FEMALE REPRESENTATIONS IN POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE: SALMAN RUSHDIE’S SHAME AND ARUNDHATI ROY’S THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

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Table of Contents

Introduction 4

Chapter 1 Colonial and postcolonial fiction and the issue of ‘woman’ 8
1.1 What is postcolonial? 8
1.2 Representations of the other in colonial writing 12
1.3 Portrayal of the female in colonial writing 15
1.4 How does postcolonial writing counter colonial oppression? 24

Chapter 2 Analysis of two postcolonial novels: Rushdie’s *Shame* and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* 29

2.1 *Shame* by Salman Rushdie 29
2.1.1 Introduction to the author and the novel 29
2.1.2 Analysis and discussion of female representations in *Shame* and literary criticism 37

2.2 *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy 56
2.2.1 Introduction to the author and the novel 56
2.2.2 Analysis and discussion of female representations in *The God of Small Things* and literary criticism 61

Conclusion: A short comparison between *Shame* and *The God of Small Things* 78

Notes 81

Appendix 1 “The White Man’s Burden” by Rudyard Kipling 84

Appendix 2 Family Tree *Shame* 87

Appendix 3 Family Tree *The God of Small Things* 88

Bibliography 89
“When you say Man,” said Oedipus, “you include women, too. Everyone knows that.”
She said, “That’s what you think.”

Muriel Rukeyser (498)

Introduction

The days of England’s glorious imperial status and colonial domination around the world now seem to be located in a far-off time, a time in which lots of people still believed that it was the duty of the great British Empire to let other, less-fortunate people ‘join’ in their wealth and success. Imperialists considered colonization to be “the white man’s burden,” a concept taken from the well-known poem by the British writer Rudyard Kipling, which I included in the appendix. His idea of “the white man’s burden” refers to the belief that Western nations had the obligation to rule over ‘primitive’ peoples and help them to develop into more civilized societies. This condescending view thus consigned entire races to inferiority. The British colonizers saw themselves as the caretakers of the ‘sullen people’ and all too willingly turned a blind eye to the destructive nature of their imperialistic enterprise. By propagating colonization as an almost humanitarian mission, the British Empire could justify the often violent oppression the colonized peoples had to endure.

Even though colonialism largely dates back to the previous century, its consequences have had a tremendous impact on the living situation in those societies which were formerly part of the British Empire; even today its influences can still be felt. Colonialism did not only dramatically undermine the political and economic institutions in those societies, but also profoundly influenced the cultural traditions in order to enforce the Empire’s control over the ‘ignorant’ population. Of course, nations that gained independence did not radically change
back to their former condition once the colonizers had withdrawn from their lands. On the contrary, British imperialism had shaped life in its colonies so deeply that going back was impossible for the newly-independent countries.

The consequences of colonialism and the representations of the subjected people in colonial literature have been widely studied by postcolonial theorists all over the world. Although a lot of these theories are rather abstract, they attempt to counter the racist and oppressive representations of formerly colonized people in order to re-establish them as people in their own rights. As became clear from my own research on the subject, postcolonialism comprises a very wide variety of issues that deal with the effects of colonization. This dissertation, however, will mainly focus on the ways in which women are represented in colonial writing and how postcolonial literature tries to challenge those representations.

In the first chapter, I will give a general introduction to postcolonialism in order to indicate the complexity of this field of study, and refer to some of its most prominent theorists, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Edward Said. I will also look at how colonial writing helped to establish the inferiority of the ‘other’ through the use of binary oppositions and stereotyping. In the third part of this chapter, I will pay particular attention to the ambivalent portrayal of the female in colonial reasoning and writing. In this respect, it is also interesting to have a look at the men’s reaction to colonial oppression since it directly affected the lives of the women in their country. We will see that women were victimized by both Western imperialism on the one hand and local patriarchy on the other hand, forming a ‘double oppression’ as postcolonial theorists like Spivak, Ania Loomba and Trinh T. Minh-ha point out. In the last part of the first chapter, I will consider the critique offered by the feminist postcolonial critics Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Silvia Nagy-Zekmi and Ien Ang, and look at their proposals to counter the oppressive images of women. We need to keep
in mind here, of course, that these critics offer solutions which are of a more philosophical nature and can thus hardly be seen as measures that could change the situations of real-life women.

In the second chapter, I will look at how two postcolonial novels, Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and Salman Rushdie’s *Shame*, address the theme of patriarchal oppression and seek ways to liberate the female subject in their stories. In accordance with Mohanty’s claim that one should always consider the context in which a story is set, I chose to discuss two novels that are situated within one and the same culture: both novels deal with Indian society, which will make a comparison between the different approaches which the writers adopt to deal with female oppression more accurate. I will analyse each novel extensively based on my own close reading and the critical attention both novels received, and conclude my dissertation with a short comparison between Rushdie’s and Roy’s way of dealing with the silenced female. In this last part, I will bear in mind the critique Rushdie’s *Shame* encountered – the Marxist critic Aijaz Ahmad called *Shame* a misogynist novel – in order to try to find out if Roy’s novel would offer us a better alternative in giving women a voice.

The actual idea for this dissertation on female representations in postcolonial writing came from a module I took as an Erasmus student at the Birmingham City University (UK). The lecturer paid a lot of attention to the problematic issues encountered in colonial writing and to the ways in which postcolonial writers dealt with the ineradicable influence the British Empire had on native countries and their inhabitants. Of course, there is so much more to be said about postcolonial literature and theory than what I will present in my dissertation, but I chose to write about the portrayal of women because it is such a universal topic. The patriarchal oppression of women is an age-old and worldwide phenomenon, but has only been properly dealt with since the last quarter of the previous century. Last year, I already
discussed the subject of female representations in the context of fairy tales and looked at how feminist writers like Angela Carter have tried to offer liberating alternatives to the traditional images of women by rewriting fairy tales. I wondered, having read about the colonial images of the female ‘other’, how postcolonial writers could succeed in that same goal: liberating the female through their writing. Rushdie’s *Shame* and Roy’s *The God of Small Things* seemed to be interesting choices for my discussion: a male and female writer who both deal with the subject of female oppression (among many other issues), but in a completely distinct way. Although both novels received considerable critical acclaim, *Shame* was also harshly criticized by critics like Inderpal Grewal and Aijaz Ahmad, who accused Rushdie of misogyny mainly because of the fact that he turns Sufiya Zinobia, one of the main protagonists, into a violent monster. Does Rushdie indeed fail to liberate the women in his story, or can we look at his approach from another perspective? Or does Roy’s novel then provide a better alternative to the violence in *Shame*? I will try to clarify the issues brought up here in the best way possible by turning for support to both postcolonial and feminist criticism.
Chapter 1

Colonial and postcolonial fiction and the issue of ‘woman’

Before we can analyse fictional texts and understand and apply the theories concerning female representations in both colonial and postcolonial writings, it is useful to first establish what is meant exactly with the term ‘postcolonial’. Secondly, I will look at how the colonized subject becomes the ‘other’ in order to legitimize the imperial enterprise and establish Western supremacy. Once I have considered how the system of ‘othering’ works, it will become easier to understand how women are pushed into an even darker shadow by patriarchal institutions, both colonial and native. Finally, I will have a brief look at the alternatives postcolonial theorists have proposed to liberate the female voices which have been suppressed in colonial literature.

1.1 What is postcolonial?

Postcolonial Studies comprises a whole variety of issues such as cultural hybridity, (post)colonial discourse analysis, racial identity and gender issues. It involves theorists like, among others, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, who have profoundly influenced the development of this area of studies. For this dissertation, I will mainly use those theories which are concerned with the representation and identity of women in fictional
texts, but I believe a more general introduction to the area of postcolonialism might be useful to start off with. I need to point out here that defining postcolonialism is not as easy as it would seem. One needs to take into account a lot of factors in order to define this concept correctly, and even then the definition might still seem incomplete and in need of further nuancing. As Ania Loomba argues, “by the 1930s, [European] colonies and ex-colonies covered 84.6 per cent of the land surface on the globe. (…) Such a geographical sweep, and colonialism’s heterogeneous practices and impact over the last four centuries, makes it difficult to ‘theorise’ or make generalisations about the subject” (3). Moreover, “postcolonial theory,” as Silvia Nagy-Zekmi points out, “was not developed by a unified group of theorists” (172); instead, they came from all over the world “representing diverse experiences” (Ibid. 172) and thus look at the impact of colonial regimes from a particular perspective. However, as Loomba warns us, “just because colonial studies encompass such a vast area, it does not mean that we should only confine ourselves to study of particular cases, without any attempt to think about the larger structures of colonial rule and thought” (3). Instead, (post)colonial theories should be developed “with an awareness that such diversity exists” (Ibid. 3). So, bearing in mind the impossibility of an all-encompassing definition of postcolonialism, I would instead like to provide a basic introduction to the notion ‘postcolonial’ which will form a starting point for my discussion of the representations of both the ‘other’ and women in colonial and postcolonial fiction.

