

EURAMERICA Vol. 30, No. 2 (June 2000), 71-109  
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## ARTICULATING SILENCE: THE EXPROPRIATION OF THE PERIPHERY IN *SHAME*

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### **Abstract**

This essay focuses on how Salman Rushdie expropriates the notion of the periphery to critique dictatorship and on how his employment of the diaspora aesthetic fails to articulate the real voice of the silent and marginalized women in *Shame*. By discussing a number of issues that are associated with the diasporic world, including images of border and exile, meanings of home, the experience of migration, the ambivalence of cultural identity, and the representation of several silenced Pakistani women, the essay shows that the expropriation of the periphery in *Shame* unravels an inner conflict of the diaspora subject and reveals its anxiety. While trying to maintain a certain detachment, the novelist apparently loses his opportunity to conduct a more in-depth exploration of the above-mentioned agenda.

**Key Words:** periphery, female, diaspora aesthetic, palimpsest, Salman Rushdie

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Received December 26, 1999; accepted March 28, 2000.  
Proofreader: Pei-Ling Tsai

'I am a peripheral man,' Omar Khayyám answered. 'Other persons have been the peripheral actors in my life-story. Hyder and Harappa, my leading men. Immigrant and native, Godly and profane, military and civilian. And several leading ladies. I watched from the wings, not knowing how to act. I confess to social climbing, to only-doing-my-job, to being cornerman in other people's wrestling matches. I confess to fearing sleep.'

—Salman Rushdie, *Shame* 283

A telescopic observation and a pungent comment on the familial, political struggle in the pseudo-Pakistani elite world, Salman Rushdie's *Shame* is no doubt a novel about the periphery. Composed of disjunctive episodes that evoke a feeling of endless stasis,<sup>1</sup> the book strings up its digressive plot with a focus on a

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<sup>1</sup> There is an obvious stylistic resemblance between *Shame* and several of Gabriel García Márquez's works. This can be most clearly detected in Rushdie's epitomization of the novelist's narrative style in an essay entitled "Gabriel García Márquez," in which he describes the ambience in *The Autumn of the Patriarch* and *The Chronicle of a Death Foretold* as follows:

[A] dictatorship so oppressive that all change, all possibility of development, is stifled. The power of the patriarch stops time, and the text proceeds to swirl and eddy around the stories of his reign, its non-linear form providing an exact analogy for the feeling of endless stasis. . . . *The Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is about honour and its opposite, that is to say, dishonour, shame. (IH 303)

Later Rushdie concludes:

. . . Márquez is writing at a greater distance from his material than ever before. The book and its narrator probe slowly, painfully, through the mists of half-accurate memories, equivocations, contradicting versions, trying to establish what happened and why; and achieve only provisional answers. The effect of this retrospective method is to make the *Chronicle* strangely elegiac in tone, as if Márquez feels that he has drifted away from his roots, and can only write

familial and collective shame incarnated in a feeble, idiot girl, Sufyia Zinobia.<sup>2</sup> Through the peeping of Omar Khayyám, a voyeuristic peripheral poet<sup>3</sup> from a border city, the novel's diasporic narrator—presumably the writer himself<sup>4</sup>—tries to critique the collective shame of the semi-fictional nation with his ambivalent representation of women—the most silent, peripheral social group in that pseudo-Pakistani palimpsest country.

In contrast to Saleem's striving for the centrality of history in *Midnight's Children*, the narrator of *Shame* stays in the periphery and uses a peripheral man, Omar Khayyám, to weave together the Iskander-Raza legend.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, unlike *Midnight's Children*, which adopts a dialogic form, *Shame's* author plays the role of an omniscient and omnipotent narrator, whose voice

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write about them now through veils of formal difficulty. (IH 304)

The above quotations indicate that these are as much Rushdie's critical comments as his ruminations on what he has absorbed from Márquez's novels.

<sup>2</sup> According to Aijaz Ahmad, the name is a "prankish" double pun on "Sufi" and "Zainub," the granddaughter of the Prophet of Islam who is quite central to the popular stands derived from Sufic Islam (*In Theory* 146).

<sup>3</sup> The motif of peeping through the telescope indicates an implicit parody of the celebrated Persian poet Omar Khayyám's double role—a poet and an astronomer (Biographical Preface, *Rubáiyát* 14).

<sup>4</sup> In an 1983 interview with Una Chaudhuri, Rushdie mentions the question of the narrator in *Shame*. He explains that

In *Shame* there's no narrator. It's not narrated, except by me. There is an 'I' figure in it which is me and occasionally says things. And even that isn't quite me because novelists, being sneaky people, will fictionalize even the bit that looks like autobiography. (7)

<sup>5</sup> Naming remains an important act in Rushdie's novels, the name of Omar Khayyám is apparently chosen out of its symbolic implication of cultural translation. With respect to the implications of other names, such as Iskander, Harappa, and many other characters, see Brennan 119-120 and Harrison 77.

sporadically intervenes into the picaresque plot to comment on family scandals and political struggles in the seemingly fictional world. By taking a peripheral, off-centering, and diasporic stance, Rushdie approaches the palimpsest world of *Shame* from an odd angle, which reveals the ambivalent cultural context he involves.

Such a diasporic view, which often teeters between detachment and involvement, results in a palimpsest representation that is made up of overlapping visions. This explains why the narrator declares that the country that he depicts is not exactly the same as the real one in reality:

The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exist, like myself, *at a slight angle to reality*. I have found this *off-centring* to be necessary; but its value is, of course, open to debate. My view is that I am not writing only about Pakistan. (S 29; emphases added)

Strategically and aesthetically, this off-centring representation is typical of a diaspora aesthetic.<sup>6</sup> It facilitates a convenient perspective for both a critical comment and the discursive practice of a counter discourse. However, in conceptualizing notions that are often associated with the periphery, such as the experience of migration, borders, exile, and the oppressed women, Rushdie seems to turn the complicated texture of *Shame* into a hodge-podge of conceptualized ideas, which discloses certain problematic employment of his diaspora aesthetic. Namely, the concept of

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<sup>6</sup> For further discussion of Rushdie's diaspora aesthetic, see Jung Su, "The Palimpsest Vision: Diaspora Aesthetic in Salman Rushdie's Tetralogy," diss., National Taiwan Normal U, 1999, 29-38.

the periphery, an effective post-colonial politics of resistance, is likely to lose its insurgent force when over-appropriated. This means that if the representation of the periphery, such as the portrayal of the women in *Shame*, becomes as much devastating and stereotypical as that of the dominant group—the centre, then there seems to be little hope of showing the real compassion for and understanding of the oppressed. It would be worth some thinking here to reconsider whether the author's critique of dictatorship turns less weighty when compared with the occasional revelation of his ambivalent diasporic neurosis in his narration.

