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# The Multiple Postcolonial Identify in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*

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**Abstract---**Post-colonialism focuses on cultural and national identity in literature produced by the people of current or former colonies in places like the Middle East, South Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. Many postcolonial authors delve into the issue of gender when expressing their ideas about post-colonialism. How an individual that lives in does, comes from, or has a history with a certain country or region which has been colonized, shape his or her identity? In the work of many Middle Eastern and South Asian authors, gender is one of the best tools to use when exploring identity. In Salman Rushdie's novel *Shame*, masculinity and femininity are important factors in how certain characters function. This growing desire to define identity as it relates to the characters in *Shame* is not only confined to the individuals in the story, but it is also an issue relevant to the nation of Pakistan as well. Most of the characters in the story are symbolic references to actual political figures in Pakistan. In addition, they also represent different periods in the country's history, both political and social. Rushdie subverts the question commonly posed to migrant intellectuals about their "exilic" identity issues. Exile, by definition, suggests a sense of loss of connections to home, family, and heritage. Although Rushdie comes from "too many places"—India, Pakistan, and England—he takes this potentially negative sense of migrancy and asserts a positive sense of multiple rooting: a rhizomatic and syncretic postcolonial identity. Western readers who are not familiar with an exilic migrant life may indeed feel "overcrowded" by the referential excess in the novel. To those readers, Rushdie is saying, welcome to my world. In addition, the text is filled with Western references that may be unknown to some Eastern audiences.

**Keywords---**assimilations, assertiveness, migration, post-colonialism, self-identity.

## Introduction

*Shame*, the third novel of Salman Rushdie, deals with a smaller canvas and the main characters are representations of the real people. The main figures in the story resemble historical personages, but most of the specific details are not historically true. The exploration of an individual's as well as a community's history gets complicated mainly due to three reasons:

- (a) Time and space always impose certain restrictions on history. A creative writer-turned-historian intends to transcend these limitations.
- (b) There is a strong likeliness of history turning into a legend.
- (c) History encompasses a wide area of study involving various as well as different aspects and happenings in society.

Rushdie's *Shame* is one of the most important novels in the post-colonial literature, Rushdie's *Shame* deals with the struggle of the migrant seems to be coming to terms with moving and ceasing, to discern which places to rest upon from places that can no longer accommodate them, which suggests a larger questioning that is taking place with the values and meaning given to certain modes of belonging—what is acceptable and unacceptable in a culture, which also involves the rhetoric of society and the nation in determining meaning and defining values. Through this struggle, the migrant strives to become and be, moving without being moved. There is a doubling of sorts occur which

investigates the nation-space in the process of articulation of elements: where meanings may be partial because they are in medias res; and history may be half-made because it is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of 'composing' its powerful image. (Bhabha, 1990:3)

Bilquis's burqas provide this kind of doubling, which covers over Omar and Raza's present identity while they engage in this struggle and process of being made. They wear invisibility cloaks that show nothing, but at the same time show forth everything they are not, challenging their identities in terms of gender and class (Jain *et al.*, 2017). They are no longer distinguishable men underneath the formless black garbs of womanly disguise, and the President and doctor go undetected amongst the servants. The black veil leaves open defining one's identity, and continues the process of investigating what identity really is, and "what emerges as an effect of such 'incomplete signification' is a turning of boundaries and limits into the in-between spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated" (Bhabha, 1990:4). Rushdie valorizes this space of the in-between, and tries to extend it in the form of dreams, refusing closure and defining boundaries by the completion of signification as an after-effect of shame which "cannot be held for long within any one frame of flesh and blood, because it grows, it feeds and swells, until the vessel bursts" (*Shame* 305), as elements of identity are being negotiated within the process of particulars dying and other particulars being established. This progress of the migrant transforming meaning takes place and is depicting when the space of the in-between functions to overturn boundaries

And then the explosion comes, a shock-wave that demolishes the house, and after it, the fireball of her burning, rolling outwards to the horizon like the sea, and last of all the cloud, which rises and spreads and hangs over the nothingness of the scene, until I can no longer see what is no longer there; the silent cloud, in the shape of a giant, grey and headless man, a figure of dreams, a phantom with one arm lifted in a gesture of farewell. (*Shame* 305)