In its original meaning, the term postcolonial designated the period that came after colonial states gained independence. From the 1970s onwards, however, the term acquired a broader meaning thanks to the works of critics such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha, who studied the “effects of colonial representation” (Ashcroft, Key Concepts 186). These critics did not yet use the term postcolonial per se in their colonial discourse studies but helped opening up its meaning. Bill Ashcroft was in fact the first critic
to use the term postcolonial to refer specifically to the “cultural interactions within colonial societies in literary circles” in his book *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) (Ashcroft, *Key Concepts* 186). He explains that by using the term in that context he wanted to “politicize and focus the concerns of fields such as Commonwealth Literature and the study of the so-called New Literatures in English” (Ibid. 186). Those New Literatures refer to the literatures that had started to emerge from the late 1960s onwards, in which writers started to testify to the reality of living in a society that had been profoundly influenced by European colonization. So, to summarize, the meaning of ‘postcolonial’ has changed significantly over the years according to the needs and development of the discipline itself. What we understand under postcolonialism today has been formulated by Bill Ashcroft in one of his more recent works as follows:

‘Post-colonialism/ postcolonialism’ is now used in wide and diverse ways to include the study and analysis of European territorial conquest, the various institutions of European colonialisms, the discursive operations of the empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and most importantly perhaps, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre- and post-independence nations and communities. (Ashcroft, *Key Concepts* 187)

In short, the term postcolonial refers to the “various cultural effects of colonization” (Ashcroft, *Key Concepts* 186) on societies that previously belonged to a European nation. It is also important to bear in mind that these effects did not cease to exist after the colonies gained their independence; on the contrary, the influence of colonization still continues to be felt in those societies up until today. Moreover, as Ania Loomba points out, “postcoloniality (...) is articulated alongside other economic, social, cultural and historical factors, and therefore, in practice, it works quite differently in various parts of the world” (22).
To conclude this short introduction to the field of postcolonial studies, I would like to briefly mention some important contributors to this area of studies. First of all, there is Frantz Fanon, one of the ‘founding fathers’ of postcolonial studies. His two most important works *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) anticipated postcolonial theory in that they already studied the effects of colonization on indigenous people. In the first work, Fanon analyses how the colonizers psychologically oppressed black men. Although his work has been considered a valuable contribution to the field of postcolonial theory, his simplistic portrayal of the black female has been severely attacked by feminist critics, as Jennifer Poulos observes (par. 5). In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon develops how a Manichean opposition supports the colonial enterprise. Fanon also pleads for a total revolution which will free ex-colonized people from the oppressive past (Poulos par.9). Fanon influenced many postcolonial theorists, including Said and Bhabha.

Secondly, there is the well-known Palestinian-American critic Edward Said who wrote one of the founding works of postcolonial studies: *Orientalism* (1978). In this work, Said investigates how ‘oriental’ cultures came to be represented within Western culture. He demonstrates that the image of the ‘Orient’ that was created in the West strongly contributed to the establishment and maintenance of colonial power (Loomba 42). As we will see in detail in the next part, Said argued that those representations of the Orient helped to create a dichotomy between Europe and its ‘others’, which served to justify the often violent occupation of the colonized lands.

Perhaps one of the most well-known postcolonial critics is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who wrote the influential essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. Her theory about the subaltern and the subaltern woman in specific has been strongly influenced by Marxism, feminism and Derridean deconstruction (Graves par.1). She introduced the notion of ‘subaltern’ to postcolonial theory, which she exclusively reserves for a particular group of
people: “Simply by being postcolonial or the member of an ethnic minority, we are not ‘subaltern.’ That word is reserved for the sheer heterogeneity of decolonized space” (A Critique of Postcolonial Reason 310). Spivak’s theories about female representation in colonial literature will return in several instances in this dissertation.

Two other important postcolonial critics whose theories will frequently be used in the first chapter of this dissertation are Ania Loomba and Silvia Nagy-Zekmi. Loomba currently is Catherine Bryson Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania and is well-known for her research in the fields of postcolonialism and feminism. Her book Colonialism/Postcolonialism, written in 1988, proved to be one of the most useful sources for my dissertation because it covers a very wide range of colonial and postcolonial aspects. Nagy-Zekmi is particularly interested in gender issues related to postcolonial theories. In the final part of this chapter, in which I consider the approaches postcolonialism can offer as an alternative to the oppressive representation of women, I will also refer to the prominent postcolonial and feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty. Her critical view of Western feminism makes us aware of the importance of contextualization when considering female representations.

1.2 Representations of the other in colonial writing

When Europeans started colonizing other countries, they needed an ideological support system which could justify the often brutal violence that characterized colonization. Such a system was easily found in the labelling of the non-European as ‘other’. By casting the native as other – not like us – the association with ‘backward’ and ‘primitive’ was easily made. What underlies this system of ‘othering’ is what Abdul JanMohamed has called a “Manichean allegory” (qtd in Loomba: 91)^2, which refers to the dichotomy created between
two aspects, in this context between the West and the East. Indeed, as Edward Said already pointed out in *Orientalism*, colonialist thought and its representations of native people “promoted a binary opposition between the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’)” (qtd. in Loomba: 45). The body proved to be the easiest basis for regarding the colonized as inferior; in this respect, Bill Ashcroft argues that

> The ‘difference’ of the post-colonial subject by which s/he can be ‘othered’ is felt most directly and immediately in the way in which the superficial differences of the body and voice (skin colour, eye shape, hair texture, body shape, language, dialect or accent) are read as indelible signs of the ‘natural’ inferiority of their possessors. (Ashcroft, *Postcolonial Studies Reader* 321)

I want to point out here that in *Orientalism*, Said studies how the ‘Orient’ is portrayed in Asian colonies; however, as Nagy-Zekmi rightly argues, the usefulness of his study can be extended to the “representation of alterity in general” (172) and as such, his theory “may be applied to postcolonial representations almost anywhere” (Ibid. 172). Loomba agrees with Said in that the creation of binary oppositions was crucial, not only for constructing the image of the ‘other’, but also for the conception of the European ‘self’ (91): the colonized others are considered to be irrational, barbaric, lazy, primitive and backward people standing in direct contrast to the rational, civilized, hard-working and well-developed Western colonizers (Ibid. 45). Consequently, by consigning entire races to inferiority and claiming a European superiority, the maintenance and extension of European domination could easily be justified as an almost ‘humanitarian’ cause: taking pride in their alleged superiority, the Europeans assigned themselves the role of saviours of those less fortunate people whom they thought were in need of a strong hand that could guide them towards civilization. This reasoning, of course, also helped Europeans to turn a blind eye to the violence with which the natives were oppressed since the imperial measurements were taken ‘in their best interest’.
The use of stereotypical binary oppositions thus contributed to the maintenance of the difference between ‘self’ and ‘other’ (Loomba 55). This stereotyping can also be found in the age-old patriarchal tradition in which women are represented as ‘the inferior gender’: women are passive, submissive child-like creatures that need guidance from active and courageous men. Not surprisingly then, colonialists turned to patriarchal language and gender stereotypes when representing the colonized other because “the Orient has to be feminine so that Europe can be masculine” (Loomba 45). In terms of fairy tale language, the colony and its people become the ‘damsel in distress’ who needs to be saved by the brave European ‘prince’. The following quote by Helen Carr illustrates the link between gender and colonial stereotyping perfectly:

"In the language of colonialism, non-Europeans occupy the same symbolic space as women. Both are seen as part of nature, not culture, and with the same ambivalence: either they are ripe for government, passive, child-like, unsophisticated, needing leadership and guidance, described always in terms of lack – no initiative, no intellectual powers, no perseverance; or on the other hand, they are outside society, dangerous, treacherous, emotional, inconstant, wild, threatening, fickle, sexually aberrant, irrational, near animal, lascivious, disruptive, evil, unpredictable. (Carr qtd. in Loomba: 135)"

In the next part, I will examine how femininity and colonialism became linked in the process of ‘othering’ the colonized. I will discuss the consequences of colonization on the position and representation of native women and explain why we can talk about a ‘double colonization’.
1.3 Portrayal of the female in colonial writing

With regards to the position of the ‘other’ in colonialist thought, we already mentioned that the ‘inferior’ colonized came to be associated with the female in order to justify the violent colonial domination. I will discuss this in more detail in this section of the paper. First of all, I will look at the place women occupied within the colonial system of ‘othering’ and how they were represented in colonial texts. Next, I will discuss how colonization affected the situation of women in their home countries.

Nancy Leys Stepan illustrates the problematic position of women in colonial situations well by concluding that if the “lower races represented the ‘female’ type of the human species”, “females” represented “the ‘lower race’ of gender” (qtd. in Loomba: 136). In other words, if the non-white can be found at the bottom of the human hierarchy, the non-white female is situated even below that. To illustrate the issues concerning female portrayal in colonial writing, I would like to make use of a classic example of colonialist fiction in which the position of the female other is regarded as problematic by postcolonial critics: Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad’s most famous novel has been severely criticized for its oppressive representation of African people by, for instance, Edward Said and the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe. Achebe accused Conrad of supporting British Imperialism by dehumanizing African people and depriving them of any kind of language or culture; in fact, he famously called Conrad “a bloody racist” (qtd. in Watts 53). Edward Said, showing a more moderate view in his analysis of Conrad’s colonialist novel, pointed out that Conrad was a creature of his time who “could not grant the natives their freedom” (281). Particularly interesting for my discussion of female representation in colonial writing is a fragment which can be found towards the end of the story, in which Marlow, the main protagonist of the
novel, encounters an African woman who has probably been Kurtz’s mistress and whom
Conrad introduces as “a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman” (87):

She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth
proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her
hair was done in the shape of a helmet; she had brass leggings to her knees, brass wire gauntlets
to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her
neck; bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch-men, that hung about her, glittered and trembled at
every step. She must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her. She was savage and
superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate
progress. And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense
wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive,
as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul. She came
abreast of the steamer, stood still, and faced us. Her long shadow fell to the water’s edge. Her
face had a tragic and fierce aspect of wild sorrow and of dumb pain mingled with the fear of
some struggling, half-shaped resolve. She stood looking at us without a stir and like the
wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose (Conrad 87)

