titles suggests, Bhabha gradually shifts his emphasis from the site of colonial discourse to the postmodern and postcolonial moment. This evolving emphasis results in a model of “cultural hybridity” in the later chapters that is markedly different from the “colonial hybridity” of his earlier work. The motivation for this evolution seems to be a more strongly asserted commitment to finding a political application for his own theorizations. The later chapters seem intent on theorizing an individual oppositional agency within the
“interstices” of the cultural hybrid that was not evident in the earlier formulation of “colonial hybridity”. It is important to call attention to this generally unremarked inconsistency, since the ways in which Bhabha’s model of hybridity is subtly transformed in its path from “colonial” to “cultural” help us to clarify which aspects of these distinct hybridities are useful to retain and which are problematic. Bhabha’s innovative theories about “colonial hybridity”, which have little to do with general understandings of hybridity as mixture, are useful tools in analysing the ambivalence of colonial discourse. His celebration of the cultural hybrid, on the other hand, shares the problems and inadequacies of that general understanding of hybridity as mixture.

The ambiguity around the question of agency in Bhabha’s concept of colonial hybridity in his earlier chapters, produced by a rhetoric which creates the impression that hybridity is its own agent, opens him to the charge that his highly abstracted theories are disconnected from lived experience. Furthermore, the expansion in his later formulations of hybridity to include the hybridity of culture itself raises questions about the applicability of this cultural hybridity as a descriptor of specific classes of experience. While Bhabha’s theories originate in moments of colonial history, the move from the colonial hybrid to the cultural hybrid produces conclusions that seem universalized and blind to history. As critics such as Anne McClintock, Lati Mani, and the contributors to the volume *Debating Cultural Hybridity* have argued, this dehistoricized and abstracted sense of hybridity potentially equates very different situations (e.g. colonial “desire” and ethnic difference), and in the process overlooks questions of real historical change.\(^{15}\) Notions of hybridity severed from history are also easily manipulated on behalf of celebrations of multiculturalist, cosmopolitan self-identification that overlook other, contradictory, and often imposed experiences of “hybridity”. Pheng Cheah, in his far-reaching article, “Given Culture: Rethinking Cosmopolitical Freedom in Transnationalism”, seriously questions whether Bhabha’s theories of hybrid agency adequately account for “political transformation in neocolonial globalization”.\(^{16}\) Cheah’s critique of Bhabha is based on interrogating, first, the “axiom” that discursive signification produces reality, and second, the notion that one can extrapolate from the moment of colonial resistance to formulate a general theory of globalization. Cultural hybridization, Cheah argues, is only one aspect of contemporary globalization; the generalization of the “ideas of linguistic freedom and cultural flux” to “a general theory of transformative agency inevitably exaggerates the role of signification and cultural representation in the functioning of socio-political life and its institutions” (p.298). This “simplistic analogy” is effected, according to Cheah, through a narrow focus on the migrant in the metropole –
specifically, the migrant academic critic. Hybridity theorists are drawn to migrancy and diaspora because these seem to be “empirical instances of the flux they regard as the ontological essences of culture” (p.298).

Cheah asks, “Is it not obvious, from the start, that the paradigm for these radical cosmopolitanisms is not really decolonized space but the metropolitan scenario of migrancy and mobility?”:

Indeed, we discover that in essence, hybrid cultural agency consists of physical freedom from being tied to the earth. Such freedom is the phenomenal analogue and material condition of possibility for endless hybrid self-creation and autonomy from the given... That is why Bhabha is not interested in those who do not migrate... In Bhabha’s world, postcoloniality is the hybridity of metropolitan migrancy. Everything happens as if there are no postcolonials left in decolonized space. (pp.300–301)

The claim of theorists to a “postcolonial perspective”, then, often depends on a level of generalization and a lack of “analytic specificity” that make disparate phenomena equivalent, effacing “the unbridgeable divide between the migrant literary critic in the metropolis and the subaltern in decolonizing space” (p.301). This leads, in Cheah’s view, to a failure to explain how and why nationalism continues to be an ineradicable and, indeed, essential, feature of neocolonial globalization at the current juncture.