The following discussion will focus on how Rushdie expropriates the concept of the periphery to critique dictatorship and on how this employment of the diaspora aesthetic fails to articulate the real voice of the silent Pakistani women in *Shame*. First, I argue that the fairyland-like palimpsest country, which “is and is not” Pakistan, is a product of the diasporic vision. Such a perspective makes possible the Derridean representations of the narrator's remotely connected homeland. In the second section, I am interested in how Rushdie elaborates the concept of border crossing and exile, the typical experiences of staying in the periphery, in order to transcend the textual as well as the ideological frames of the suffocating world in *Shame*. In the third section, I will explore the textual recurrence of the image of “home” as prison and the source of consolation by contrasting the patriarchal home of Iskander and Raza and the matriarchal home of the three Shakil sisters. I try to argue that while using the female as the symbol of marginal resistance, Rushdie risks the danger of going astray in the labyrinth of his multi-lineal elaboration of numerous post-colonial agendas, which are not easily encompassed by a polarized representation of the muzzled female.

Furthermore, I attempt to argue that if the matriarchal home is as oppressing as its patriarchal counterpart, then such an appropriation of the periphery implies nothing but an excessive taste for the aesthetic of violence. Finally, I hope to elucidate how the image of Sufyia Zinobia, the representative of the most peripheral and silent woman in the book's pseudo-Pakistani society, is expropriated by Rushdie to express his condemnation of the collective shame. By focusing on Sufyia Zinobia's Dracula-like revenge, Rushdie tries to articulate her silence by making explicit the personal, familial, and collective shame in her bestiality. However, in portraying her as a vampire-like succubus, it seems difficult for the reader not to associate the representation with misogyny and a strategic aestheticization of several post-colonial agendas, which conversely dilute the intensity of his piquant critique. In doing so, I hope to point out that the expropriation of the periphery in *Shame* unravels an inner conflict of the diaspora subject and reveals its anxiety. It also indicates that while trying to maintain a certain detachment, the novelist apparently loses his opportunity to conduct a more in-depth exploration of the afore-mentioned agendas.

### Fabricating the Palimpsest Country

Stylistically, it seems not easy for the reader to categorize *Shame* within a particular genre or tell the fictional from the real in Rushdie's representation of the palimpsest land. But it is exactly due to this medley of different genres and the blurring between the fictional and the factual that the novel is able to cultivate an interstitial space to critique the real with the imaginary.

A blend of “modern fairy-tale” (S70), “comic epic” (Rushdie, “Author from Three Countries” 22), “black comedy” (Rushdie, “Interview with Haffenden” 241), horror film, the picaresque tradition (Brennan 122), “postmodern oral tale” (Brennan 139), “modern cartoon” (Ahmad, *In Theory* 141), and the tradition of the Grotesque (Ahmad, *In Theory* 142), *Shame* is no doubt a novel composed of histories, imaginations, and many other implied literary texts, all of which overlap one another. It is, among Rushdie’s major novels, the first one that explicitly applies the term “palimpsest” to depict his fictional world, in which the Iskander-Raza legend is superimposed upon the Bhutto-ul-Haq antagonism.

To better illustrate how the antagonism of the story’s two villains is based on the political turmoil of Pakistan, allow me to briefly outline the founding of the country. To begin with, the founding of India and Pakistan is the by-product of the end of the British colonization in the Indian subcontinent. On July 15, 1947, the House of Commons proclaimed that in precisely one month “two independent Dominions” would be established in India, “to be known respectively as India and Pakistan” (Wolpert 347). A partition of territory, which divides the assets and liabilities of British India into bundles of 82.5 percent for India and 17.5 for Pakistan, was therefore validated on August 14, 1947 (Wolpert 348). The main cause of this partition arose from the religious, communal collision between Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. Led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the Muslim League insisted that Muslims establish a “pure” country. In doing so, the League hoped to found a country that entirely belongs to the

Muslims.<sup>7</sup> Mediated by the British government, Nehru, the leader of the Congress Party, was reconciled to partition, whereas Gandhi alone refused to accept the vivisection of his motherland, but no one in power paid much attention to the Mahatma anymore (Wolpert 347). Having feared that they would awake next morning to find themselves trapped in a nation fundamentally hostile to their faith, millions of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs were thus driven to take what pitiful possessions they could carry and abandon their fields and homes to migrate from their old homes to the “new homes” (Wolpert 348). This is known as the land change in the summer of 1947, which forced ten million people to leave their homes while approximately one million of them never reached their promised land (Wolpert 348). In Pakistan, Jinnah died in 1948, which resulted in a political tumult between different political parties for more than ten years (Harrison 26). In 1958, General Ayub Kuan controlled the country with his military force and stepped toward becoming an Islamic republic (Harrison 26).

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, on whom Iskander Harappa is modeled upon, rises to become an influential politician at this time. Like Iskander, Bhutto comes from the landlord family of Sind and was educated in Berkeley and Oxford. He organized Pakistan People’s Party in 1967 and became the Prime Minister in 1973 (Harrison 27). During the period, the civil war broke up in 1971,

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<sup>7</sup> According to T. A. Raman, there was a ratio of 254,931,000 Hindus to 92,058,000 Muslims in the subcontinent in 1941, which was three to one minus (216). This means Muslims were gradually aware of their status as a religious/political minority; therefore, the establishment of an entirely new country composed of and dominated by Muslims seems an ideal that promises a better future.



which resulted in a second partition—East Pakistan split from the country and became an independent country, Bangladesh (Harrison 26). In 1977, just like Raza in *Shame*, General Zia ul-Haq initiated a coup and arrested Bhutto. In 1978 the former president was executed (Suleri 174). Although Zia was not killed by the three Shakil sisters' dumbwaiter as Raza was in the story, he died in a plane crash in 1988 (*IH* 53)—five years after the publication of *Shame*, which coincidentally verifies the book's prediction.

This pseudo-social-realistic and parodic representation of the diasporic vision on the one hand suggests that Rushdie might adopt an ambivalent politics to escape censorship.<sup>8</sup> On the other, it helps to fabricate an “almost the same but not quite” palimpsest “Peccavistan,” which makes possible the existence of ruptures that permits the author to intervene into the farcical, violent “fairyland” with his own comments, exaggerations, and the theorization of his diaspora experience:

My story's palimpsest-country has, I repeat, no name of its own. The exiled Czech writer Kundera once wrote: 'A name means continuity with the past and people without a past are people without a name.' But I am dealing with a past that refuses to be suppressed, that is daily doing battle with the present; so it is perhaps unduly harsh of me to deny my

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<sup>8</sup> Sara Suleri has discerningly pointed out the evasiveness in *Shame* and its relation with censorship:

The novel's engagement in both the execution of Pakistan's former president and the familial problems of the late President Zia ul Haq [sic] rendered it far too inflammatory for the censors of that third-world nation. It is therefore written in a calm assumption that its audience will not have lived through the historical poignancies it caricatures. (217, chapter 8, note 1)

fairyland a title.