This image of the African woman as “savage and superb”, “wild-eyed and magnificent”
illustrates the ambivalence with which indigenous women were perceived by colonialists.
Silvia Nagy-Zekmi discusses this ambivalent representation of women in colonial discourse,
pointing out that the female is represented with both desire and disdain: “They are mysterious
yet untrustworthy, sexually arousing yet not quite clean, intriguing and yet uninteresting”
(172). This ambivalence also found its way into the way the native men perceived the women
in their country: the idealized woman as opposed to the inferior, obedient one. This issue will
be discussed further on when considering how the reaction of men towards women changed
under the influence of colonization.
The woman Joseph Conrad introduces can also be interpreted as personifying the African continent, again with the same ambivalence: Africa as a fascinating, exotic land waiting to be discovered, full of the unknown, but which proves to be at the same time savage, terrifying and full of danger. Africa is presented in Conrad’s novel as both appealing to and appalling the colonizers; Marlow and the other colonizers are fascinated by the land and its inhabitants, yet also terrified of its dark and mysterious wilderness and the – in their eyes – barbaric natives. Indeed, as Ania Loomba argues, it was a common practice in colonialist texts to represent the colonized countries and continents as being feminine, in order to make Africa or Asia “available for plunder, possession, discovery and conquest” (128). In other words, the traits traditionally associated with femininity – such as passiveness, weakness and submissiveness – were not only transferred to the native inhabitants of the colonies but also to the colonized land itself so that the European colonizer could shamelessly take possession of lands which were seen as “awaiting discovery” (Loomba 65). Bearing in mind the male-female dichotomy which I already discussed earlier on, it is obvious here that if the colonies are considered to be feminine, Europe is consequently its masculine opponent: it is Europe who has to ‘help’ Africa escape from its primitiveness, brutality, cruelty and ignorance. However, women were not exclusively represented as passive victims; on the contrary, another popular figure was that of the ‘Amazonian’, a deviant and sexually insatiable creature that could lure the European man into danger (Loomba 131). In this respect, Europe’s task of guiding the indigenous people towards civilization could prove to be a dangerous one because the colonized land seduced men into madness: “But his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad” (Conrad 95). Africa, presented in Heart of Darkness as a primeval jungle, a source of power and wealth, fascinates but also maddens Kurtz, eventually leading to his death.
Of course, the link between the seductive nature of the effeminized colonies and that of the prostitute is not a difficult one to imagine in the context of colonialism: as Sander Gilman argues, “the primitive is black, and the qualities of blackness, or at least of the black female, are those of the prostitute” (qtd. in Loomba 135). So, by regarding the colonized countries as a prostitute the colonizers again legitimized the brutal exploitation of the land and its natives. Whether the female is represented as a passive victim, as a savage and seductive Amazonian or as a prostitute, the results of these colonial strategies remain the same: “female volition, desire and agency are literally pushed to the margins of the civilised world” (Loomba 131).

Loomba states that “from the beginning of the colonial period till its end (and beyond), female bodies symbolise the conquered land” (129). However, as she also claims, this “metaphoric use of the female body varies in accordance with the exigencies and histories of particular colonial situations” (Ibid. 129); the representation of Asian women, for instance, is distinct from the portrayal of African and American women: whereas the former is usually shown as mysteriously veiled, the latter two will be represented as naked and savage-like (Ibid. 129). Despite this difference, both groups equally remained legitimate objects for male possession. Loomba explains the difference in representation by referring to the history of trade between Asia and Europe: already during the Renaissance, Europeans were brought into contact with the East through trade negotiations with powerful Asian rulers. When they later colonized those lands which had belonged to the rich and impressive royal courts they used to visit, Europeans “could hardly encode themselves as the male deflowerers of a feminized land” (Ibid. 129). So, as an alternative, the “Oriental male was effeminised, portrayed as homosexual, or else depicted as a lusty villain from whom the virile but courteous European could rescue the native (…) woman” (Ibid. 129). The latter strategy again shows how women were objectified in order for the colonizers to justify their actions, or as Gayatri Spivak
phrases it: “Imperialism’s (...) image as the establis her of the good society is marked by the espousal of the woman as object of protection from her own kind” (A critique of Postcolonial Reason 291). Now, since the East was associated with wealth and splendour, the stereotypical image of the oriental woman came to be connected with the royal courts: she was either a queen or a harem girl (Loomba 130). These upper-class/caste women thus became symbolic for the magnificent and mysterious Orient. As an unfortunate consequence, the existence of lower-class women was neglected in colonial writing and remained a forgotten subject for a long time, even in postcolonial texts.

Now that we have looked at the ambivalent and stereotypical ways in which women were represented in colonial writing, I would like to discuss the consequences colonization had for the position of women in native societies. Ania Loomba argues that women in (post)colonial states often became the victims of a “double colonisation” (140). This idea has also been formulated by Gayatri Spivak in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” and by Trinh T. Minh- ha in “Woman, Native, Other”. With the term ‘double colonization’, these critics refer to the way in which the female subject is victimized by both Western imperialism and native patriarchy: women, unlike men, are not only being oppressed because of their race, but also because of their gender. Moreover, when it came to the domination of women, male colonizers and native men often collaborated (Loomba 142).

In considering the patriarchal oppression of women, Loomba argues that colonialism led to an intensification of patriarchal oppression in the colonized lands; men were themselves “increasingly excluded from the public sphere” (142) and therefore chose to assert their power at home instead:

They seized upon the home and the women as emblems of their culture and nationality. The outside world could be Westernised but all was not lost if the domestic space retained its cultural purity. (Ibid. 142)
Besides intensifying female oppression in colonized lands, Loomba claims, colonialism also “eroded many matrilineal or woman-friendly cultures and practices” (141). For instance, as farming increasingly declined with the introduction of the slave trade, the men needed to migrate to the cities where there was more work, sending money to the families they had to leave behind. Consequently, the women who used to play an important role in growing the crops now became more and more dependent upon the income their husbands earned (Ibid. 141).

A similar explanation for why men started to regard women as symbols of traditional values can be found in the work of Sangeeta Ray. Ray rightly points out that tradition is generally “a hard thing to let go of” (1); people will do anything to try to hold on to their traditions. In colonial situations, men often had no choice but to adapt to the new ways of life introduced by European colonizers because they still had some role to fulfil in the public sphere; women, on the other hand, occupied the private sphere, remaining uncontaminated by colonial rule and could therefore “always be counted on to affirm the continuity of tradition” (Ray 1). Ray’s explanation thus slightly differs from the one Loomba gives in that she still sees native men as part of the dominant public sphere. She is also specifically referring to the colonial context in India, whereas Loomba’s claim can be seen as a more general one. Nevertheless, both critics agree that nationalists took hold of the women and idealized them to secure the existence of indigenous traditions; ‘woman’ became a commodity, deprived of her own voice.

Loomba points out that women were called upon to fulfil the role of mother or wife in order to “literally and figuratively reproduce the nation” (180): figuratively speaking, the nation was seen as a mother who ‘protected’ her sons from colonial destruction but who at the same time needed her sons’ protection because she herself had been invaded by colonial
forces. In the literal sense, women were held responsible for producing sons who would fight for their country and its traditions (Loomba 182). Islah Jad illustrates this point by referring to the rather blatant statement from the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas: “In the resistance, the role of the Muslim woman is equal to the man’s. She is a factory to produce men, and she has a great role in raising and educating the generations” (Jad qtd. in Loomba 180). It is obvious that women are only imagined to have the same rights as men because it serves patriarchal ideology. In reality, of course, native women are often voiceless victims of oppression. The ideal native woman’s identity can thus be seen as a patriarchal, and therefore artificial, construction which hardly takes into account the situation of real-life women.

Now, as women became signs of the nation’s traditions and the nation itself became synonymous with an imagined femininity, one that included purity of tradition and respectability, men felt that they needed to safeguard the nation’s purity against intrusion from Western civilization (Ray 138). Since women occupy the private sphere in society “the purity of the family mirrors the purity of the nation” (Ray 136). Women need to keep their husbands satisfied and are held responsible for the upbringing of future generations according to the traditional values of the nation. Of course, domestic violence is all too often involved in keeping the women, and thus the nation, as ‘pure’ as possible. Sangeeta Ray illustrates how the purity of the nation and family is valued above everything else by referring to the way in which rape is regarded in the (post)colonial state:

The raped female body encompasses the sexual economy of desire that is denied in the mythologization of the purity of one’s own ethnic, religious, and national gendered subject. The inevitability of rape leaves woman with the ‘choice’ of committing suicide so that she can be accommodated within the narrative of the nation as a legitimate and pure – albeit dead – citizen. Those who survive rape are refused entry into the domestic space of the new nation. (Ray 135)
In other words, there is no room available for rape victims within the myth of the pure nation since sexual desire is not considered to be appropriate at all. These raped women would contaminate the ideal of chastity that validates the existence of the nation and everything it is supposed to stand for: “The raped woman cannot be the vehicle of the familial metaphor that enables the narration of the nation” (Ray 136). Consequently, those who survive rape were often left with no other option than to commit suicide if they did not want to face exclusion from their family and society. From the many stories in the news, however, we learn that it is often the men in the family who take ‘responsibility’ into their own hands and kill the raped relative in order to ‘save the family’s honour’. In the discussion of Shame, we will see that Salman Rushdie’s novel was written with the story of the murder of a young girl in mind: she was killed by her father for having an inappropriate relationship with a white boy, for “she had brought such dishonour upon her family that only her blood could wash away the stain” (Rushdie 115).

Another example of the symbolic status women acquire within the myth of the nation’s purity is that of the sati. Gayatri Spivak paid considerable attention to the image of the sati in some Hindu communities in her work “Can the Subaltern Speak?” The term sati refers to a recently widowed woman who throws herself onto her husband’s burning body during the funeral, or in Spivak’s words:

The Hindu widow ascends the pyre of the dead husband and immolates herself upon it. This is widow sacrifice. (…) the abolition of this rite by the British has been generally understood as a case of ‘White men saving brown women from brown men.’ Against this is the Indian nativist argument, a parody of the nostalgia for lost origins: ‘the women actually want to die’. (“Can the Subaltern Speak” 33)
According to R.J. Singh, the widow comes to be regarded as “a worthless nuisance” (qtd. in Gairola 311) who needs to do penance for her sins that caused her husband to die. The widowed Hindu woman is expected to follow her husband in death if she does not want to bring dishonour upon him and the family. The only acceptable way of doing this is by throwing herself onto the pyre; no other form of suicide will get her the desired respect from the community (Gairola 310). Moreover, she herself is imagined to actively want to die for her husband’s honour (Ibid. 310). Although the act of sati was said to be a voluntary one, there have been many incidents in which women have been forced into their deaths if they did not want to jump into the flames voluntarily. Rahul Gairola reads the funeral fire as a symbol of patriarchal discourse which constructs women’s identities ranging from “the good woman as wife and mother, the repository of past sins as widow, a goddess reborn through fiery consecration as she jumps into the flames of her husband’s funeral pyre” (Gairola 310-311).

Now, the traditional practice of sati has been banished by law ever since the British ruled over Indian territories. The British claimed that by banishing widow immolation, they were saving women from the barbaric cruelty of native men (Loomba 130-131). Despite this legal prohibition of sati, the tradition was continued by those who had, as we learn from Spivak’s quote above, a “nostalgia for lost origins” (33). Even in the 21st Century, sati incidents still occur; for instance, Rao Jaswant Singh reported on a widow-burning in May 2006 in the Indian village of Raari Khurd, where a woman was physically forced by the crowd to jump into the flames of her husband’s pyre because she had allegedly been involved in an extramarital affair and had thus brought dishonour upon her family.