The links made between hybridity and the exiled cosmopolitan writer in postcolonial Indian literature elucidate the theoretical re-examination of these issues in the current moment. Timothy Brennan’s challenge to Salman Rushdie’s cosmopolitanism and Pheng Cheah’s provocative questioning of Homi Bhabha’s favouring of the migrant experience in his theories of hybridity both ask how we are to adequately account for the postcolonial remaining in the decolonized world. Incorporating the history of racial mixture in colonial India into our analysis of Midnight’s Children allows us to assess the fluidity of Bhabha’s “cultural hybridity” against a convergence of socio-historical circumstances that produced a community labelled as “racial hybrids,” but whose “hybridity” was in fact largely generated through institutional policy. This investigation points to a parallel with one trait of cosmopolitanism theory questioned by these materialist-oriented critics: the generalizing move from racial hybridity to cultural hybridity effaces “actually existing” cosmopolitan experiences in favour of an intellectual idea of cosmopolitanism as freedom-through-signification largely unavailable to actual racial hybrids in postcolonial India.
Midnight’s Children: The Project of Genealogy Construction

Not surprisingly, criticism of *Midnight’s Children* seldom discusses Saleem Sinai with reference to the historical existence of Anglo-Indians; his apparently biological Anglo-Indian birth is usually only mentioned as a stepping-stone in another line of argument about, for example, the Indian nation state and national identity or the constructedness of reality or history. Indeed, Saleem is such an atypical “Anglo-Indian” that even labelling him such seems somehow inappropriate. And yet, throughout *Midnight’s Children*, traces of a more familiar, recognizable Anglo-Indian community appear at such regular intervals that the novel seems to demand an investigation of where its protagonist stands in relation to that community. Such an investigation makes clear that Rushdie is not interested in the Anglo-Indian *per se*, but rather in the metaphorically suggestive dislocation introduced by the notion of racial mixture. At the same time, the Anglo-Indian’s trace contributes to the novel’s understanding of productions of identity. In juxtaposing a mixed-race character removed from his “community” to more typical Anglo-Indians, *Midnight’s Children* demonstrates that while identity is a socially constructed fiction, that fiction still powerfully dictates the possibilities available to an individual within the frame of his life. Through the biographical oddities of Saleem Sinai’s life, the terms of his “hybridity” are relocated from a racial to an economic register; class becomes the dominant determination of “in-betweenness”. This emphasis on class over race complicates notions of hybridity by demonstrating that racial hybridity is inflected through class position, among other things, and is therefore unevenly experienced.

Ironically, this use of an atypical Eurasian to demonstrate the determining nature of class over race has a cost: the oppressively socially determined hybridity of the Anglo-Indian community is overlooked in favour of a valorization of the hybridity of the individual isolated from a community. This individualist hybridity expresses the optimistic belief in literature’s ability to choose fathers and alternative histories; while this belief results in refreshing re-imaginings of possibilities for the Indian nation, it denies those possibilities for the historically marginal Anglo-Indian remnant in India. Recognizing this disparity through attentiveness to the Anglo-Indian elements present and missing from *Midnight’s Children* leads to an awareness of the need to modify our theories of hybridity, so that they make room for both the “cosmopolitan” and the “hybrid” whose position is less fluid.

Brought up in a well-to-do secularized Muslim family in Bombay, Saleem Sinai is unaware of his genetic racial mixture during his early years. The withheld fact of his paternity is the secret that initiates the
narrative’s structure of suspense. Saleem as narrator first drives his faithful listener Padma to near distraction by withholding which of Aadam Aziz’s daughters and their suitors will be his parents. And then, as the ticking clock arrives at his birth on August 15th, 1947, he drops the bombshell that the thirty-two-year family history he has just narrated is not strictly speaking his. As Saleem finally discloses the secret of his birth, that he is the product of the Englishman William Methwold’s seduction of Vanita (the wife of the accordionist Wee Willie Winkie), Padma exclaims with horror, “An Anglo? ... What are you telling me? You are an Anglo-Indian?”¹⁹ Saleem does not directly answer this charge, and Padma’s initial horror at the idea of Saleem’s racial make-up quickly gives way to anger at the callousness of Saleem’s deception: “What thing are you that you don’t even care to tell the truth about who your parents were? You don’t care that your mother died giving you life? That your father is maybe still alive somewhere, penniless, poor? You are a monster or what?” (p.136). In speculating on the fate of Saleem’s “father”, Padma herself seems to erase Methwold from her understanding of Saleem’s origins, as clearly it is “penniless, poor” Wee Willie Winkie for whom she is concerned. It seems that the thought of Saleem’s racial mixture is too unimaginable for Padma to retain, and she therefore unconsciously rewrites the paternity he recounts. Saleem himself does not deny or accede to the accusation that he is an Anglo-Indian, leaving ambiguous the racial implications of his birth.