There's an apocryphal story that Napier, after a successful campaign in what is now the south of Pakistan, sent back to England the guilty, one-word message, 'Peccavi'.<sup>9</sup> *I have Sind*. I'm tempted to name my looking-glass Pakistan in honour of this bilingual (and fictional, because never really uttered) pun. *Let it be Peccavistan*.<sup>10</sup> (S 88)

Compared with *The Moor's Last Sigh*, the palimpsest country in *Shame* is more of an embryonic scheme than a fully-developed artistic vision. It can be thought of as Rushdie's earliest conception of the palimpsest vision. Strategically, this palimpsestual design fulfills two narrative requirements. First, its ambivalence destabilizes the narrative frame of the plot, creating fissures and loopholes for the insertion of various kinds of digressions, episodes, reiteration of events, and authorial comments. Secondly, the *palimpsestuality* of the story's setting—the pseudo-realistic nation—visualizes Rushdie's theory of cultural and historical formations, which treats both culture and history as overlapping trajectories of the present and the past. In other words, there is no "purified" culture, nor is there any one-dimensional interpretation of history. The metaphor of palimpsest, accordingly, becomes a double-blade: on the one hand it interrogates the validity of the founding of the nation on the basis of the elimination of its former historical trajectories; on the other, it highlights the overlapping vision of the narrator's diasporic representation of the homeland.

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<sup>9</sup> This is a Latin pun, which connotes "I have sinned (Sind)."

<sup>10</sup> In parodying Napier's Latin pun, Rushdie turns the name "Pakistan," which is made up of *Pak*, "holy," and *istan* "land" (Jussawalla, "Rushdie's DASTAN-E-DILUBA" 54), into a mimic land inscribed with the colonial sin.

Such an emphasis on the palimpsestual nature of the fictional country and the narrator's diasporic reinscription no doubt creates textual flexibility and ambivalence, which cultivate a gray zone for satires. Apart from the narrative ambivalence, it is worth noticing that the theoretical ambivalence of the text, on the other hand, paradoxically dilutes the intensity of the authorial critique. This theoretical disparity is in particular explicit when the idea of migration is linked to the diasporic narrator's palimpsest vision.

Before examining the disparity of his theorization of migration, I would first like to illustrate how Rushdie develops the metaphor of migration with a metonymic transference. In the first place, Rushdie associates migration with gravity:

The anti-myth of gravity and of belonging bear the same name: flight. Migration, n., moving, for instance in flight, from one place to another. To fly and to flee: both are ways of seeking freedom. . . . (S 86)

This personal act of migration is shortly magnified as the separation of land:

When individuals come unstuck from their native land, they are called migrants. When nations do the same thing (Bangladesh), the act is called secession. What is the best thing about migrant peoples and seceded nations? I think it is their hopefulness. . . . And what's the worst thing? It is the emptiness of one's luggage. . . . We have floated upwards from history, from memory, from Time. (S 86-87)

The above passage employs a chain of signifiers to accomplish the effect of a Derridean *différance*. Through a metonymic transference, the narrator displaces each signifier with a slightly

different new one to create an ambivalent shift of significance. The differing and deferring of signification are then grafted to the palimpsestual nature of the diasporic vision, which sets up an underlying structure for the story's fictional world. Thus, the narrator declares: "I may be such a person. Pakistan may be such a country" (S 87). Then he goes further to explain:

It is well known that the term 'Pakistan', an acronym, was originally thought up in England by a group of Muslim intellectuals. P for the Punjabis, A for the Afghans, K for the Kashmiris, S for Sind and the 'tan', they say, for Baluchistan. (No mention of the East Wing, you notice; Bangladesh never got its name in the title, and so eventually, it took the hint and seceded from the secessionists. Imagine what such a double secession does to people!)—So it was a word born in exile which then went East, was borne-across or trans-lated, and imposed itself on history; a returning migrant, settling down on partitioned land, forming a palimpsest on the past. A palimpsest obscures what lies beneath. To build Pakistan it was necessary to cover up Indian history, to deny that Indian centuries lay just beneath the surface of Pakistani Standard Time. The past was rewritten; there was nothing else to be done. (S 87)

The metonymic shift that includes gravity, flight, the search for freedom, migration, and partition results in a variety of metaphorical implications, which is incorporated into the metaphor of palimpsest. It is worth noticing here that the metaphor of palimpsest is operated on a double level: on the one hand, it refers to a bitter satire on the religious fundamentalism and cultural essentialism that bolster up the founding of the nation; on the other, it signifies the migrant's overlapping vision of his homeland and his longing for the plurality of cultural represen-

tation:

Who commandeered the job of rewriting history?—The immigrants, the *mohajirs*. In what language?—Urdu and English, both imported tongues, although one travelled less distance than the other. It is possible to see the subsequent history of Pakistan as a duel between two layers of time, the obscured world forcing its way back through what-had-been-imposed. *It is the true desire of every artist to impose his or her vision on the world*; and Pakistan, the peeling, fragmenting palimpsest, increasingly at war with itself, may be described as a failure of the dreaming mind. Perhaps the pigments used were the wrong ones, impermanent, like Leonardo's [painting]; or perhaps the place was just *insufficiently imagined*, a picture full of irreconcilable elements. . . . [A] miracle that went wrong. (S 87; emphases added)

There are subtle conceptual leaps and linkages in the above two cited passages. First of all, Rushdie tries to connect migrant, language, and the nation's formation by marking out their commonality—"being borne-across and trans-lated." Then, these concepts are followed by the associations of colonial languages (Urdu and English), translation, the imbrication of the palimpsest, and the historical formation of Pakistani history. It is evident that the "failure of the dreaming mind" implies a bitter criticism of the suffocating atmosphere in Pakistan and the narrator's disapproval of the country's censorship<sup>11</sup> and religious fundamental-

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<sup>11</sup> In an essay entitled "Censorship," Rushdie mentions his unhappy encounter with censorship in Pakistan:

My first direct encounter with censorship took place in 1968, when I was twenty-one, fresh out of Cambridge and full of the radical fervour of that famous year. I returned to Karachi, where a small magazine commissioned me to write a piece about my impressions on

ism. However, this critique loses its piquancy when the locus of its argument is replaced by an aesthetic concern, which transforms the connotation of palimpsest from the formation of Pakistani history into the writer's own diasporic vision:

As for me: I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist. I, too, face the problem of history: what to retain, what to dump, how to hold on what memory insists on relinquishing, how to deal with change. (S 87-88)

This aestheticization of the prior pungent criticism in fact reveals the inner discrepancy between aesthetics and politics in Rushdie's employment of the diaspora aesthetic, which makes *Shame* teeter between the critique of a religious, cultural essentialism and the theorization of migration. It can be argued that Rushdie's occasional detachment and involvement expose a narrative hesitance, which never really resolves to persist in its satiric critique or switch to an aestheticization of diasporic experiences.