In conclusion, it is interesting to see how the colonizers drew on a female sexuality to emphasize “differences”, whereas the colonized used this same sexuality to symbolize “essence” (Loomba 182). Nevertheless, both ways of representing the feminine contributed to the oppression of women as I have tried to explain extensively. Female identity became a
commodity of which both the colonizers and the male colonized made use to justify imperial and patriarchal power.

1.4 How does postcolonial writing counter colonial oppression?

Now that we have looked at how the female is generally constructed in colonial writing, we can begin to understand why so many postcolonial theorists have regarded colonial representation of women as problematic. In this part, I will briefly consider the alternatives some postcolonial theorists have proposed to counter the oppressive images of women. Because of the parallels between patriarchal and colonial domination, it is not surprising that feminist and postcolonial theories have influenced each another. Other major influences on postcolonial studies include psychoanalysis, deconstruction and postmodernism. Ania Loomba points out that “from colonial as well as nationalist records, we learn little about how [women] felt or responded, and until recently, there was little attempt to locate them as subjects within the colonial struggle” (185). Moreover, despite the importance of the work of critics who are concerned with addressing female oppression, their work “often did not go beyond asserting that black and/or colonised women were doubly oppressed” (Loomba 140). In other words, the solutions offered are merely theoretical; they can hardly be thought of as active measures that can liberate women from real-life oppression. Nevertheless, these theories are important in that they brought attention to the oppression of non-white women, an issue which had been pushed to the margins for a long time within the area of postcolonial studies.

One of the major voices in feminist postcolonial theory is that of the Indian critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. In her most well-known and critically acclaimed essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak explores the position of the colonized to find out if the subaltern is
truly rendered mute by the colonizer. Besides her concern for the subaltern subject in general, Spivak pays specific attention to the position of the female subject in (post)colonial societies. In the context of female representations in colonial writing, she concludes that “if (…) the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak” 33). Spivak discusses at length the image of the sati in Hindu culture, pointing out that the women’s voices in the debates surrounding widow immolation are completely absent (Loomba 185). The female is silent; she is spoken for by the male patriarch (Nagy-Zekmi 173). Spivak therefore argues that readers of colonial texts should ask themselves “what the work cannot say” (qtd. in Gairola 308); that is to say, we should try to give a voice to the muted female subject rather than speak in her place. Also, “Spivak’s image of a postcolonial identity places the danger in assuming a fixed identity, such as that of a woman, a subaltern, a person of color, etc.” (Nagy-Zekmi 173); instead, she sees a solution in the creation of a more fluid female identity that takes into account the diversity and changeability of womanhood.

How can we then accomplish what Spivak suggests? How can the female voice be restored in postcolonial literature? In this respect, a first approach can be found in autobiographical writings. Nagy-Zekmi refers to the fact that many “women writers (and their male counterparts) tried to develop a language of their own and often turned to autobiography or to other types of memorialistic discourse as their genre of preference in their representation of the female subject” (175). She mentions Teresa de la Parra’s Memorias de Mamá Blanca (1929), Katia Rubinstein’s Mémoire d’une fillette illettrée d’Afrique de Nord à l’époque coloniale (1979) or Fadhma Amrouche’s Histoire de ma vie (1968). Autobiographical writing permits women to challenge patriarchal discourse and counter colonial representation (Nagy-Zekmi 175). Secondly, postcolonial writers can opt for a rewriting of classic colonial novels. An excellent example of how the female non-white can be given back her voice by rewriting a
classic novel can of course be found in Jean Rhys’s novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). This well-known novel can be seen as a prequel to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* in which Rhys gives a voice to the suppressed black character in *Jane Eyre*: Bertha Mason, the black ‘madwoman in the attic’. Rhys creates a history for Bertha Mason (who used to be named Antoinette) by reconstructing her life in the Caribbean before her marriage to Mr. Rochester. Silvia Nagy-Zekmi offers another approach by arguing that “by re-telling a story in different ways and by different voices, a case may be made for counter-history as opposed to the official history” (176). I believe *The God of Small Things* is a good example here since Arundhati Roy chooses to tell her story from different perspectives and in doing so, gives a voice to characters which would have been silenced in colonial texts. In brief, all these instances illustrate how postcolonial writing is concerned with female representations and how to reposition “women’s role as producers of history and of culture” (Nagy-Zekmi 178).

Another important critic of gender identity within (post)colonialism is Chandra Talpade Mohanty. She criticizes Western feminism for using “women as a category of analysis” (qtd. in Nagy-Zekmi 174) without taking into account the many different contexts in which women around the world live. In her article “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,”9 Mohanty argues that one should base any analysis of women in Third World countries on the local context in which these women live while at the same time considering the socio-historical context (Nagy-Zekmi 174):

> defining women as archetypal victims freezes them into ‘objects-who-defend-themselves’, men into ‘subjects-who-perpetrate-violence’ and (every) society into a simple opposition between the powerless (read: women) and the powerful (read: men) groups of people. Male violence (if that indeed is the appropriate label) must be theorized and interpreted within specific societies, both in order to understand it better, as well as in order to effectively organize to change it. (Mohanty 54)
Mohanty thus warns us against the danger of considering women as a coherent group: because they are constituted as a single homogeneous group, “sexual difference becomes coterminous with female subordination and power is automatically defined in binary terms” (60): men who have power and women who do not; men are the oppressors, women the oppressed. “Such simplistic formulations,” Mohanty argues, are “historically reductive” and “ineffectual in designing strategies to combat oppressions” because “all they do is reinforce binary divisions between men and women” (60). So, like Spivak, Mohanty favours regarding women as having a fluid identity in which not only gender but also class, ethnicity and cultural differences play a role.

Ien Ang agrees with Mohanty and Spivak by claiming that “not all women share the same experience of ‘being a woman’, nor is shared gender enough to guarantee a commonality in social positioning” (191). Acknowledging the need to deconstruct the universal notion of ‘oppressed women’, Ang rightly asks herself what the implications of such a deconstruction are: “who is permitted to speak on behalf of whom?”; “If speaking in the name of the other is no longer politically acceptable, how then should the other be represented?”; “Should white feminists refrain from representing ‘other’ women?”; “Would the problem be gradually solved if more ‘other’ women would start raising their voices and presenting ‘their’ points of view?” (Ibid. 195). She sees a solution in Teresa de Lauretis’s suggestion to enter into dialogue with one another so that we can learn the other’s point of view without imposing “a premature sense of unity as the desired outcome of such an exchange” (Ibid. 197).

In my opinion, the solutions proposed by some of the critics discussed above are still rather theoretical, but nonetheless, I took into account the importance of the context in which women live when I chose two postcolonial novels for my analysis. I agree with Mohanty’s
claim that female oppression is always situated within a specific context, so a discussion of
two novels written in completely distinct cultures would have been like comparing apples and
oranges. I therefore chose to analyse two novels that are anchored within Indian culture:
Salman Rushdie’s *Shame* and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*. In addition, it is
interesting to compare two novels written by a male author and a female author, who both
have their own particular ways of representing and countering female oppression. Although
Rushdie’s novel has been praised by many critics, some have also criticized him severely for
making his female protagonist turn to violence in order to deal with her oppression. My
analysis of *Shame* will take into account both the praise and critique Rushdie’s novel
encountered in order to try to determine if Rushdie’s way of dealing with oppression is truly
liberating the female or not. I will analyse both *Shame* and *The God of Small Things*
separately and conclude my dissertation with a comparison between both writers and their
novels in order to determine if one of them succeeds in liberating women better than the other.
Chapter 2

Analysis of two postcolonial novels: Rushdie’s *Shame* and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*

2.1 *Shame* by Salman Rushdie

2.1.1 Introduction to the author and the novel

Salman Rushdie is, undoubtedly, one of the most important writers in world literature today. Rushdie was born in Bombay (now called Mumbai) on 19 June 1947 but was mainly educated in England. After he graduated from King’s College, Cambridge, he went to live with his family again who had by then moved to Pakistan. After a short while, however, he returned to his beloved England where he began working for an advertising agency before dedicating his life to literature. His literary debut, *Grimus* (1975), was published without receiving much attention from the public or from literary critics. It is with the publication of his second novel *Midnight’s Children* in 1981 that “the story of Rushdie’s literary reputation really begins” (Booker 3). Rushdie gained immediate international status as a literary writer with *Midnight’s Children*, for which he won the prestigious Booker Prize in 1981 and for which he was even awarded the Booker of Bookers in 1993 – a special prize for the best book to have won the Booker Prize in the award’s 25-year history. In addition, other novels of his
have been short-listed for the Booker Prize: Shame in 1983, The Satanic Verses in 1988 and The Moor’s Last Sigh in 1995. The Ground Beneath her Feet (1999) is another, more recent, well-known work of his that gained positive critical attention. Keith Booker sees an explanation for Rushdie’s popularity among literary critics in the fact that his works are extremely complex, reflect a number of different cultural positions and viewpoints, and employ a rich variety of literary techniques, conveyed through a lively literary language that many critics have seen as an effective representation of the heteroglossia of postcolonial Indian culture (...) his use of irony, parody, and exuberant carnivalesque imagery and language have for many critics made him a paragon of postmodernism. (2)

Rushdie’s fame especially grew with the controversy arising after the publication of The Satanic Verses in 1988. After this novel came out, the Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a fatwa upon Rushdie for allegedly having insulted the Islam and its prophet Muhammed; the Ayatollah openly called for Rushdie’s execution, offering a bounty for anyone who succeeded in killing him.11 Consequently, Rushdie was forced to go into hiding for several years, unable to leave the door without the protection of bodyguards. Although he was in hiding, Rushdie continued to write. Keith Booker notes that as Rushdie published new works, criticism of his novels continued to be haunted by The Satanic Verses controversy (6). In addition, even Rushdie’s earlier novels were suddenly taken up again. His third novel Shame, for instance, did not receive much critical attention upon its publication in 1983 although it had been well received; it was not until after The Satanic Verses affair that serious criticism on Shame was published (Booker 4). Thus, despite the terrible personal consequences resulting from the controversy, it cannot be denied that the affair “provided a tremendous boost to Rushdie’s prominence as a figure of Western critical attention” (Booker 6).
While his fictional novels are considered to be highly valued contributions to world literature, “Rushdie’s importance goes beyond his work as a novelist” (Booker 1) since he has also “emerged as a major commentator on Indian and other postcolonial culture” (Ibid. 1). In “Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991,” for example, he deals with issues he himself as a postcolonial writer faces such as hybridity, the feeling of being in-between-cultures and thus never really fitting in. Rushdie’s work as a whole is seen as an “extended plea for intercultural tolerance and understanding, (…) as inherently opposed to dogmatism, authoritarianism, and fanaticism” (Booker 7) for which he turns to “a rich combination of materials derived from various cultural perspectives” (Ibid. 7) and the use of “a complex, dialogic language and style” (Ibid. 7).