It is odd, however, that in a narrative that continually casts doubt on its own reliability, the story of Vanita’s seduction by Methwold is never undermined. By and large, it seems that we are not meant to question that Methwold is Saleem’s biological father. The implicit credibility lent to the Methwold story in a novel dedicated to narratorial unreliability suggests that Saleem’s racial mixture is not only entirely metaphorical, but also not of defining importance to his identity. Contrary to Aruna Srivastava’s claim that “Saleem needs to know who his father is; is he British or Indian?”,²⁰ Saleem is supremely unconcerned with who his true father is – the narration of his life is spent not in an archaeological attempt to determine his origins, but rather in the obsessive proliferation of alternative origins through metaphorical fathers intended to structure and make sense of the events of his life. Methwold’s presence in that collection is simply one element among others, the element that represents the abrupt break in Indian history brought on by decolonization. The father that Methwold is to Saleem, then, is not the originator of one half of an epic battle between East and West; Saleem is not heir to a binary struggle of “in-betweenness”, but rather to a multiple and overdetermined genealogy. The list of fathers Saleem inventories – Ahmed Sinai, Wee Willie Winkie, Nadir Khan, Hanif Aziz, “Sharp-
sticker Sahib”, General Zulfikar, Picture Singh – is a useful register of the forces that he perceives as contributing to the shape of his life. Most notably, these characters do not represent racial or religious categories, but rather economic or political positions. The disease of turning white suffered by Ahmed Sinai is a symptom of “Businessism”, just as turning red signals Saleem’s turn to the Communism of his beloved Picture Singh (p.474). Imperialism (Methwold), the lure of the film industry (Hanif Aziz), and military power (Zulfikar) are some of the forces that Saleem decides determine his life. The alternative worlds Saleem’s life wavers between are not racial, or even cultural, but rather political and economic. The ambiguity surrounding Saleem’s birth does not centre on whether he is to grow up Indian or English, but rather whether he will be rich or poor.

Mary Pereira’s baby-swapping crime is inspired by her desperate love for Joseph D’Costa. An ardent Communist, Joseph angrily longs to destroy the sway of the rich and powerful; Mary decides to give the son of wealth a life of poverty and vice-versa, believing that this will somehow secure her Joseph’s love. Saleem suffers his family’s rejection of him keenly, when it is revealed that he is not their son, but he soon discovers that this rejection is only half of the burden created by Mary’s act. After he is expelled from the house of his last remaining uncle, Saleem tries unsuccessfully to enter into a life of poverty in the magician’s ghetto; the realization of his inability to do so completes the process of isolation from community membership: “I began to see that the crime of Mary Pereira had detached me from two worlds, not one; that having been expelled from my uncle’s house I could never fully enter the world-according-to-Picture-Singh” (p.493). The two worlds Saleem is poised between at his birth, and alienated from as an adult, are those represented by Ahmed Sinai and Picture Singh – the “Businessism” of the well-to-do and the Communism of the poor. The juxtaposition of these two worlds offers a different interpretation of the familiar “in-betweenness” of the Eurasian: whereas the usual “two worlds” theory invoked when accounting for the un-belonging of the Eurasian is that of East and West, for Saleem, it is the haves and have-nots – an accident of class is above all the determining force of his life.

While the baby switch and the contrasting lives of Saleem and Shiva suggest the artificiality of categories such as race and class, they simultaneously demonstrate the inexorable limitations those categories place on the possibilities available for a single life. The song Mary Pereira sings to Saleem throughout his childhood – Anything you want to be, you kin be./ You kin be just what-all you want” – creates the illusion of self-determination that becomes Saleem’s lifelong burden. Through his repeated travails, Saleem discovers that he cannot be anything he wants to
be. Nor, in fact, can most of the characters peopling the novel. Ahmed Sinai and Hanif Aziz’s dreams of fortune and fame, the futures of the young soldiers on both sides of the Indo-Pakistani wars, the hopes of the Midnight’s Children, are all ruthlessly destroyed. Only those with power, like the Widow and Shiva, are able to be what they want to be. All others are subject to the implacable forces already in motion all around them – the families they are received into, power, history. At the same time, however, the novel longs to subvert that implacability, as symbolized in the switch of baby Saleem and Shiva. *Midnight’s Children* does not want to fully accept the irrevocability of the lie behind Mary Pereira’s nursery song, an unwillingness most clearly mapped in the novel’s rejection from its genealogy of the fixity of identity inhering in the racial hybrid in history. While Anglo-Indians form an important part of the world of *Midnight’s Children*, Saleem’s interpretive agenda works to exclude them from his metaphorical narrative of Indian history, on behalf of a questionable theory of self-invention.