To better illustrate how the authorial intervention reflects

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returning home. . . . I submitted my piece, and a couple of weeks later was told by the magazine's editor that the Press Council, the national censors, had banned it completely.

Next I persuaded Karachi TV to let me produce and act in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*, which they liked because it was forty-five minutes long, had a cast of two and required only a park bench for a set. I then had to go through a series of astonishing censorship conferences. . . . '[T]he word pork may not be spoken on Pakistan television.' And that was that. I also had to cut the line about God being a coloured queen who wears a kimono and plucks his eyebrows. (IH 37-38)

It does not take too much effort to see why the narrator in *Shame* compares the country to "a failure of the dreaming mind." See also Rushdie, "Fiction's Embattled Infidel" 49.

**this diasporic neurosis, let us go back to an earlier passage, in which Rushdie tries to metaphorize the migrant's "anti-**

rootedness”:

I, too, know something of this immigrant business. I am an emigrant from one country (India) and a newcomer in two (England, where I live, and Pakistan, to which my family moved against my will). And I have a theory that the resentments we *mohajirs* engender have something to do with our conquest of the force of gravity. We have performed the act of which all men anciently dream, the thing for which they envy the birds; that is to say, we have flown.

I am comparing gravity with belonging. Both phenomena observably exist: my feet stay on the ground, and I have never sold my childhood home in Bombay. But neither is understood. We know the force of gravity, but not its origins; and to explain why we become attached to our birthplaces we pretend that we are trees and speak of roots. Look under your feet. You will not find gnarled growth sprouting through the soles. Roots, I sometimes think, are a conservative myth, designed to keep us in our places. (S 85-86)

This “anti-rootedness” implied in the above ornithoid metaphor is subtly replaced by an affirmation of “multi-rootedness” in the legend of the ash Yggdrasil, a metaphorization and mythologization of the act of migration:

[T]o come back to the ‘roots’ idea, I should say that I haven’t managed to shake myself free of it completely. Sometimes I do see myself as a tree, even, rather grandly, as the ash Yggdrasil, the mythical world-tree of Norse legend. The ash Yggdrasil has three roots. One falls into the pool of knowledge by Valhalla, where Odin comes to drink. A second is being slowly consumed in the undying fire of Muspellheim, realm of the flame-god Surtur. The third is gradually being gnawed through by a fearsome beast called the Nidhögg. And



when fire and monster have destroyed two of the three, the ash will fall, and darkness will descend. The twilight of the gods: a tree's dream of death. (S88)

In comparing himself to the ash Yggdrasil, Rushdie apparently aestheticizes the state of being a diaspora man, turning the predicament into creative force. This hermeneutic shift can, at its best, be understood as recuperative mythologization, which sees migration as “rebirth in death” and thereby affirms the productivity of one’s multi-rootedness. But if we contrast Rushdie’s previous bitter criticism of the stifling atmosphere of Pakistan with this aestheticized legend, we find it barely convincing that Rushdie has any positive expectation of his Pakistani “root.” There is, as Aijaz Ahmad has pointed out, a sense of “lovelessness” (*In Theory* 151) that permeates the whole text, which can also be detected by the careful reader in Rushdie’s depiction of Saleem’s unhappy Pakistani adolescence in *Midnight’s Children*. This disparity between despair and affirmation results in a positional oscillation. The ambivalent, self-rationalizing, contingent theorization of migration, in this sense, reflects a typical diasporic anxiety about making choices and identification.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The anxiety and ambivalence can be detected in Rushdie’s 1983 interview with Michael T. Kaufman, in which he expresses his detached attitude to Pakistan and his affirmation of multi-rootedness:

I felt that, of the three countries, I was most an outsider there [Pakistan]. . . . The '65 war was one of those instances where a choice became necessary and it really did partially derange me. Saleem, in *Midnight’s Children*, also goes slightly off his rocker in the '65 war, and I drew on what was happening to me because I did feel awful about the fact that there were Indian airplanes, and I was in Pakistan. I didn’t particularly feel India was my enemy because we’d only very recently come to Pakistan. . . . I don’t think that migration, the process of being uprooted, necessarily leads to rootlessness. What it can

I quote Rushdie's authorial confession in length to elucidate that the narrator's "off-centring" stance in fact results from the operation of an ambivalent politics, which facilitates a palimpsestual representation, reveals a diasporic anxiety, and features the diaspora aesthetic in *Shame*. Border and centre, the two metaphoric concepts that often signify the silenced (the dominated) and the ones that articulate (the dominant group) in the recent critical discourse, for example, serve as the two contrapuntally recurrent images that strenuously imply a teetering between the sense of belonging and that of escape, echoing the motif of "anti-rootedness" and the desire for "rootedness" with a likewise ambivalence.

## Borders and Exile

Borders or frontiers, the terms often associated with the periphery, as is mentioned above, serve as recurrent motifs that are contrasted with the centre. They appear throughout the text and carry much weight especially in the beginning and the end of the story. In employing the politics of difference, Rushdie combines the concept of migration and exile with differing/deferring interpretations of borders to indicate a transgressive will. The border, the place where resistance usually takes place, is ambivalently connected with the idea of exile, translation, the female, and other recurrent concepts in *Shame*.

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lead to is a kind of multiple rooting. It's not the traditional identity crisis of not knowing where you come from. The problem is that you come from too many places. I have a fear that it may, at some point, become necessary to make choices among these three countries, and that it would be very painful. ("Authors from Three" 22-23)

The story, thus, strategically begins from the border:

In the remote border town of Q., which when seen from the air resembles nothing so much as an ill-proportioned dumb-bell, there once lived three lovely, and loving, sisters. Their names . . . were universally known . . . as Chhunni, Munnee and Bunny. (*S* 11)

Beginning his story from a setting based on the border city of Quetta in Pakistan (Suleri 180), Rushdie combines the idea of the periphery with the closed, self-sufficient matriarchal home of the three Shakil sisters who greatly suffered the patriarchal repression in their youth. Yet, out of the reader's expectation, the closed female world in the border is not just a place of resistance but a stifling female microcosm replete with ambivalent properties. On the one hand, it is firmly constrained by social decorum, which even impels the three sisters to declare their conception at the same time to cover up the personal shame (One of them has sex with a white man). This emphasis on collectivity goes to extreme when the three declared that they gave birth to a son—Omar Khayyám—"collectively." Later, the kind of solidarity is extended to a severe incarceration that can hardly allow the son to make contact with the world outside.