Although Rushdie is generally seen as “an exemplary postcolonial writer” (Booker 2), many critics “have rejected his work as representative of Indian culture because Rushdie’s work (like Rushdie himself) is so extensively rooted in Western literary traditions” (Ibid. 3). Indeed, *Shame*, like all the other novels, relies on literary traditions and genres such as the Grotesque, the Gothic and Postmodernism. Also, Rushdie himself has spent most of his lifetime in England and the United States rather than in his native homeland India and ‘adopted’ homeland Pakistan. This issue of problematic authority is something which many postcolonial writers are confronted with when trying to represent their native country. Rushdie addresses this issue in the novel itself when a voice interrupts the narrator, disputing the narrator’s authority to tell the story (During 127):

*Outsider! Trespasser! You have no right to this subject!…I know: nobody ever arrested me. Nor are they ever likely to. Poacher! Pirate! We reject your authority. We know you, with your foreign language wrapped around you like a flag: speaking about us in your forked tongue, what can you tell but lies? I reply with more questions: is history to be considered the property*
of the participants solely? In what courts are such claims staked, what boundary commissions map out the territories? Can only the dead speak? (Rushdie 28)

I believe Rushdie is rightly questioning the belief that ‘outsiders’ are not allowed to speak out about events which allegedly belong to those who fully experience them. I think Rushdie is very well-placed as a commentator of Indian and Pakistani culture, having experienced both Western and Eastern ways of life; as a consequence, he is able to understand native events and issues better than any other Western critic, while still being able to look at it from a different, Western, perspective: he is not caught up in the events; rather, he can maintain an overview.

The African author Chinua Achebe, too, has been criticized for choosing the genre of the Western novel and the English language to portray the Igbo society in Things Fall Apart (1958). But, Achebe beautifully counters the critique by referring to the origins of jazz music:

(...)

(...) did not the black people in America, deprived of their own musical instruments, take the trumpet and the trombone and blow them as they had never been blown before, as indeed they were not designed to be blown? And the result, was it not jazz? Is any one going to say that this was a loss to the world or that those first Negro slaves who began to play around with the discarded instruments of their masters should have played waltzes and foxtrots? No! Let every people bring their gifts to the great festival of the world’s cultural harvest and mankind will be all the richer for the variety and distinctiveness of the offerings. (Achebe 61)

Likewise, we should be thankful for the contributions a literary talent like Rushdie brought to world literature. So, in my opinion, Rushdie’s authority as a Westernized Indian author cannot be a valid point of discussion. However, what can be discussed and even contested are the strategies Rushdie chooses in re-appropriating women as powerful human beings, as I will examine further on.
Shame. Rushdie’s third novel, is situated in Pakistan or what is at least to be understood as being Pakistan: “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” (Rushdie 29). Abdulrazak Gurnah notes that although Rushdie only lived in Pakistan for a short time, “everything he had to say about that country by 1983, in both Midnight’s Children and in Shame, expressed his repulsion” (4). But whereas Midnight’s Children describes “India’s lost possibilities, its tolerant and plural ambitions squandered for expediency,” Shame portrays Pakistan “as never having had such possibilities because it was constructed out of intolerance and narrow-mindedness” (Gurnah 4). Direct critique would probably lead to censorship or even violent protest – as Rushdie would unfortunately experience after the publication of The Satanic Verses; so, by claiming to use a ‘fictional’ Pakistan as the setting of his novel, Rushdie is anticipating possible negative criticism while still being able to offer critique on the political situation in Pakistan in a less straightforward way. Rushdie himself phrases it in the novel as follows, after having considered writing about the truth behind Pakistani politics of that time:

(…) if I had been writing a book of this nature, it would have done me no good to protest that I was writing universally, not only about Pakistan. The book would have been banned, dumped in the rubbish bin, burned. All that effort for nothing! Realism can break a writer’s heart. Fortunately, however, I am only telling a sort of modern fairy-tale, so that’s all right; nobody need get upset, or take anything I say too seriously. No drastic action need be taken, either. What a relief! (70)

Nevertheless, Pakistani politics are actually fairly thinly disguised in Shame; many critics have identified the two male protagonists – Iskander Harappa and Raza Hyder – around which a large part of the story revolves, as representing Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Zia ul-Haq.
respectively. Bhutto was the progressive, Westernized leader coming into power after the civil war in Pakistan. He was overthrown, however, by a military coup lead by the Islamic fundamentalist Mohammed Zia ul-Haq in 1977. Bhutto was imprisoned and later hanged with the utmost secrecy, causing great protest in the West (Wenger par.3). The events in *Shame* resemble these real-life events very closely.

*Shame* is a very complex story constructed out of many intertwined storylines. The larger context of these storylines is the relation between two powerful Pakistani families: the Harappa family and the Hyder family. The novel starts by introducing the reader to the family of Old Mr. Shakil, who is a remnant of the colonial order, and his three daughters Chunni, Munnee and Bunny. They live together in a fantastic mansion – nicknamed Nishapur – in the town of Q., located on the border with Afghanistan. After Old Mr. Shakil’s death, the three daughters set out to celebrate their newly acquired freedom by throwing a party to which they only invite white men. One of them becomes pregnant during the party, but it is unclear which one of them since they decide to ‘share the pregnancy’. Since the three sisters close themselves off from the world for nine months and all three sisters develop the same symptoms, it becomes impossible for the outside world to decipher which one of them really is pregnant. When their son Omar Khayyam Shakil is finally born, the three mothers bring him up in isolation for years. After twelve years of wandering the halls of Nishapur, however, Omar Khayyam decides he wants to leave the house. In exchange for him being allowed to attend school, his mothers order their son never to feel shame or *sharam* in Arabic. Rushdie notes that shame is actually an inadequate translation for *sharam* because the English word does not capture all the connotations *sharam* has in Arabic culture:

*Sharam*, that’s the word. For which this paltry ‘shame’ is a wholly inadequate translation. (…) It was not only shame that his mothers forbade Omar Khayyam 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. (Rushdie 39)

Jenny Sharpe considers *sharam* as a patriarchal device to keep women oppressed, as I will come back to later on; “a woman who submits to feelings of shame is one who does not step out of line” (par. 2). In this respect, we can say that the Shakil sisters order their son not to submit to the same patriarchal code of conduct they have been subjected to. Omar consequently comes to embody ‘shamelessness’, something which will make the contrast with his future wife, Sufiya – who embodies shame – all the more striking. Although Omar Khayyam becomes a brilliant medical doctor, he is loathed by many for his despicable, ‘shameless’ attitude and misogynistic character. Omar befriends the rich playboy Iskander ‘Isky’ Harappa in whom he finds a companion in debauchery. At this point, the story of Omar Khayyam is pushed aside for a while and we learn more about the history of the two rival families. Iskander is married to Rani Humayun; they have a single daughter: Arjumand ‘the Virgin Ironpants’ Harappa who worships her father. When Iskander Harappa reaches the age of forty, he decides to abandon his life of gambling, whoring and drinking; instead, he enters politics and becomes the civilian Prime Minister. He installs his wife’s cousin, Raza ‘Old Razor Guts’ Hyder, as the leader of the military force on the premise that he will not cause any trouble. Raza Hyder is married to Bilquis, whom he rescued during the suicide-bombing of her father. Bilquis is a somewhat haughty character who is deeply traumatized by her father’s suicide. After their first child, a son, is stillborn, Raza is infuriated when he learns that his next child is a girl instead of the much wanted boy: Raza rejects Sufiya Zinobia as the ‘wrong miracle’; her mother calls her ‘shame’. In the unfortunate event of a brain fever Sufiya becomes mentally retarded, which makes her ‘pure’ in Rushdie’s eyes; as a consequence, Sufiya “becomes the repository of all the shame not felt by others” (Fletcher 98). She receives extensive treatment from Omar Khayyam, who falls in love with her. Omar Khayyam is
allowed to marry Sufiya provided that he does not have sexual relations with her. Instead, to
satisfy his sexual needs, he can sleep with Sufiya’s *ayah* – her servant – Shahbanou. Despite
her mental illness, Sufiya realizes she is not fulfilling her duty as a wife and feels deeply
ashamed when Shahbanou becomes pregnant. As not only her own shame, but also the shame
of the world culminates within herself, Sufiya transforms into a ‘beast’ and commits horrible
acts, eventually even raping and brutally murdering four young men. Sufiya’s sister, Naveed
‘Good News’ Hyder, marries the police captain Talvar Ulhaq after she rejected an arranged
marriage with Haroun Harappa, Isky’s nephew. Talvar, however, only marries her because
she can produce his heirs. In the end, Naveed commits suicide because she cannot longer deal
with the unnatural accumulation of numbers of babies she is having. Haroun, in turn, rejects
Isky’s daughter Arjumand who sees in him the only man capable of resembling her ideal
father. Meanwhile, Rani and Bilquis both get sent away with the children by their husbands to
far-off areas in the country. In her captivity, Rani embroiders eighteen shawls that record the
horror of her husband’s regime, which, as I will discuss further on, is an important sign of
female resistance in the novel. Bilquis on the other hand, goes insane. After some political
turmoil in the country, Raza Hyder replaces Iskander Harappa in a military coup and has him
killed to avenge the death of his cousin, Little Mir, by the hands of Isky. Later on in the novel,
Raza himself will be overthrown and forced to flee with the help of his wife Bilquis. Raza and
Omar, both disguised as women, together with Bilquis manage to reach the Old Shakil
Mansion, where they catch malaria and are forced to stay in bed. Bilquis eventually dies of
the disease. Omar Khayyam’s mothers rejoice when they are finally offered an opportunity to
kill Raza Hyder, who is responsible for the murder of their second son, Babar. The novel ends
with the return of Sufiya as the beast. After she beheads her husband, Sufiya explodes and the
fire causes the entire building to burn down.
In its complexity, *Shame* lends itself perfectly for an analysis of the representations of women in postcolonial literature. However, whether these representations can be considered liberating has long been a point of controversy among literary critics, as I will illustrate in the next part. I will also offer my own opinion on the subject.