Another in-between space is produced. The continuous motion of the death of a house, the demolishing of one framework, in which shame is subsumed, defused, destroyed, and the emptying out of history, identity, meaning, opens up yet another space of the in-between for the migrant to occupy. It seems such destruction is necessary and useful for the revealing of truth that is a fluidity that encompasses the migrant's territory, which is similar to what Anthony D. Smith calls "the new global culture" which "unlike previous cultural imperialisms, which were rooted in an ethnic time and place of origin, the new global culture is universal and timeless Being eclectic, it is indifferent to place or time. It is fluid and shapeless—it is here and now and everywhere. It boasts no history or histories" and furthermore "it is also a fundamentally artificial culture. Its pastiche is capricious and ironical; its effects are carefully calculated, and it lacks any emotional commitment to what is signified" (Smith, 1991:158). And yet the very thing that makes the removal of the house, a framework, giving the effect that a part of the self is experiencing death, so violent and difficult seems to be emotional commitment and the meanings given to shape these "histories" and cultures, through language, rhetoric, and narrative, where "languages thus appear rooted beyond almost anything else in contemporary societies. At the same time, nothing connects us affectively to the dead more than language" (Anderson, 2006:145). Language seems to make movement difficult for the migrant, as it affectively connects the migrant to the things which one is struggling to flee from: the dead past, histories, which creates a "special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests—above all in the form of poetry and songs," where "such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody. The image: unisonance" and "nothing connects us all but imagined sound" (Smith, 1991:145). And simultaneously it is through language that the in-between space is made—space is created for rewriting, and "through that language, encountered at mother's knee and parted with only at the grave, pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures dreamed" (Anderson, 2006:154). The language provides for affective connectors, and within the language, the migrant finds a place of rest in part, in the process of being articulated and articulation. It struggles with the dangers of setting up seemingly solid irremovable boundaries when in reality it is an effective imagined sound that functions to build and also to destroy those same boundaries.

One form of belonging that migrant invests into is the nation and national identity. Anthony D. Smith points out, “for we must never forget that the nationalist solution was adopted not only by many intellectuals in search of their roots but also by many others for whom a similar quest for roots, though it may have possessed other meanings, became equally paramount and for whom a similar solution, the nation was equally necessary and attractive” (Smith, 1991:98). Furthermore, the development of this mode of belonging engages in this *jouissance* motion of straying and being saved, being estranged through the experience of shame and recovering one’s territory of belonging, especially through the use of language and narrative. Smith claims the nation as necessary and attractive in searching for one’s roots and belonging, because in the nation, despite there being difficulties that are produced through this model, “the dangers are clear enough: destabilization of a fragile global security system, proliferation and exacerbation of ethnic conflicts everywhere, the persecution of ‘indigestible’ minorities in the drive for greater national homogeneity, justification of terror, ethnocide and genocide on a scale inconceivable in earlier ages” (Smith, 1991:176), there are the benefits that show

at the same time, a world of nations and national identities is not without hope. Nationalism may not be responsible for the many instances of reform and democratization of tyrannical regimes, but it is a frequent accompanying motive, a source of pride for down-trodden peoples and the recognized mode for joining or rejoining ‘democracy’ and ‘civilization’. It also provides the sole vision and rationale for political solidarity today, one that commands popular assent and elicits popular enthusiasm. (Smith, 1991:176)

Similarly, Aijaz Ahmad points out the dangers of setting up seemingly solid boundaries through language, more specifically in narratives that are to be read as national allegories. In his response to Fredric Jameson, who asserts, “all third-world texts are necessary, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories” (Jameson, 1986:69), and that “the allegorical nature of third-world culture, where the telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself” (Jameson, 1986:85), Ahmad seems to argue for the impossibility of containing the occurrence of, in Smith’s terms, the eclectic fluidity of the universe in what Jameson polemically labels as “Third-World Literature”, because the “category ‘nation’ itself keeps slipping into a much wider, far less demarcated vocabulary of ‘culture’, ‘society’, ‘collectivity’, and so on” (Ahmad, 1992:109). The in-between spaces allow for the migrant to be aware of the fluid possibilities, rather than subject to fitting into a national allegory, which cannot speak for all the surplus fragments uncategorized by the nation. Rather, it is from this border the migrant is able to move through these fragments, using “nationalism” as a powerful model and tool for utilizing the structures of power that is always functioning for different migrants, to navigate away from constraining boundaries and identities, such as the Third-World Other. Rushdie uses the experience of shame to provide this in-between space for the migrant to move through.

The experience of shame cannot be seen as a “third-world text” projecting “a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society” (Jameson, 1986:69), because shame and the unassimilated fragments it produces is a phenomenon that is not exclusive to Pakistan, or to any one individual, and “by assimilating the enormous heterogeneities and productivities of our life into a single Hegelian metaphor of the master-slave relation, this theory reduces us to an ideal-type and demands from us that we narrate ourselves through a form of commensurate with that ideal-type”(105). In this case, Rushdie uses the event of shame to show that shame can function as an ideal type of representation, which inevitably reveals the discrepancies that arise in proposing ideal-types, which are the solidified frameworks that cannot house existing realities of the migrant. Furthermore, shame is used to reveal that the nation can be about Pakistan, not because that is the only experience to describe Pakistan, but because it is something that Pakistan experiences and in no way limited to Pakistan. The migrant is able to narrate this from the in-between space, the fluid boundaries that shame opens up.