Omar Khayyám, a hybrid that comes from the border town, emerges as a functional and peripheral character<sup>13</sup> that goes into the heart of the events on the narrator's behalf. However, as a "voyeur," he can only watch them from an off-centring perspec-

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<sup>13</sup> Suleri also points out that "Omar Khayyám serves very little function in the plot of *Shame*, other than to represent the narrator's more self-punishing impulses, his sense of being an inept body in the discourse of history" (188).

tive. Ironically, born out of an unnamable shame, Omar becomes a shameless person. He peeps out through his telescope the young Farah Zoroaster, irresistibly loves the imbecile young Sufyia at an old age, and has an adultery with Sufyia's ayah, Shabhanou, all of which suggest a transgressive will to break the textual as well as the ideological frame.

Conceived by the three mothers in a time very close to the 1947 partition of India in a border town, Omar Khayyám, named after the translated Persian poet (Suleri 180), summarizes the sum total of the novel's dominant concepts, such as shamelessness, the periphery, translation, border crossing, transgression, exile, and the sense of being an outsider. Rushdie takes advantage of the name and the historical context it invokes, using it to refer to his own ambivalent position and the subtle historical context he involves:

Omar Khayyám's position as a poet is curious. He was never very popular in his native Persian; and he exists in the West in a translation that is really a complete reworking of his verses, in many cases very different from the spirit (to say nothing of the content) of the original. I, too, am a translated man. I have been *borne across*. It is generally believed that something is always lost in translation; I cling to the notion—and use, in evidence, the success of Fitzgerald-Khayyám—that something can also be gained. (S 29)

This metaphorization links the peripheral hero and the narrator to not only the historical context the Persian poet involves but also the concepts of cultural hybridity, translatedness, and border crossing, which the name connotes. The peripheral man—Omar Khayyám, consequently, is a self-portrait of the

narrator himself. His synthetic cultural breeding,<sup>14</sup> his longing for the escape from home, and his self exile, are redolent of Rushdie's personal dissatisfaction with the fundamentalist sectarianism and the banality of censorship in Pakistan.

Yet, these divergent connotations do not incorporate into an organic texture. The border connotes the marginal, the sense of desolateness, border crossing, resistance, the harbor for the exilic, and ironically, the place of imprisonment and destruction. This ambivalence is in particular evident in many characters' exilic experiences in *Shame*. Omar Khayyám, for example, cannot tolerate his mother's surveillance and regards his border home as a prison. To rid himself of this invisible panopticon, he chooses to lead a self-exilic life by running away from home. The two villains, Iskander and Raza alike, lead exilic lives after they lose the power and flee to the border as Omar Khayyám does. The border, therefore, symbolizes the limit exiles attempt to cross over because "[t]he border is impossible to police" (S 268). The sense of remoteness and desolation—a synonym of freedom, which the border evokes, metaphorically indicates the prelude of hope because the narrator tells its reader: "[B]eyond the border,

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<sup>14</sup> This is in particular evident in the narrator's depiction of Omar's taste in books:

Here I must praise his autodidactic gifts. For by the time he left "Nishapur" he had learned classical Arabic and Persian; also Latin, French and German; all with the aid of leather-bound dictionaries and the unused texts of his grandfather's deceptive vanity. . . . Illuminated manuscripts of the poetry of Ghalib; volumes of letters written by Mughal emperors to their sons, the Burton translation of the *Alf laylah wa laylah* [*1001 Nights* or *Arabian Nights*] and the *Travels* of Ibn Batuta and the Qissa or tales of the legendary Hatim Tai. (S 33)

This, together with his westernized education, makes him a perfect hybrid, translated man.

the possibility of hope: yes, there might be sanctuary across the frontier” (*S* 267).

Ironically, Rushdie does not offer too much bright future to his marionette-like clowns. The border, peculiarly, like the centre, becomes a place where the “feral nemesis” awaits the “revenge of flesh against flesh” (*S* 268) and where human longings are fiercely constrained. This ambivalent connotation of the border is even more explicit in Omar Khayyám’s later inner thought:

The border is the edge of his world, the rim of things, and that super-natural frontiers into some wild hallucination of a promised land. Get back into ‘Nishapur’, the inner voice whisper, because that’s where you’ve been heading, all your life, ever since the day you left. (*S* 268)

The above passage, apart from providing an artificial device for Raza’s falling into the trap of the three Shakil sisters, reveals an authorial anxiety about the diaspora experience—a teetering between escape and belonging. This may well explain the inner conflict of Rushdie’s appropriation of the periphery: on the one hand the periphery is invested by the narrator with the resistant power; on the other, it is governed by an “aesthetic of despair” (Ahmad 155). Take the novel’s dark ending for example. Raza, expelled by his enemy to the border, is killed by the three sisters’ dumb-waiter. Omar Khayyám, after returning to his border home, is decapitated by his manticore-like wife. Finally, the story ends with an explosion, which turns everything into nothingness. There is nothing but “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 a farewell” (*S* 286).

Although such an obscure ending may be read as the author's bitter indication of the nuclear bomb test in Pakistan, it also reveals an authorial taste for the aesthetic of violence, which weakens the productivity of the text and its critical power. If resistance, escape, and transgression lead to nothing but destruction, if the appropriation of the periphery creates nothing but equally violent revenge, then what hope is there in this appropriation? If the border and the act of exile, the site where transgression is likely to take place and the act that symbolizes transgression, are equally hopeless in the palimpsestual, fictional world, then is there any hope to break the textual and ideological frame? A similar problem exists in Rushdie's depiction of other ambivalent images—the patriarchal and matriarchal homes.

### Home and the "Carceris"

Apart from the variant thematic recurrence of the images of borders and exile, which ambivalently signify the periphery, resistance, transgression, destruction, and liberation, Rushdie maintains a formal balance by shifting the textual gravity to the contrapuntal contestation of the patriarchal home (center) and the matriarchal home (periphery). In general, home in *Shame* represents the confining force of collectivity, which becomes exactly what diaspora people or exiles aspire to break away. It is noted that both the matriarchal home of the periphery and the patriarchal home of the center are saturated with the sense of incarceration, which constantly makes Omar Khayyám dizzy.