**Repressed Anglo-Indian Genealogies**

The Anglo-Indian Christian community of *Midnight’s Children* is most notably represented by Mary Pereira and her family. Mary’s original occupation as a nurse and Ahmed Sinai’s Anglo-Indian secretaries gesture to conventional images of the modern Anglo-Indian woman. Social prejudice against Anglo-Indians and the durability of the image of the loose Anglo-Indian woman is suggested by Amina Sinai’s dismissive collectivization of her flirtatious husband’s string of secretaries (the last of whom is Mary’s sister Alice):

> “Those Anglos”, she said to Mary, revealing a touch of snobbery, “with their funny names, Fernanda and Alonso and all, and surnames, my God! Sulaca and Colaco and I don’t know what. What should I care about them? Cheap female types. I call them all his Coca-Cola girls – that’s what they all sound like”. (p.155)

The shortening of “Anglo-Indians” to “Anglos” (echoing Padma’s initial horror at the secret of Saleem’s birth – “An Anglo?... What are you telling me?”) marks the perceived pretensions of Anglo-Indians to Britishness, in sharp contrast to the Portuguese names of both the parodied “Coca-Cola girls” and the actual Anglo-Indian characters (Pereira, D’Costa). This contrast complicates the Anglo-Indian world typically portrayed by British writers such as Paul Scott and John Masters by calling attention to tensions and ambiguities within the Anglo-Indian “community”. At the same time, *Midnight’s Children* parodies its own complications. Amina’s lumping together all of the
Anglo-Indian secretaries into the parodic “Sulaca and Colaco and I don’t know what” participates in the generalizing function of stereotype, while her humorous summation of them as “his Coca-Cola girls” anticipates the “hybrid tragedies” of *The Satanic Verses*, including “the Coca-Colonization of the planet.”23 – a link which suggests that the racial hybridity of the Anglo-Indian, the objectification of women, and westernized globalization are equally lamentable (and laughable) phenomena, existing, in Brennan’s terms, “on the same plane of value”.

When Mary Pereira objects, “They aren’t so funny names, Madam; beg your pardon, but they are good Christian words”, Amina hastens to emend her blunder: “Oh, not *you*, Mary, how could you think I was making fun of you?” (p.155). This rare moment of discord between ayah and employer positions Mary Pereira within the class of funny-named Coca-Cola girls even as Amina denies it. It is, of course, Mary Pereira who plays the pivotal role in creating the circumstances of Saleem’s convoluted life. As Padma notes, “You might as well call her your mother...She made you, you know” (p.137). Saleem does include Mary in the list of mothers he acquires, and at the novel’s end it is to her arms (and her employment) that he returns. The links between Mary, the Coca-Cola girls, and Padma’s horrified “You are an Anglo?” offer a sort of doppelganger life for Saleem – a life not chosen by Saleem-as-narrator. Although he is of mixed race, and his life effectively has been created and nurtured by an Anglo-Indian, Saleem is not Anglo-Indian as Mary Pereira is. Recognizing the novel’s failure to connect Mary’s metaphoric maternity to the communal identity her motherhood would entail leads to further questions about who is absent from Saleem’s invented patrilineal genealogy.

If in this unclaimed doppelganger life, Mary Pereira is Saleem’s mother, who would be his father? Well, “like every Mary she had her Joseph” (p.119). It is for love of Joseph D’Costa that Mary undertakes the originary act of Saleem’s life. Joseph D’Costa, then, is at least as responsible for Saleem’s life as Methwold or any of the other father figures Saleem accumulates. And at the core of Mary’s act of immaculate conception is a contestation of the values central to Anglo-Indian identity. In response to Joseph’s anger at the violence in the aftermath of Partition falling unequally on the poor, Mary pleads, “even if it’s true about the killing, they’re Hindu and Muslim people only; why get good Christian folk mixed up in their fight?” Joseph angrily replies:

“You and your Christ. You can’t get it into your head that that’s the white people’s religion? Leave white gods for white men. Just now our own people are dying. We got to fight back; show the people who to fight instead of each other, you see?” (p.120)
Mary Pereira attempts to position herself and Joseph as part of a distinct, Christian community, defined in opposition to “Hindu and Muslim people”. Joseph, however, does not see in terms of religion, but of class and race. Although an “Anglo”, he includes himself in “our people” opposed to “white men”.

In his otherwise insightful analysis of Midnight’s Children, Neil ten Kortenaar seems uncomfortable with the idea that Christianity plays a central role in the lives of some of the novel’s characters. Kortenaar argues that the Christian references are to be understood as pointers to the process of embodiment, the literalization of metaphor that is Saleem’s life. This, according to Kortenaar,

explains the echoes of the Christian nativity that accompany Saleem’s birth and that seem out of place in a novel concerned with the typically Indian... Mary, a virgin, is inspired to an act of domestic terrorism by her unconsummated love for a Communist... The Christian references involved here have to do with the Incarnation, an image of the literalization at work in the text itself: Saleem’s life makes flesh the “word” of Indian history.24

