

Englisch-Sprachklausuren

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11. April 2002 – [Oliver Lubrich](#)

V. S. Naipaul: „Prologue“.

in: **V. S. Naipaul:** *Beyond Belief. Islamic Excursions Among the Converted Peoples*. New York 1999, S. xi-xiii.

This is a book about people. It is not a book of opinion. It is a book of stories. The stories were collected during five months of travel in 1995 in four non-Arab Muslim countries – Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia. So there is a context and a theme.

Islam is in its origins an Arab religion. Everyone not an Arab who is a Muslim is a convert. Islam is not simply a matter of conscience or private belief. It makes imperial demands. A convert's worldview alters. His holy places are in Arab lands; his sacred language is Arabic. His idea of history alters. He rejects his own; he becomes, whether he likes it or not, a part of the Arab story. The convert has to turn away from everything that is his. The disturbance for societies is immense, and even after a thousand years can remain unresolved; the turning away has to be done again and again. People develop fantasies about who and what they are; and in the Islam of converted countries there is an element of neurosis and nihilism. These countries can be easily set on the boil.

[...]

I began my writing career as a fiction writer, a manager of narrative; at that time I thought it the highest thing to be. When I was asked – nearly forty years ago – to travel about certain colonial territories in South America and the Caribbean and to write a book, I was delighted to do the traveling – taking small airplanes to strange places, going up South American rivers – but then I wasn't sure how to write the book, how to make a pattern of what I was doing. That first time I got away with autobiography and landscape. It was years before I saw that the most important thing about travel, for the writer, was the people he found himself among.

So in these travel books or cultural explorations of mine the writer as traveler steadily retreats; the people of the country come to the front; and I become again what I was at the beginning: a manager of narrative. In the nineteenth century the invented story was used to do things that other literary forms – the poem, the essay – couldn't easily

do: to give news about a changing society, to describe mental states. I find it strange that the travel form – in the beginning so far away from my own instincts – should have taken me back there, to looking for the story; though it would have undone the point of the book if the narratives were falsified or forced. There are complexities enough in these stories. They are the point of the book; the reader should not look for „conclusions“.