The fictional world in *Shame*, therefore, is a closed system in which the peripheral man Omar Khayyám tries to move along but fails to break through. The movement of the plot line, ac-

cordingly, is mainly led by Omar's movement, which I will roughly divided into three phases. First, he tries to run away from the three Shakil sisters' "Nishapur,"<sup>15</sup> which originally represents the home of the oppressed peripheral women but later becomes an equally oppressive suffocating prison. Then, he moves to the central, authoritative, patriarchal homes of Iskander and Raza. Finally, hunted by Iskander, he runs with Raza toward his peripheral, matriarchal home again and is decapitated by the feeblest and the most violent woman, Sufyia Zinobia, a socially marginalized woman deprived of the right to speak for herself. What is worth noticing here is that there is an ambivalent oscillation between Omar's attempt to escape from the control and incarceration of home and his longing for returning to it. This implicit ambivalence features the emotional structure of *Shame*, which characterizes the diasporic neurosis and the anxiety about self-positioning.

The idea of "home," therefore, exists as a polar star in the diasporic subject's itinerary of self-identification. It offers a referential coordinate for the diasporic subject's self-adjustment in the symbolic order of the context it involves. More often than not, the image of home haunts diaspora people and exiles with the sense of belonging and consolation, whereas paradoxically the expropriation of that image and its combination with an essentialist nationalism result in the ideological incarceration that diaspora people and exiles abhor. In his essay on the intellectual exile, Edward W. Said maintains:

The exile therefore exists in a median state, neither com-

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<sup>15</sup> The name indicates the birthplace of the Persian poet Omar Khayyám —Naishápúr in Khorassán (Fitzgerald, *Rubáiyát* 27).



pletely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another. Being skilled at survival becomes the main imperative, with the danger of getting too comfortable and secure constituting a threat that is constantly to be guarded against. (*Representations* 49)

This mentality may to some extent explicate the narrator's ambivalent feeling—a blend of the sense of self-condemnation, detachment, nostalgia, and the constant aversion to the suffocation of home, which reveals the narrator's attempt to critique as an outsider and his inability to rid himself of his deep involvement. This ambivalent attitude toward his second home—Pakistan—results in a conspicuous narrative hesitation that always leads to the inner contradictions of Rushdie's theorization of “anti-rootedness” and “multi-rootedness” and blunts the effect of the novel's pungent attacks on dictatorship and censorship.

The ambivalent feeling underlies the entire text and is indicated by a tacit parody of a popular Hollywood film, *The Wizard of Oz*. However, unlike Doris who learns the lesson of the ruby slippers—“there's no place like home” (Rushdie, *WO* 57), Omar, after returning home, confronts a more severe punishment than ever. The horrible, witch-like images of the three sisters, their cruel revenge on Raza, and the stifling atmosphere of “Nishapur” unequivocally indicate that Rushdie intends to delineate “home” as the “carceris.” Omar's running away from home, grasped in this light, can be taken as a darker parody of *The Wizard of Oz* and a more radical subversion of its lesson. In his film criticism of the fairlogue, Rushdie once comments:

So Oz finally *became* home; the imagined world became the

actual world, as it does for us all, because the truth is that once we have left our childhood places and started out to make up our lives, armed only with what we have and are, we understand that the real secret of the ruby slippers is not that 'there's no place like home,' but rather that there is no longer any such place as home: except, of course, for the home we make, or the homes that are made for us, in Oz: which is anywhere, and everywhere, except the place from which we began. (WO 57)

If this represents Rushdie's intent to liberate the connotation of home from its original rigidity, then his dark representation of the image of home fails to fulfill this ideal. If home as the "carceris" indicates religious fundamentalism, cultural essentialism, and dictatorship, then it is evident that the sense of suffocation is created on the aesthetic level rather than the historical one. Unlike *Midnight's Children*, whose historicization reinforces the effect of carnivalesque parody, the intended dehistoricization in *Shame* dilutes the power of its critique, turning its appropriation of the periphery into an exquisite aestheticization of theoretical concepts that are overloaded with ambivalent or antithetical connotations. Behind this conceptual exuberance there is apparently an ambitious attempt that is too ready to appropriate all kinds of available contemporary discourses to compensate for the evacuated reality in the dehistoricized fairyland, which results in an excess and a contradiction of concepts and an oscillation of positions. The expropriation of the female in the text, for example, is a most conspicuous case in point.

## Sufyia Zinobia: the Expropriation of the Female

I had thought, before I began, that what I had on my hands was an almost excessively masculine tale, a saga of sexual rivalry, ambition, power, patronage, betrayal, death, revenge. But the women seem to have taken over; they marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories, and comedies, obliging me to couch my narrative in all manner of sinuous complexities, to see my 'male' plot refracted, so to speak, through the prisms of its reverse and 'female' side. It occurs to me that the women knew precisely what they were up to—that their stories explain, and even subsume, the men's. (*S* 173)

If "shame," the major metaphor of the novel embodied in Sufyia Zinobia, puts the author's accusation of dictatorship, male chauvinism, and conservative social decorum in a nutshell, then it is precisely the representation of women that carries out this doubly burdensome task. The women in the novel's pseudo-Pakistani society, the most peripheral social group in either the Iskander-Raza or the Shakil families, are silent "present absence" in general. Their existence can be mainly formulated into two types: those who provide their bodies for male satisfaction and for reproduction, and those who refuse to depend on men and therefore become more ferocious than men. Strangely, the image of women invariably oscillates between the two polarized stereotypes. There exists no alternative ways of representation that go beyond the two extremes. More surprisingly, the oppressed, miserable women turn out to be the most violent oppressors in the end. Such a Janus-faced representation of women, like the above-mentioned ambivalent representation of the images of borders and home, smacks more of a strategic

ages of borders and home, smacks more of a strategic expropriation than an in-depth, sympathetic interrogation of the predicament of the female.