2.1.2 Analysis and discussion of female representations in *Shame* and literary criticism.

In this part of the paper, I would like to discuss two aspects: Firstly, I will consider the representations of each of the female protagonists individually, all of whom are clearly represented as victims of patriarchal oppression: The Shakil Sisters, Rani Harappa, Bilquis Hyder, Arjumand Harappa, Naveed Hyder and especially Sufiya Zinobia. Secondly, I will consider both the at times harsh critique the novel encountered and the opinion of those who think that Rushdie succeeds in offering an alternative to the oppressive images of women. All the women in the novel are in some way or another victimized by the men, but still try to find a way to deal with their oppression. Apart from discussing how Rushdie shows the oppression of women in his novel, I will also consider how the men in the novel are represented, since they too have been the subject of critique. In this respect, it is also interesting to have a look at what Rushdie himself has said about the subject. Based on my own analysis of the novel, I will offer my opinion on whether Rushdie fails or succeeds in liberating women in his fiction.

At the beginning of the novel, we meet the three Shakil sisters Chunni, Munnee, and Bunny, who are locked up by their father in the Nishapur house, which provides a metaphor for Pakistan (Goonetilleke 51, Gurnah 4); it represents the closed, medieval Islamic society that oppresses women. Damian Grants allegorically reads Old Mr. Shakil as the departing Ray and the three sisters as representing India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (60). The Shakil sisters
rebel against their oppression by throwing a scandalous party after their father’s death, to which they only invite white *sahibs*. On this occasion, one of them shamefully gets pregnant. The identity of both the father and mother, however, remains a mystery as the Shakil sisters resolve to ‘share the pregnancy’, a treaty “signed in the commingled menstrual blood of the isolated trinity” (Rushdie 13). Goonetilleke argues that the three sisters themselves are symbols of Pakistan’s “static society, made stagnant by Islamic patriarchy” (51). They have been oppressed by their dominant father and, in turn, extend that same oppression to their son: “[they] built a fortress of motherhood around their son in order to protect and retain him within the walls of his mothers’ country” (Binns par. 4).

Rani, too, is a victim of male oppression. As already mentioned in the summary, Iskander Harappa exiles Rani to the countryside because she cannot give him a male heir. The dry land surrounding the estate symbolically refers to Rani’s ‘bareness’. Moreover, he takes Pinkie Aurangzeb as his mistress. Rani keeps hoping that one day Isky will want her back, but resigns herself to her fate when she learns that “he only wanted her to stand on election platforms” (Rushdie 182). In other words, he only wants her around “when it is politically to his advantage,” as Goonetilleke points out (58). In her state of oppression, she starts embroidering eighteen shawls which depict the truth about the murders and crimes her husband committed. Rani aptly titles her collection of shawls ‘The Shamelessness of Iskander the Great’ and surprisingly signs her “epitaph of wool” (Rushdie 191) with her maiden name, Rani Humayun, “retrieved from the mothballs of the past” (Ibid. 191). In doing so, she dissociates herself from her husband’s crimes (Goonetilleke 63). I will demonstrate further on in this dissertation that Rani, as an artist, can be seen as a powerful woman.

Similar to Rani, Bilquis Hyder is victimized by her husband. Raza becomes heartless towards his wife because she is unable to give birth to a male heir: their first-born son dies, strangled by the umbilical cord. When the second child turns out to be a girl Raza causes a
fuss in the hospital, blaming his wife for the disgrace of having a girl. As if the humiliation of her sex was not already enough, Sufiya also catches a brain fever which causes her to be mentally retarded. Bilquis feels like she has failed her husband and projects her shame onto her daughter. In one of her phone conversations with Rani, Bilquis complaints:

‘Rani, a judgement, what else? He wanted a hero of a son; I gave him an idiot female instead. (...) a simpleton, a goof! Nothing upstairs. Straw instead of cabbage between the ears. Empty in the breadbin. To be done? But darling, there is nothing. That birdbrain, that mouse! I must accept it: she is my shame.’ (Rushdie 101)

Bilquis starts hating her daughter; for instance, right after Sufiya kills Pinkie’s chickens she violently cuts off Sufiya’s bloody hair, making her head look like “the rough, cropped proof of her mother’s loathing” (Rushdie 141). Surprisingly, as the novel evolves, it is Raza who shows the most concern for their daughter when he resents marrying her off to Omar Khayyam.

Now, Bilquis herself is represented in the novel as the “archetypal migrant (...) whose past in India literally disappears in flames” but “whose beautiful naked body is rescued (...) by her future husband, the future president of Pakistan” (Hai 22):

(...) it is the fate of migrants to be stripped of history, to stand naked amidst the scorn of strangers upon whom they see the rich clothing, the brocades of continuity and the eyebrows of belonging (...) Bilquis’s past left her even before she left that city; she stood in a gully, denuded by the suicide of her father, and watched it go. (Rushdie 63-4)

Raza thus rescues and re-clothes the naked Bilquis. Here, she resembles the damsel in distress who is saved by the brave ‘prince’. Likewise, her new family recovers her “from the
nakedness of her past” (Hai 22) by incorporating her story in the “family’s saga” (Rushdie 78). Unfortunately, Bilquis is so traumatized by her experience that she increasingly suffers from nervous breakdowns, sometimes even bordering on insanity. Consequently, Raza sees no other choice than to place her “under a kind of unofficial house arrest” (Rushdie 171) for “it would have been a shame and a scandal if any outsider had seen her in that state” (Ibid. 68). Being locked up and neglected by her husband, Bilquis gradually fades away, turning into “a shadow hunting the corridors for something it had lost,” “a mumble in the corners of the palace,” “a rumour in a veil” (Rushdie 209). At the funeral of their youngest daughter, Raza compares the image of the young, naked Bilquis whom he rescued standing amidst the ruins of her world, to the older Bilquis standing next to him, hidden behind an Islamic burqa, and concludes that hers is a history of “retreat into the secrecy of the veil” (Ibid. 228). In other words, Bilquis’s story is a typical example of how the ‘other’ becomes silenced by patriarchy.

I want to add here that according to Goonetilleke, it seems that, ironically, the fundamentalist Raza treats his wife Bilquis better than the ‘modern’ Iskander does Rani (58). Indeed, there are instances in the novel where Raza seems to show genuine feelings for his wife; for example, Raza takes care of Bilquis after her traumatic experience of the bomb explosion, covering up her nakedness with his jacket. Moreover, upon finding Bilquis’s dead body in the Shakil mansion, Raza’s caring reaction seems sincere: “Don’t worry, Billoo, he whispered to her, Raz is here. I’ll clean you up good and proper and then you’ll see” (Rushdie 280). However, in my opinion, these few moments in which he seems to care about his wife do not mean that he is not equally engaging in the oppression of women; these moments do not make up for the way he treated his wife all those years.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator reveals a friendship between Rani and Bilquis; ignored and locked up by their husbands, the two women become even closer friends, turning to each other for support whenever they can escape their husbands’ control. However,
their bond weakens as their husbands become rivals and reinforce power upon their wives:

“The deeds of men had severed that link between the women, that nourishing cord which had, at different times, carried messages of support first one way, then the other, along its unseen pulses” (Ibid. 191). With this situation, Rushdie again demonstrates the tragic oppression of women in Pakistan.

Another victim of male oppression is Naveed ‘Good News’ Hyder, Raza and Bilquis’s second daughter. She is planned to marry Haroun Harappa, but having fallen for the polo player Talvar Ulhaq, chooses to marry him instead. Bilquis is able to prevent Raza from killing Naveed for having had a disgraceful affair, and makes him agree to let their daughter marry the man she loves: “a whore with a home” Raza admits, “is better than a whore in the gutter” (Rushdie 167). Talvar, on the other hand, is “a complete male chauvinist” (59) in Goonetilleke’s point of view because he only marries Naveed because of her capacity to bear him a large number of heirs. Indeed, Talvar’s perception of his wife recalls the view held by Hamas I discussed earlier on; women are considered mere factories for the production of babies. Furthermore, Talvar disregards the unnatural accumulation of babies, none of whom are male, contrary to his wife who is so terrified by this problem that she eventually chooses to commit suicide:

(…) Naveed Talvar, the former Good News Hyder, proved utterly incapable of coping with the endless stream of humanity flowing out between her thighs. But her husband was relentless, insatiable, his dream of children had expanded to fill up the place in his life previously occupied by polo (…) He came to her once a year and ordered her to get ready, because it was time to plant the seed, until she felt like a vegetable patch whose naturally fertile soil was being worn out by an over-zealous gardener, and understood that there was no hope for women in the world, because whether you were respected or not the men got you anyway, no matter how hard you
Margaux Vandamme

tried to be the most proper of ladies the men would come and stuff you full of alien unwanted life. (Rushdie 207)

I believe that, in refusing to acknowledge the problem he causes, Talvar is the one responsible for his wife’s suicide. Through the story of Naveed, Rushdie criticizes local patriarchy for aligning itself with the colonial idea that women are objects rather than human beings. Through the powerfully tragic portrayals of Bilquis, Rani and Naveed, Rushdie definitely succeeds in encouraging the reader to reflect on the terrible situations in which women end up because of patriarchal oppression.