Kortenaar’s generally provocative and useful argument about the literalization of metaphor is here made at the expense of ignoring the novel’s intentional inclusion of Anglo-Indian Christianity. Mary’s Christianity is always highly visible (witness her disgust at a priest’s attempt to convince her that Jesus is blue, or her macabre act of penance involving the holy mummified corpse of St. Francis Xavier), and is a significant factor in her fateful falling out with Joseph. If Saleem were raised in the Anglo-Indian community invoked by his ghost-mother, Christianity would have been part of his legacy. Kortenaar’s contention that this Christianity seems “out of place in a novel concerned with the typically Indian” excludes the Anglo-Indian from the realm of what is “typically Indian”, and overlooks both the actual existence of a class of people who literally make flesh the word of Indo-British history and the novel’s own nagging reminders of the Anglo-Indian story Saleem is not writing. Kortenaar’s argument is one salient example of literary criticism’s failure to recognize the function the Anglo-Indian performs in the literature of India.

The Anglo-Indian story gestured towards, but not told in Midnight’s Children must in fact be suppressed by Saleem because it debunks the promise of Mary’s song, “Anything you want to be, you kin be”. For much of the novel, Saleem’s act of narration is an effort to maintain the efficacy of this myth, an effort that requires the invention of special powers to bolster its weak foundations in the material world. For Saleem, in order to be anything you want to be, you have to make your kin be
“just what-all you want”. The power of inventing parents is conjured in the world of narrative to replace what does not exist in the material world. This wilful act of imagination points to Saleem’s simultaneous success and failure as a storyteller. His failure lies in the eventual collapse of his effort to give his story meaning by proving his central and causal role in Indian history. He succeeds, however, to the degree that he has directed his readers toward the genealogy, and hence some interpretive meaning, he wants assigned to his life.

Kortenaar has ably demonstrated that “at all times, Saleem chooses his own line of descent”, by noting that Saleem not only fictitiously propagates Aadam Aziz as his grandfather, but even within that fiction determines the tenor of his family history by overlooking the genealogies of both Ahmed Sinai and his putative grandmother.25 I turn now to one last potential father whom Saleem excludes from his line of descent, a father who emphatically gives the lie to the refrain “Anything you want to be, you kin be”:

I present the leaping, hair-tearing figure of Mr. Emil Zagallo, who taught us geography and gymnastics, and who, that morning, unintentionally precipitated the crisis of my life… We called him Pagal-Zagal, crazy Zagallo, because for all his talk of llamas and conquistadores and the Pacific Ocean we knew, with the absolute certainty of rumour, that he’d been in a Mazagaon tenement and his Goanese mother had been abandoned by a decamped shipping agent; so he was not only “Anglo” but probably a bastard as well. Knowing this, we also understood why Zagallo affected his Latin accent, and also why he was always in a fury, why he beat his fists against the stone walls of the classroom; but the knowledge didn’t stop us being afraid. (p.275)

Zagallo, the terror of Saleem’s days at the Cathedral and John Connolly Boys’ High School, is the catalyst in the chain of events leading to “the crisis of my life”, the discovery that Saleem is not his father’s son. Like Mary Pereira and Joseph De’Costa, Zagallo is a Goan Christian identified as an “Anglo”. His teaching position at the English-education school for privileged Indian children recalls the shifting world of Anglo-Indians in post-Independence India.26 Presumably, Zagallo’s father, the “decamped shipping agent”, decamped upon British withdrawal from India, evoking the British “betrayal” of Anglo-Indians at Independence.27 The novel’s oblique allusion to this history through the presentation of Zagallo is reinforced by the schoolboys’ consciousness of the reasons for Zagallo’s attempts to “pass” as European and the ignominy and frustration he suffers. Contrary to Mary Pereira’s theme song, Zagallo cannot be anything he wants to be. The rage-inducing life he lives as a teacher at
John Connolly Boys’ High School in fact gets worse when he is fired for his part in Saleem’s disgrace.

Most intriguing, however, is the implicit link between Zagallo and Saleem: for Saleem is himself “not only ‘Anglo’ but probably a bastard as well”. The applicability of this description to both Saleem and Zagallo creates an unacknowledged kinship between them. And yet the struggles represented by Zagallo’s desperate beating of his fists against stone walls are not a part of Saleem’s life. If the switching of Saleem and Shiva at their births was done in misguided protest against the inequitable distribution of wealth, Zagallo is one portrait of the effects of that inequity. He is the father Saleem did not have, the ghost of what Saleem’s life would have been, had the origins of his conception been known.