In his analysis of Rushdie's representation of women in *Shame*, Ahmad has stated:

[T]he issue of misogyny is a central issue in any sort of oppositional politics. . . . Living in the contemporary milieu of the British Left, Rushdie has not remained untouched by certain kinds of feminism. (*In Theory* 143)

Having analyzed several powerful female images in *Shame*, Ahmad concludes:

What we have, then, is a real disjuncture between particular *episodes* which can delineate quite vivid sympathies for the respective female characters on the one hand, and on the other, a generalized structure of representation in which each of those same characters turns out to be at least dislikable and frequently repugnant. (*In Theory* 144)

It is undeniable that Ahmad comments with considerable precision. The issue of misogyny is one of the predominating topics that the oppositional politics can most easily bring the full range of its agendas into play. It therefore does not take the reader too much effort to realize why the image of the oppressed women, not least that of the confined Islamic women, is appropriated, together with other images of the periphery, by the narrator to critique authoritative ideologies. Ahmad sees in such a representation a *generality* of the female image, which turns the pitiful, oppressed women in the story into repugnant avengers. However, a subtler problem may consist in the author's indecisive

positioning and his lack of critical focus. What does the narrator aim to critique? We may thus ask. The divergent thematic concerns, ambivalently encompassed by the title, "Shame," vaguely refer to the narrator's criticism of male chauvinism, cultural essentialism, social decorum, and essentialist nationalism, each of which demands more specific elaboration. Furthermore, another coarse textual resolution of the female distress consists in the female's even more violent revenge on male violence, which not only turns the oppressed into the oppressor but also reduces the sense of sympathy to antipathy.

But this does not mean that Rushdie does not have a critical agenda in mind. It can be easily discerned that Rushdie tries to pick up the imprisonment of the female within the *zenana*, or *harem* (chamber) to re-examine the Islamic conventional restriction of the female freedom. The recurrent representation of the image of incarceration can be read on at least two levels: first, it certainly represents the restrictions on the female freedom, which may include a great deal of material specificities. This no double alludes to a secular reconsideration of the problem of modernization in the Islamic world. Second, the closed, stasis atmosphere of the *harem* or the matriarchal home of the Shakils implies that the ideological monopoly does not just exist in the patriarchal power bloc of the fictional country; more deplorably, it forms an inner self-discipline, impelling women to constrain themselves with social decorum (the idea of honor and shame).

Above all, either of the implications aims at a critique of the authoritative patriarchy of the essentialist nationalism and the Third World nation's problematic process of modernization. But what turns this representation of women into an inefficient expropriation lies in a *generality*, to borrow Ahmad's saying,

which blurs the focal point of Rushdie's critique:

Repression is a seamless garment; a society which is authoritarian in its social and sexual codes, which crushes its women beneath the intolerable burdens of honour and propriety, breeds repressions of other kinds as well. Contrariwise: dictators are always—or at least in public, on other people's behalf—puritanical. So it turns out that my 'male' and 'female' plots are the same story, after all. (*S* 173)

If the passage indicates that both the narrator's "male" and "female" plots aim to critique the repression of authoritarianism, then what is the purpose of countering the male plot with the female one? Rushdie offers his answer with the following explanation: "[i]t is commonly and I believe, accurately said of Pakistan that her women are much more impressive than her men . . . their chains, nevertheless, are no fictions. They exist. And they are getting heavier" (*S* 173). This explanation on the one hand blunts the book's touching portrayal of the oppressed women<sup>16</sup> by generalizing the repression of the male and the female; on the other hand, it makes explicit that the representation of women is projected out of the aesthetic necessity instead of deep sympathy.

This generalization results in an incompatible combination of male violence and female fragility in the representation of Sufyia Zinobia, the avatar of shamelessness and shame. Just as Ahmad points out, she "provides the link between the stark title of the book and its disjointed, sprawling narratives" and "is at the centre of that marriage between shame and shamelessness which . . .

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<sup>16</sup> Ahmad has made an insightful analysis of some of the most moving episodes in the novel. See Ahmad, *In Theory* 143-144.

breeds the all-enveloping violence” (*In Theory* 145). Born with a blushing face, Sufyia feels ashamed at the familial and the national collective shame. She appears from the outset as a feeble, pitiable imbecile baby. Since the Razas have long expected a boy, the arrival of Sufyia disappoints them a great deal, especially her mother, Bilquis. Sufyia’s existence, therefore, becomes the unspeakable family taboo, which makes her an almost invisible girl. With respect to the representation of Sufyia’s image, Rushdie makes an authorial “lay-bare” of the germ of the idea. He explains that Sufyia Zinobia grew out of the corpse of a girl, who was murdered in the East End of London by her father because she brought a dishonour upon her family by having sex with a white boy (*S* 115-116).<sup>17</sup> Rushdie goes further to mention that there are two ghosts inherent in the image of Sufyia. The first one is about an Asian girl set upon in a late-night underground train by a group of teenage white boys (*S* 117). Afterwards, remembering her beating, she feels not angry but ashamed. Instead of talking what happened, she makes no official complaint but keeps silent (*S* 117). The second girl inside Sufyia is male, a boy from a news clipping (*S* 117). He was found blazing in a parking lot, his skin on fire (*S* 117). Having examined the corpse, the experts found that he had simply ignited of his own accord, without dousing himself in petrol or applying any external flame (*S* 117). The mixture of the two images contributes in the making of Sufyia Zinobia, whose feeling of shame is transformed into the ruthless violent revenge on males and animals.

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<sup>17</sup> This rewriting of a real story reappears in *The Satanic Verses* to form intertextuality. But in *The Satanic Verses* the girl is transformed into a pair of young Bangladesh immigrant girls, Mishal and Anahital Muhammad, one of whom finally marries a white man. See also Rushdie, “Fiction’s” 44.

The above authorial insertion illustrates that the image of Sufyia is a product of the author's concern about such topics as racism, sex, culture, the confining power of the Asiatic ethics, the resistance of minorities, violence, and the mythic power of self-destruction. However, when Rushdie weaves these concerns into the making of Sufyia, he turns the poor imbecile girl into something of what John Haffenden calls a "metaphorical-fantastic mechanism" (Rushdie, "Interview with John Haffenden" 254), which resembles a medley of incompatible qualities.

On the one hand, deprived of parental love, being kept apart from her husband and forbidden to have sexual relations with him, and bearing the familial shame as well as all kinds of oppressions, Sufyia is portrayed as the weakest and the most silent, lamentable woman in the novel. Trying to please her mother by offering some help, the innocent idiot girl decapitates all the 218 turkeys raised by Atiyah Aurangzeb—Bilquis' rival—to take revenge on her (*S* 138-141). However, this innocent revenge infuriates her mother, who sees it as a family scandal and punishes her by cutting her hair to make it look like a cornfield after a fire (*S* 140). Suffering from a fever and tortured by pus, which bursts from her sores and dribbles incontinently, the poor exploited girl needs nothing but love.