Rushdie seems to agree with the insistence that the gendered sign, being the women embodying this doubling of time, straddling the border from being consumed by male structures of narrative, being defined and contained by a singular framework of being, are resilient to being completely destroyed, and “not all women are crushed by any system, no matter how oppressive” (*Shame* 181). They breed the marginalized repressions that gather strength to overturn the system, and to move and situate female and the male within a different narrative, deploying dialectical opposites that are “contained within a trajectory of progression—that is no longer as threatening since they are contained by their very dependence on each other; they can be transcended, grasped from without” (Yishai, 2002:203).

Bilquis provides the means for Omar and Raza to be removed from their present reality. Underneath their disguise, they are no longer male, President, nor doctor, but they are ambiguous, yet gendered bodies in motion,

moving half-made identities that hold endless possibilities within them, that is “due to this very act of meditation, they are in excess of their corresponding concepts as well as of each other” and

at the same time, her existence exceeds the symbolic value she embodies. It is this excess that is the marker of mediation—of the impossibility of a complete allegorical identification between the character and what she purportedly represents. Thus, this excess is not a “flaw” in the conceptual framework of the novel, but is the inevitable residue, intrinsic to the negative dialectic, according to Horkheimer and Adorno. (Yishai, 2002:205)

The same is true for the figure of the male-gendered dream. The historical sedimentation seems to be gendered as male, the establishment of a system, and the seemingly immovable structures, yet Rushdie depicts these solid structures in the figure of dreams, alogical and fluid, to reveal they are in fact not impossible to remove, but only seem that way. In mediation, the excess fragments and unexplainable flaws do not function to define the characters, but they become arbitrary commensurable parts and representations to identify with (Sankar *et al.*, 2019). They are as Anthony D. Smith suggests, fluid structures, artificial cultures, created histories that have no historical origin, here and nowhere, held together by powerfully imagined emotional commitments that are difficult to remove, but not impossible. These gendered signs move and work together to build and tear down structures of reality and narrative, and they are constantly working to invite and exclude, create relationships and maintain them because

Communities able to boast such histories have a competitive advantage over others where that history is scanty or doubtful. In the latter case, the intellectuals have a double task: they must recover a sufficiently large quantity of communal history to convince their own members that they have an illustrious past, and they must authenticate it sufficiently to convince skeptical outsiders of its merits. (Smith, 1991:164)

In bringing together solidarity, and structure, a believable sturdy history that can convince the skeptics, those inside and outside, the migrant seems to always be working with the present fragments, past repressions that have resurfaced, and the traces shame produces, that essentially constitute these solid structures of being through structures of power which is where regeneration lies. Shame becomes a site of regeneration through mediation, the in-between space “in and through the figure of woman a critique not only of social relations made possible within a certain system of representation but a critique of the domination of women not through the women represented, but through the representation of these women” (Yishai, 2002:212). And shame always seems to create and reveal the flaws that are seeking to be incorporated, demanding invitation into a narrative, where

The scraps, patches, and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects. In the production of the nation as a narrative, there is a split between the continuous, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of writing the nation. (Bhabha, 2013:297)

As each of these fragments of daily life are incorporated, turned into convincing material for solidifying artificial histories, creating identities and incorporating them, building the nation, it ultimately invests in incorporating all of the scraps, patches, and rags of daily life, which seems to point to the importance of continuing this motion of ambivalent splitting, a doubling in time and narrative, establishing seemingly lasting pedagogical models and identities, while simultaneously performing, dying and rewriting identity, defining and redefining values, making meaning and attaching them to the fragmented signs of national culture. And it seems the nation is of significance and value for the migrant, because “as opposed to other models of identification—‘they offer no sense of election, no unique history, no special destiny. These are the promises which nationalism, for the most part, fulfills and the real reasons why so many people continue to identify with the nation’” (Smith, 1991:176-177). It provides a powerful place of belonging, which is really no place at all, a utopia that is always present as long as there is a continuum of convincing, assenting through identification, and restructuring that is happening. Rushdie ends with the figure of the dream, as a means of offering this promise, it is the sublime object that

dissolves in the raptures of a bottomless memory. It is such a memory, which, from stopping point to stopping point, remembrance to remembrance, love to love, transfers that object to the refulgent point of the dazzlement in which I stray in order to be. As soon as I perceive it, as soon as I name it, the sublime triggers—it has already been triggered—a spree of perceptions and words that expands memory boundlessly. I then forget the point of departure and find myself removed to a secondary universe, set off from the one where ‘I’ am—delight and loss. (Kristeva, 1982:12)




## Conclusion

Rushdie's *Shame* can be seen as a site of hope and regeneration, for the event of shame itself is the in-between space and the borders that provide the doubling motion to remove, establish, and transform what is a death drive into a new place of significant, temporary and ambivalent residence. It is the postcolonial writer as the migrant, writing from the borders of the nation, identity, and meaning, straddling the politics of shame, continually devoted to demarcating and demolishing boundaries, who eventually expands the territory of hope, to allow the migrant entry into a movement which seems to be moving away from shame. Furthermore, the nation can be seen as a useful and powerful place of belonging for the migrant to be working in and out of to accomplish these transformations.

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