Rani’s daughter Arjumand, nicknamed ‘The Virgin Ironpants’ deals with patriarchal oppression in a totally different way than the other female characters; she denies her femaleness, wishing to appear masculine because it is the only way to come into a more powerful position: “‘It’s a man’s world, Arjumand. Rise above your gender as you grow. This is no place to be a woman in’” (Rushdie 126). As the Virgin Ironpants blindly admires her father Iskander Harappa, she follows his advice, eventually even leading her to loath her own sex: “‘This woman’s body,’ she told her father on the day she became a grown woman, ‘it brings a person nothing but babies, pinches and shame’” (Ibid. 107). When Arjumand falls in love with Haroun Harappa, it is because he is the only man resembling her father so closely (Ibid. 157). Yet, he rejects her, leaving Arjumand embittered. Arjumand tries everything to cover up her femininity but “the harder she tried” to look more masculine, “the more insistently her blossoming body outshone her disguises” (Ibid. 156). However, as she realizes later on, her sexuality can also be used to her advantage; she decides to take revenge on the men that hold her captive by causing riots under the guards:

Arjumand began to do what she had never done in her life, that is, she dressed to kill. The Virgin Ironpants swung her hips and wiggled her behind and flashed her eyes at all the soldiers, but
most of all the peach-faced Captain Ijazz. The effect of her behaviour was dramatic. Fights broke out in the little canvas Himalayas, teeth were broken, soldiers inflicted knife-wounds on their comrades. Ijazz himself was screaming inwardly, in the grip of a lust so fierce that he thought he would explode (...). (Rushdie 190)

Although she is placed under house arrest together with her mother, both women fail to draw closer to each other. In fact, Arjumand loathes her mother for being so weak, claiming that being locked up is Rani’s own fault: “If he did not love you, you must have done something to deserve it” (Ibid. 108). After Raza’s fall, Arjumand and Haroun take charge of the situation. Once she is installed into power, though, she all too willingly engages in the oppression of women herself. For instance, when Rani sends her collection of embroidered shawls to her daughter as a warning not to abuse her newly acquired power, Arjumand is not interested; on the contrary, she “has her own mother placed under guard” ensuring that “she will never leave the estate again” (Ibid. 277).

Now, the most important female character in the book is Sufiya Zinobia, elder daughter of Raza and Bilquis Hyder. She is born a girl when her father wanted a boy; she is ‘the miracle gone wrong’. From the very start, she is made ashamed of her gender, a shame she is unable to voice since she becomes mentally retarded after a brain disease. In Rushdie’s view, her retardation makes Sufiya the most pure and innocent creature, “clean (…) in the midst of a dirty world” (Rushdie 120). She is therefore suitable to absorb all the unfelt emotions in the world; she blushes for the shamefulness of the world. Refusing to make her a completely powerless victim, Rushdie chooses to let that shame inside of her cause her to turn to acts of violence. The ‘beast’ inside Sufiya feeds on her emotions of shame and takes possession of her from time to time. The consequences are horrifying: after her first transformation, she gruesomely decapitates the two hundred and eighteen turkeys of her
father’s mistress Pinkie Aurangzeb, reaching “down into their bodies to draw their guts up through their necks” (Ibid. 138). After this explosion the narrator notes that

Sufiya Zinobia, for so long burdened with being a miracle-gone-wrong, a family’s shame made flesh, had discovered in the labyrinths of her unconscious self the hidden path that links sharam to violence; and that, awakening, she was as surprised as anyone by the force of what had been unleashed. (Rushdie 139)

That force turns out to be so overwhelming that Sufiya ends up in a coma, the violence of the beast turning inwards and causing “a total immunological collapse” (Gurnah 106). It is Omar Khayyam who is able to save her life and as a reward – and because no one else will – he is allowed to marry the girl. Later on, aroused by the shame caused by her sister’s affair, Sufiya attempts to decapitate Talvar, leaving him unable to pursue his career as a polo player.

Despite having the mental age of a child, Sufiya understands there is something wrong about her marriage to Omar:

There is a thing that women do at nights with their husbands. She does not do it, Shahbanou does it for her. (…) But she is a wife. She has a husband. She can’t work this out. The horrible thing and the horrible not-doing-the-thing. (…) There is no ocean but there is a feeling of sinking. It makes her sick. There is an ocean. She feels its tide. And, somewhere in its depths, a Beast, stirring. (Rushdie 215)

The shame of not fulfilling her marital duties is the final humiliation for Sufiya; it causes her to transform into the beast once again, this time raping and murdering four young men:
Shame walks the streets of night. In the slums four youths are transfixed by those appalling eyes, whose deadly yellow fire blows like a wind through the lattice-work of the veil. They follow her to the rubbish-dump of doom, rats to her piper, automata dancing in the all-consuming light of the black-veiled eyes. Down she lies; and what Shahbanou took upon herself is finally done to Sufiya. 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. (Rushdie 219)

With Sufiya’s rape of the four men, Rushdie introduces a very dark reversal of one of the Islamic laws, the Hudood Ordinances\textsuperscript{13}, which state that four adult men need to be present as witnesses in order to register a rape crime (Yaqin 68). After this event, Raza and Omar resolve to lock up Sufiya, whom they drug, but she manages to escape. She makes her final transformation and becomes a white panther, roaming the land and killing everything and everyone on her way. By terrorizing the land, Sufiya contributes to the fall of her father’s regime. At the end of the story, Sufiya – as the beast – arrives at the Shakil mansion where she finds her husband waiting for her “like a bridegroom on his wedding night” (Rushdie 286). She kills Omar and finally explodes, destroying everything around her.

Rushdie definitely succeeds in depicting the patriarchal oppression which many native women face; however, are the representations of the women in Shame in themselves oppressive as some critics have suggested? I think that there is definitely some truth in claiming that these representations are problematic, but many images can also be given a more positive reading, as critics such as Andrew Teverson or Justyna Deszcz have pointed out. In considering both ways of looking at the novel, we can ask ourselves if the women in Shame are truly rendered mute or not? Or are we the ones failing to understand Rushdie’s strategies? In what follows, I will offer my own opinion on the subject and try to determine if Rushdie fails or succeeds in liberating the female voice.
Rushdie wrote his novel *Shame* to “illustrate the way women are the victims of masculine ambition, lust, fanaticism, cruelty, and incompetence” (Damian 62) and to readdress their oppressed status in Pakistan. As the writer himself remarks in the novel:

> 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 see my ‘male’ plot refracted, so to speak, through the prisms of its reverse and ‘female’ side. (Rushdie 173)

Indeed, the women’s stories are being told – retrieved from the shadow of history, if you like. However, is their presence in the novel alone enough to give them back their voices? In many of his narratorial asides, Rushdie calls for the inclusion and participation of women; yet, many critics have argued that the writer fails to carry out his own ideas. Catherine Cundy, for example, thinks that Rushdie’s attempt to reconstitute women’s voices is problematic because it is “undercut by the representations of the women themselves” (qtd. in Yaqin 66). Ahmad agrees, stating that Rushdie contradicts himself with the often repugnant representations of the women in *Shame*:

> what we find is a gallery of women who are frigid and desexualized (Arjumand, the ‘Virgin Ironpants’), demented and moronic (the twenty-odd years of Zinobia’s childhood), (…) driven to despair (Rani, Bilquis), or suicide (Good News Hyder), or embody sheer surreal incoherence and loss of individual identity (the Shakil sisters). (Ahmad 469)

Ambreen Hai, too, accuses Rushdie of the fact that “his own language and ideology become indistinguishable from what they seek to castigate” (31). Hai refers, for instance, to the way in
which Rushdie describes how Rani is “oiled and naked before (…) a man who had just turned her into a grown woman” (Rushdie 80) on her wedding night. By falling back into a passive construction, Rushdie is said to repeat the patriarchal ideology in which women are regarded as “sexualized possessions (…) as reaching such ‘womanhood’ only when acted upon” (Hai 31). Rushdie, despite his good intentions, is thus said to intensify rather than break down the stereotypical gender divide by using the same binary oppositions that characterize patriarchal discourse (Ibid. 18). I disagree with their assessment, as I will explain further on in this part, but, first, I want to examine the criticism offered by two of Rushdie’s fiercest critics: Aijaz Ahmad and Inderpal Grewal.

The Marxist literary theorist Aijaz Ahmad and the postcolonial feminist theorist Inderpal Grewal both show deep concerns for the way Rushdie represents women in *Shame*. While Ahmad acknowledges the powerfulness of the images Rushdie sketches of female oppression, he also finds that there is something inherently wrong with the fact that “every woman, without exception, is represented through a system of imageries which is sexually overdetermined” (469). Likewise, Catherine Cundy claims that female representations in *Shame* are characterized by an “innocent/whore binarism” (qtd. in Yaqin 66) which reminds us of the portrayal of women within colonial and patriarchal writing. Rushdie’s representation of women in *Shame* is indeed very ambiguous at times; he seems unable to get out of the binary oppositions in that violence is represented as active and masculine, whereas silence is associated with passiveness and femininity. For instance, as Inderpal Grewal argues, the women in the novel can only gain power when acting like men – in the case of Arjumand – or become equal to men through violence – in the case of Sufiya (134). In addition, when a woman like Arjumand accedes to power, she seems to use that power no more wisely than the men in the novel: she does not, as we would expect from a woman in power, jump to the
defence of other victims of patriarchy – like her mother – but continues her father’s oppression of Rani.

Ahmad even accuses Rushdie of misogyny although, of course, “Rushdie is not, in the way Orwell always was, a misogynist plain and simple” (468) because, “living in the contemporary milieu of the British Left, he has not remained untouched by certain kinds of feminism” (Ibid. 468). Ahmad considers Rushdie’s representations of women misogynistic in that he gives “only chilling portraits (…) of women, in terms so very close to the dominant stereotypes” (Ibid. 474) which overvalorize “the erotic, the irrational, the demented and the demonic” (Ibid 474). Ahmad illustrates his point by referring to the portrayal of Sufiya Zinobia, who by turning into a beast “becomes the oldest of the misogynist myths” (472). I will come back to this later on when I discuss the representation of Sufiya more elaborately.