On the other hand, the humiliations of all kinds accumulated in her heart gradually turn to hate and violence. She is transformed, ironically, from the oppressed into the terrible oppressor, with more and more negative female images imposed on her. When finally controlled by the beast in the heart, she becomes a vampire (*S* 232), a shrew, a "succubus" (Dayal 54), and a Nemesis—the sum of cruelty, man-hate, violence, insatiable sexual desire, and revenge. One of the most typical scenes that



best features this implied misogyny can be found in Sufyia's sexual intercourse with four young men:

Down she lies; and what Shahbanou took upon herself is finally done to Sufyia. Four husbands come and go. Four of them in and out, and then her hands reach for the first boy's neck. The others stand still and wait their turn. And heads hurled high, sinking into the scattered clouds; nobody saw them fall. She rises, goes home. And sleeps; the Beast subsides. (S 219)

It would be very difficult for us to be sympathetic to such a violent, vampire-like representation of our former victim, who now has become a perfect Dracula or mummy in horror films. The appropriation of the popular culture and the aesthetic of violence leads to a thematic deviation. If the oppressed women have to revenge shame with shamelessness, violence with violence, then there seems little productivity in Rushdie's expropriation of the socially marginalized female because the female revenge repeats nothing but male violence, showing neither compassion nor hope. On the other hand, if what Rushdie intends to attack is the racial and sexual oppression that Third World immigrants suffer in the first world, it seems too far-fetched an agenda when contextualized in the story's obscure, palimpsest world. If, to look otherwise, what Rushdie implies is that some of the cultural heritage in the Islamic convention fosters the fortification of patriarchal discourse and its restrictions on the female autonomy, then why does the story's "male" plot make no difference from its "female" one? It is evident that the female, like the concepts of the border, exile, and home, is appropriated by Rushdie to highlight his critique of unifying ideologies and dictatorship, lacking an in-depth interro-

gation of the true need of women.

To sum up, if *Shame* cultivates any “interstitial space” (Dayal 39) for a Derridean different representation of the concept of the periphery with a politics of ambivalence, then it is precisely this politics of ambivalence that blurs the focus of his critique. This ambivalence may be taken as a narrative slyness, but it also indicates a neurosis of the diasporic self-positioning, which is revealed by a typical post-colonial aphasia in the process of translation, as is manifested in the narrator’s interpretation of the title:

This word: shame. No, I must write it in its original form, not in this peculiar language tainted by wrong concepts and the accumulated detritus of its owners’ unrepented past, this Agnrezi<sup>18</sup> in which I am forced to write, and so for ever alter what is written. . . .

*Sharam*, that’s the word. For which this paltry ‘shame’ is wholly inadequate translation. Three letters, *shin rè mim* (written, naturally, from right to left); plus *zabar* accents indicating the short vowel sounds. A short word, but one containing encyclopaedias of nuance. It was not only shame that his mother forbade Omar Khayyám to feel, but also embarrassment, discomfiture, decency, modesty, shyness, the sense of having an ordained place in the world, and other dialects of emotion for which English has no counterparts. (*S* 39)

The act of cultural translation unconsciously exposes the narrator’s anxiety about linguistic transgression, but it also cultivates an alternative perspective to re-examine a familiarized conception. Suleri once makes an insightful comment on *Shame*, which,

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<sup>18</sup> The word is Urdu, which means “English.”

in my view, may help elucidate the ambivalence and disjunctiveness in *Shame*: “Shame attempts to write itself out of the absence in a complicated swerve that seeks to project the burden of adolescence onto the story it must tell” (184). The ambivalent implication of the concept of the periphery, consequently, hints at the splitting of the diasporic narrator, who, despite his peripheral stance, cannot completely decide to stay “within” or “without.” In expropriating the periphery, Rushdie may try to critique his second homeland and its conservative decorum from a diasporic perspective by articulating various tragedies of several silent Pakistani women. However, in stereotyping female qualities, he risks the danger of turning them again into another present absence. Moreover, if *Shame* is a novel that writes about the resistance to oppression, then it is a pity that some silent *others* are totally absent in the text. This negligence of *class* is the loophole of the book’s expropriation of the periphery, which lessens its persuasive power.

Compared with Rushdie’s other works, *Shame* is apparently a darker book. Although it does make an exquisite elaboration of many significant concepts, it is a book written out of an ambivalent emotion. In conclusion, I would like to end my reading of *Shame* with Ahmad’s comments, which in one sense incisively problematize the novel’s positional ambivalence:

[F]or all its marvelous humour, Rushdie’s imagined world is, in its lovelessness, almost Orwellian. . . . If the political vision of your imagined world does not include those who resist, or love, or act with any degree of integrity or courage, then you *will* conclude—as Rushdie does, in the ‘worst tale in history’ which comes in the final pages of the book—that it is a country that brother has been betraying brother for genera-

tions! . . . [T]he Orwellian idea . . . that human beings *always* betray one another . . . gives this book its quite extraordinary quality of lovelessness. . . . [I]t is always much less problematic to denounce dictators and to affirm, instead, a generality of values—‘liberty, equality, fraternity’ . . . but always much harder to affiliate oneself with specific kinds of praxis, conceived not in terms of values which serve as a *judgement* on history but as a solidarity with communities of individuals, simultaneously flawed and heroic, who act within that history, from determinate social and political positions. (*In Theory* 151-152)

Ahmad’s comments represents the reaction of the enthusiastic Third World native intellectual, whose critique reminds us of Homi K. Bhabha’s assertion: “Subversion is negotiation; transgression is negotiation” (“The Third Space” 216). If the politics of ambivalence is directed to an aimless subversion, if the transgressive act of cultural translation is directed to a prankish linguistic game, then there would be no room for negotiation. If the expropriation of the periphery in *Shame* is informative, it is informative in the sense that it exhibits the problem of the diaspora aesthetic, which, in this case, reminds us that any resistant discourse can lose its cutting force once it attempts to take advantage of an opportunistic evasiveness.

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## 說出沈默：《羞恥》之徵用邊緣

蘇榕

### 摘 要

本文旨在探討魯希迪 (Salman Rushdie) 如何徵用邊緣 (the periphery) 的概念，據以批判獨裁政權；以及他如何運用其離散美學 (diaspora aesthetic)，卻未能真正替小說中被邊緣化的沈默女性發聲。

藉由討論一連串有關離散世界的主题，包括邊境和放逐的意象、家的意涵、遷徙的概念、文化認同的曖昧性，以及被消音的幾位巴基斯坦女性之再現，本文試圖指出《羞恥》(Shame) 之徵用邊緣揭露了離散主體 (the diaspora subject) 的內在矛盾和焦慮。在企圖維持疏離關係的同時，小說家顯然失去了進一步深入探討其議題的契機。

關鍵詞：邊緣、女性、離散美學、層層刮覆的羊皮紙、魯希迪