Zagallo also has a claim to paternity by Saleem’s own selection criteria for his invented fathers. Behind Mary Pereira, Zagallo is one of the most significant agents in the cataclysmic events of Saleem’s life: his classroom torture results in a wound that leads, eventually, to the fateful blood test that reveals that Saleem is not his father’s son. Yet Saleem never appropriates Zagallo into his “noble line” (p.508) of fathers. Mary Pereira, the devoted and well-behaved Anglo-Indian ayah, can be his mother (and end up rich), but the embittered Zagallo must be fired from his job and vanquished into oblivion. Thus Zagallo serves a revealing function in the novel: the contrast between his life and Saleem’s once again demonstrates the artificiality of social categories on the one hand and their inescapable determining effects on the other. This in turn explains Saleem’s rejection of Zagallo from his roster of fathers: Zagallo represents a truth unacceptable to Saleem’s project of narration, and his kinship must therefore be repressed. In so doing, Saleem-as-storycrafter derives for himself the promise of Mary’s song at another level, the level of narration. To the extent that we are unaware of what Saleem excludes from his genealogy, he does prove that he can be anything he wants to be. Attention to the Anglo-Indian history of decline in post-Independence India, however, makes clear that this project of genealogy construction willfully suppresses those painful stories that do not lend themselves to Saleem’s incompletely relinquished myth of self-determination.

At the end of the novel, Saleem announces his relinquishing of the illusion of self-determination: “when was there ever a choice? When options?” (p.503). In deciding that he is “the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me”, Saleem posits a model of hybridity that is not the duality of colonial discourse. It is, rather, an uncontainable, ever-expanding phenomenon informed by all the discourses of race, class and history. At the same time, Saleem exchanges his claims of unique causality in Indian history for a commonality with all Indians: “Nor am I particularly exceptional in
this matter; each ‘I’, every one of the now six-hundred-million-plus of us, contains a similar multitude” (pp.457–8). In this shift from a claim of unique centrality to representativeness, Saleem submerges the details of his personal history into a paradigm of existence for all of postcolonial India, thus relocating the ambiguity of his racial mixture to a metaphor for the multiply determined identity of all individuals. It is this move from the particular to the universal, in which the historical details of the particular are erased, that I would call the cosmopolitanism of Midnight’s Children, in keeping with Timothy Brennan’s characterization – it is a cosmopolitanism based on the notion that “hybridity” is not a communal, ethnic, or specific cultural phenomenon, but rather the fundamental condition of postcolonial existence. What is troubling about this notion of hybridity is that, while it admits the determining effects of history, it leaves “each ‘I’” in such a state of dissolution as to be indistinguishable from the next. As enacted in the novel, the movement of pepperpots is interchangeable with military coups, and the destruction of the fictional (and wealthy) Sinai family exists on the same plane of value as the Emergency’s demolition of the ghettos of Delhi.

In “Imaginary Homelands”, Rushdie draws a parallel between “Indian writers in England” and the familiar description of Eurasians as “between two stools”. He further links himself to his Eurasian protagonist by declaring that is it “one of the more pleasant freedoms of the literary migrant to be able to choose his parents”. For Rushdie, the idea of the “in-betweenness” and inauthenticity of the Eurasian is above all an apt metaphor for the dislocation of the émigré writer. Furthermore, Rushdie sees in “the migrant condition” a “metaphor for all of humanity”. We recall here Pheng Cheah’s critique that in Bhabha’s theories of hybridization, “postcoloniality is the hybridity of metropolis migrancy. Everything happens as if there are no postcolonials left in decolonized space” (pp.300–301). While Rushdie’s metaphorizations are undoubtedly apt and productive of meaning, they are staged at the expense of recognition of the quite different reality of the historical Anglo-Indian, a representative of the non-migrant left behind in decolonized India. It is clear that Rushdie does not intend to disparage Anglo-Indians, and indeed treats them with a certain affection. But, if Midnight’s Children is “a novel of memory and about memory”, it also has its origins in “a nation of forgetters”. It is a novel overwhelmed by the violence of Indian history in the twentieth century, and can be seen as an eloquent expression of grief at the inability to give shape or meaning to that violence, as reflected in the collapse of Saleem’s narrative as the novel draws to a close. It is undoubtedly unfair, in calling attention to Saleem’s repression of the Anglo-Indian story, to ask the suffering mourner to catalogue all of the casualties of the history he grieves. But
the novel itself, in inserting the ghostly reminders of Anglo-Indians, calls us in turn to question the nature of this grief. Knowledge of Anglo-Indian history reminds us that the history of suffering is unevenly experienced. *Midnight’s Children*, in its self-invented genealogies and demonstrations of the non-essential nature of race and class, wants to forget this. It wants to declare that all Indians, “every one of the now six-hundred-million-plus of us”, have suffered from history. While poignant, this sense of the indistinguishability of our multiply determined identities obliterates continued real experiences of disparity. This variety of “cosmopolitanism”, which has its analogue in literary theory, does not offer us the means to understand the causes and solutions to the violence it laments. With a return to the specificities of history, we can develop a more “rooted” cosmopolitanism, which acknowledges that while identity is indeed multiply determined, the uneven and enduring weight of factors such as race and class (and, in India, religion and caste) continues to irrevocably shape the degree to which identities can be fluid and self-invented.

**NOTES**

1 This is in marked contrast to the usage of contemporary Anglo-American academics, for whom “Anglo-Indian” still refers to the British in India in the nineteenth century, with little acknowledgement of the term’s contested history. In this essay, “Eurasian” and “Anglo-Indian” will both be used to refer to the mixed-race population of India, with “Eurasian” generally signifying the construction of mixed-race characters in colonial and postcolonial fiction, and “Anglo-Indian” indicating a more formal association with a self-identified “community”.


3 A designation that continued until 1961. After 1961, Anglo-Indians were enumerated as native speakers of English.


6 The relationships between the meaning of “Anglo-Indian” and “Domiciled European” again reflect complex and shifting dynamics of identity and
affiliation. For example, in 1876, the Eurasian and Anglo-Indian Association was founded in Bengal, and in 1879, the Anglo-Indian and Domiciled European Association of Southern India was formed. The “Anglo-Indian” of the Bengali association referred to Europeans, whereas in the Southern Indian organization it was meant to indicate Eurasians. Both these nineteenth-century groups asserted an affiliation between the mixed-race community and the “Domiciled Europeans” – an affiliation whose historical accuracy is difficult to ascertain. British fiction of the period, by authors who consider themselves the true “Anglo-Indians” (such as Maud Diver), creates the impression that no Briton would willingly associate socially with a “Eurasian”. And yet the implied membership of these associations suggests otherwise. These affiliations are further complicated by the fact that later fiction, such as John Masters’s Bhowani Junction, uses “Domiciled European” as a euphemism for “Eurasian”. Not surprisingly, historians of the period vary widely in their conclusions about the social interaction between “Eurasians” and “Domiciled Europeans”. (See, for example, Herbert Alick Stark, Hostages to India: or the Life Story of the Anglo-Indian Race, Calcutta: Star Printing Works, 1926; 2nd edn., 1936, p.123 or Cedric Dover, Cimmerii?: or Eurasians and their Future, Calcutta: The Modern Art Press, 1929, p.52). This is no doubt due in part to the fact that there is not one simple answer as to whether “Domiciled Europeans” as a monolithic group associated with “Eurasians” as a likewise monolithic group. Both shifting historical and regional circumstances as well as, perhaps most importantly, class positions, made these affiliations contingent and local.

7 Hostages to India, p.101.


9 In the 1947 Constitution of India, the first of independent India, Anglo-Indians were guaranteed political representation, the inclusion of English as an official language of India, support for English education, and reserved posts “in the railway, customs, postal and telegraph services of the Union”. While they were the only minority group to receive these protections, the Constitution also structured a gradual reduction of these reserved posts, by ten percent every two years so that in ten years all such reservations would be eliminated. See Paragraph 336 of the 1947 Constitution of India, New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1963.

10 While the issues surrounding ethnic identification in processes such as censuses makes numerical estimation difficult, there are in the order of 100,000–300,000 Anglo-Indians currently in India (Marginality and Identity, p.3). Census figures for “Anglo-Indians” in the last decades when such a category was enumerated are as follows: 1931: 138,395; 1941: 140,422; 1951: 111,637 (John Spencer, “The Anglo-Indians and their Speech: A Socio-Linguistic Essay”, Lingua, 16 (1966), 57–70, 61; and Lionel Caplan, Children of Colonialism: Anglo-Indians in a Postcolonial World, New York: Berg,
2001, p.69). In 1961, after "Anglo-Indian" was removed as a distinct category, 223,781 Indians reported English as their mother tongue (Frank Anthony, *Britain's Betrayal in India: The Story of the Anglo-Indian Community*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1969, p.9). Frank Anthony estimates that the 1941 population was almost double that returned by the census. For a useful account of the problems of Anglo-Indian identity reflected in census-taking, see *Children of Colonialism* pp.66–76.

In his Introduction to *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha cites Nadine Gordimer's description in *My Son's Story* of the mixed race "coloureds" of South Africa as "halfway between...being not defined—and it was this lack of definition in itself that was never to be questioned, but observed like a taboo, something which no one, while following, could ever admit to" (Nadine Gordimer, *My Son's Story*, London: Bloomsbury, 1990, pp.20–1, qtd. in Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994, p.13). Bhabha then asserts that the "in-between" position of the coloureds in South Africa becomes "the symbol for the disjunctive, displaced everyday life of the liberation struggle" (p.13, emphasis added). It is surprising, given that most of Bhabha's anecdotal examples of colonial hybridity come from Indian history, that he never turns his attention to the Anglo-Indians, the "coloureds" of India. His interest in Gordimer's "coloureds" as symbol, however, provides a salient example of the allure of the metaphor of the mixed-race individual.


*ibid.*, p.52.

The chronology of the development in these essays is obscured in the Acknowledgements of *The Location of Culture*, which list the most recent publication date rather than the original. "The Other Question," for example, was first published in 1983 in *Screen* (24, 6, pp.18–35). "The Commitment to Theory" first appeared in 1988 in *New Formations* (5, pp.5–23) and "Of Mimicry and Man" in 1984 in *October* (28, pp.125–33).

See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, New York: Routledge, 1995; Lata Mani, "Multiple Mediations: Feminist Scholarship in the Age of Multinational Reception", *Feminist Review* 35 (1990), 24–41; and Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood, eds., *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, London: Zed Books, 1997. In *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, London: Routledge, 1995, Robert Young provides an essential historical investigation into the development of the concept of hybridity from its biological and racial origins to contemporary usage in critical theory. Young argues that reinvoking the concept of hybridity enables the continuation of a metaphor of "an organic process of the grafting of diversity into singularity" (p.10); it also selects out the notion of race relations that was predicated on the idea of different (therefore unequal) species, and reiterates a conflictual dynamic in which identity is always articulated through the fixity of difference. For Young, to the degree that we
use the model of hybridity without acknowledging or challenging its disconcerting implications, “we still operate within its legacy of violence and corruption” (p.4).


18 First published in February 1981 in Great Britain by Jonathan Cape, *Midnight’s Children* was written in the years preceding the explosion of “hybridity” onto the scene of identity discourse. Monika Fludernik claims that the first use of “hybridity” in its current postcolonial sense is in 1980. See Monika Fludernik, *Introduction, Hybridity and Postcolonialism: Twentieth-century Indian Literature*, ed. Monika Fludernik, Tübingen: Stauffenberger Verlag, 1998, p.10. Clearly, the motif of the racial hybrid continued to intrigue Rushdie. The “peripheral” hero of *Shame*, Omar Khayyam Shakil, is also an illegitimate half-breed of dubious origins: he has three “mothers”, and an unknown Englishman for a father. And Moraes Zogoiby, the Moor of *The Moor’s Last Sigh* describes himself as “a high-born cross-breed”, the son of a Cochin Jew and a Portuguese Catholic (again with aspersions cast on his paternity), *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1995, p.5.


20 “‘The Empire Writes Back’”, p.66.

21 Through the distinction between Mary Pereira’s speech and Saleem’s narration, we clearly see the flaw in Feroza Jussawalla’s argument that *Midnight’s Children* merely mimics Anglo-Indian speech and is therefore unoriginal. Mary’s dialect is stereotypically Anglo-Indian: “one does not have to be Pope to know that the mens are not ever blue!...You are comparing Our Lord to jungle wild men? O Lord, I must catch my ears for shame!” (p.119). See Feroza Jussawalla, *Family Quarrels: Towards a Criticism of Indian Writing in English*, New York: Peter Lang, 1985.

22 Eurasians in British fiction generally had very British-sounding names, such as Patrick Taylor and Victoria Jones in Masters’s *Bhowani Junction* or Judith Anderson in Scott’s *The Alien Sky*. Among the numerous other writers who contributed to conventional images of the Eurasian are Maud Diver, in *Candles in the Wind*, Alice Perrin, in *The Stronger Claim*, and E.M. Forster, in *A Passage to India*. Anglophile Anglo-Indians denied that Indian
Christians (i.e., converts to Christianity) were part of the Anglo-Indian community. See, for example, Evelyn Abel, *The Anglo-Indian Community: Survival in India*, Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1988, p.90.


24 "Midnight's Children" and the Allegory of History", p.47.

25 *ibid.*, p.51.

26 Such schools were originally founded to ensure the anglicization of Anglo-Indian children, but were increasingly under pressure to admit the sons of wealthier Indians who recognized the importance of English in ensuring successful careers. One observer notes, "The schools they set up are still the best, despite falling enrolments of Anglo-Indians who have emigrated. Many Anglo-Indians can scarcely afford to send their children to these schools. As their composition is increasingly Indian, the name will signify the history and tradition of some four centuries of Anglo-Indian life in the Indian subcontinent" (Gloria Jean Moore, *The Anglo-Indian Vision*, Melbourne: AE Press, 1986, p.160).

27 See Anthony, *op. cit.*


29 *ibid.*, p.21.

30 *ibid.*, p.394

31 *ibid.*, p 10; *Midnight's Children*, p.37.