Through the narrator’s interventions, we learn that Rushdie’s sees himself as an “outsider” (28). He, as an emigrant, identifies for example with Bilquis when she stands “naked and eyebrowless” (Ibid. 63) amidst the ruins of the cinema building after the explosion; Bilquis’s traumatizing experience symbolizes Rushdie’s experience as an emigrant for “it is the fate of migrants to be stripped of history, to stand amidst the scorn of strangers” (Ibid. 63). However, Inderpal Grewal questions whether or not Rushdie’s “condition as an exile and as potentially banned writer places him in a peripheralized position similar to that of women” (126) since “the narrator’s voice, a male one, is the only voice that is heard” (Ibid. 125). She suggests that Rushdie had better opted for a history about the struggle of women rather than their history of subjection if he wanted to liberate Pakistani women through his writing (Ibid 142). Ahmad, too, believes that Shame lacks the presence of women who embody that history of struggle:
(…) there is something fatally wrong with a novel in which virtually every woman is to be pitied, most are to be laughed at, some are to be feared (…) but none may be understood in relation to those fundamental projects of survival and overcoming which are none other than the production of history itself. (474)

As such, Ahmad concludes, *Shame* cannot offer any hope of changing the situation of women.

However, I want to point that in one of the authorial asides Rushdie clearly shows that he is aware that such female resistance to patriarchy exists:

I hope that it goes without saying that not all women are crushed by any system, no matter how oppressive. It 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. (…) In the end, though, it all blows up in your face. (Rushdie 173)

His recognition of the tragic situation in which many women are victimized by patriarchy and his choice to portray such situations does not mean that he denies the existence of women’s resistance. After all, as Rushdie himself pointed out, his main objective is to represent “the way in which the sexual repressions of [Pakistan] are connected to the political repressions” (qtd. in Deszcz 38)\(^\text{15}\). He is “questioning certain patriarchal norms and recasting or foregrounding cultural and social injustices toward women” (Booker 8).

Furthermore, Teverson questions whether or not it is true that Rushdie presents all women in *Shame* as disempowered (142-3). Though I admit that the portrayals of some of his female characters are often disturbing, I strongly believe that Rushdie *does* provide strong images of female resistance, something Ahmad and Grewal fail to see. There are two characters that provide a non-violent frame of resistance to patriarchy: Rani Harappa and Bilquis Hyder.
Like Ambreen Hai I believe that Bilquis can be understood as a powerful woman. When Raza notices that Bilquis is “sewing large expanses of black cloth into shapes that were impossible to decipher” (Rushdie 249), he asks his wife: ‘What are you making in such a hurry that you can’t wait till you get back home?’ ‘Shrouds,’ she answered seriously, and he felt a chill on his spine” (Ibid. 249). Bilquis’s project of sewing burial sheets announces the downfall of her husband; she is “literally shaping the form that his death will take” (Hai 23). Moreover, at the end of the novel, it is Bilquis whom Raza and Omar turn to when they need to escape. Here, Rushdie reverses agency in two ways; Bilquis is the one who dresses them in women’s clothes, thereby reversing the gender roles: “Your son became a daughter (…) now you must change shape also. I knew I was sewing these for a reason” (Rushdie 262).

Secondly, she is the one who leads them to Nishapur, the house of the Shakil sisters. By delivering the two men in the hands of the vengeful three mothers, whom Hai reads as the three goddesses of Fate (23), Bilquis is making sure they will get punished for their crimes against women. She thus manages to “reshape the end of [the men’s stories]” (Ibid. 23). Since Bilquis actively changes the men’s stories, she can surely be understood as a powerful woman.

The other example of a woman empowered by artistry is Rani Harappa, who, as already mentioned before, speaks out against patriarchy by embroidering eighteen shawls which testify to the crimes her husband committed. She is thus showing the atrocities of Isky’s regime rather than talking about them. She signs her work with her maiden name, Rani Humayun, in order to dissociate herself from her husband. According to Teverson, Rushdie is using Rani’s artistic project as a way to “explore the capacity of the artist to critique (or fail to critique) those with political power using representation” (143). Like the writer, she can expose the crimes of the powerful, but is “unable to act more directly” (Ibid. 143). Goonetilleke, too, argues that Rani’s resistance is “virtually passive” (63) in that they do not
affect Isky’s public reputation; by sending the shawls to Arjumand, she warns her daughter not to abuse her power the way Iskander did. Arjumand, however, chooses to ignore that message. Nevertheless, I believe that Rani should be seen as a hopeful character because her work provides an alternative perspective to the official, patriarchal truth; she acts as a judge of the oppressive regime. As such, Rani’s power lies within the potentially transformative nature of her female artistry.

Another point of negative critique I want to address concerns the characterization of Sufiya Zinobia. Her portrayal is considered to be Rushdie’s greatest flaw in the eyes of Ahmad, Cundy and Grewal. Indeed, Sufiya’s representation is an extremely ambivalent one. Unlike the other women in the novel, Sufiya seems to be the only one capable of successful rebellion. However, Rushdie makes her rebel by turning her into a violent beast. Ahmad, Cundy and Grewal all agree here that Rushdie’s idea of female rebellion fails to be truly liberating because of the horror of Sufiya’s acts; she becomes a murderer and rapist, which is a very macabre reversal of the reality where men abuse women. We might thus indeed wonder to what extent violent representations of women can serve as a means to address female oppression and offer alternatives.

In depicting her as a men-slaughterer, Ahmad argues, “Sufiya becomes the oldest of the misogynist myths: the virgin who is really a vampire, the irresistible temptress who seduces men in order to kill them” (472). Moreover, by placing the origins of the beast in Sufiya’s sexual awakening, Rushdie is said to reproduce men’s fear of women; “the beast increasingly comes to represent a dangerous female sexuality” (Sharpe par. 4). Sufiya even ceases to be human at the end of the story when she makes her final transformation into a white panther, whereupon Omar Khayyam remarks: “‘For the first time in her life (…) that girl is free.’ He imagined her proud, proud of the violence that was making her a legend” (Rushdie 254). Ahmad makes a valid point when stating that “there is something profoundly
unsettling about this idea of ‘freedom’” (473) for “violence is not in itself capable of regeneration” (Ibid. 471). Her powers are only powers of destruction; she becomes exactly that what she is rebelling against.

But is it true that Sufiya’s beastly violence can in no way be understood as a liberating force? I believe it can. Let us start by looking at what the writer has said about his representation of Sufiya. In chapter three of the novel, Rushdie explains his motives for Sufiya’s story, a story which grew out of two events. The first event which caught Rushdie’s attention happened in London, where a Pakistani father murdered his own daughter for having allegedly made love to a white boy: “She had brought such dishonour upon her family that only her blood could wash away the stain” (Rushdie 115). The second story on which Rushdie based his portrayal of Sufiya is that of an Asian girl who got beaten up by a group of boys in the underground train. Though she had been the victim, the girl considered herself responsible for what had happened; she was so ashamed – as she had been taught by her cultural background – that she did not even make an official complaint. I think that by making Sufiya embody that feeling of shame, she comes to represent all those women who are forced into submission. Jenny Sharpe considers the importance of ‘sharam’ (or the inadequate translation ‘shame’) in Islam culture, concluding that as a code of conduct, it is there to

(…) reproduce the gendered role of female passivity, withholding from women other definitions of femininity. (…) So long as women experience sharam, family honour is preserved (…) A woman who submits to feelings of shame is one who does not step out of line. (Sharpe par. 2)

So, shame or sharam is a patriarchal concept to keep women in place, to keep them oppressed. Rushdie, however, addresses this idea by making Sufiya rebel. Through his depiction of Sufiya, Rushdie issues a warning about the terrible consequences patriarchal oppression might hold: “Humiliate people for long enough and a wilderness bursts out of
them” (117). As Sharpe points out, “Rushdie introduces the imaginative possibility of women’s shame producing anger and self-pride rather than embarrassment and family honor” and in doing so, “he breaks down the taken-for-grantedness of female modesty” (par.3). Now, Rushdie imagines how these girls could have defended themselves against such oppression:

I imagine what would have happened if such a fury could have been released in that girl on her underground train – how she would have trashed the white kids within an inch of their lives, breaking arms legs noses balls, without knowing whence the violence came, without seeing how she, so slight a figure, could command such awesome strength. And they, what would they have done? How to tell the police they were beaten up by a mere girl, just one weak female against the lot of them? How to look their comrades in the face? I feel gleeful about this notion: it’s a seductive, silky thing, this violence, yes it is. (Rushdie 117)

Jenny Sharpe supports Rushdie by reading Sufiya as a positive character: “Sufiya represents the effort to imagine a different outcome for women who are the victims of male violence” (par.12). Through the story of Sufiya Zinobia, Rushdie thus constructs an imaginary world in which female resistance is possible. I too believe that the strength of Shame is exactly located in its imagination; by exaggerating Sufiya’s monstrosity – a strategy which perfectly fits into the tradition of the Grotesque – Rushdie encourages the reader not to take anything for granted but instead to actively think about the possibility of female liberation.

A second way of considering Sufiya as a positive character can be found in Justyna Deszcz’s discussion of how Sufiya’s story is an explicit rewriting of the fairy tale “Beauty and the Beast”. As is the case in fairy tales, the female protagonist undergoes a series of psychological changes before reaching the desirable end: marriage. However, Omar is the one who undergoes the change instead of Sufiya: whereas at the beginning he is still a repugnant,
misogynist character who “[sacrificed] wifely brains for the beauty of the flesh” (Rushdie 144), he gradually shows genuine care for his wife and understand her motives: “‘Sufiya Zinobia, (...) I can see you now’” (Ibid. 254). At the end of the story, he accepts his wife’s beastliness and faces his death with dignity. As Deszcz argues, “Omar’s acceptance attests to his recognition, not so much of the victory of feminine power, but of the establishment of harmony between male and female” (37). In this respect, Sufiya “emerges as capable of transporting her partner beyond the exhausted gender ideologies” (Ibid. 37). I think that Sufiya is empowered because she succeeds in making Omar love her for who she is: a powerful, active ‘beast’. Justyna Deszcz defends the ambiguous ending of the novel in which Sufiya explodes, as Rushdie’s way of countering “the oppressive predictability of the fairytale happy ending of ‘Beauty and the Beast’”(39). Having examined fairy tale stereotypes in my Bachelorpaper, I agree that Rushdie’s explosion strategy can be interpreted as a powerful rewriting of “Beauty and the Beast” since it defies all expectations which we as a reader might have about fairy tale endings.

So, even if Rushdie’s portrayal of Sufiya is indeed unsettling at times, should we therefore dismiss it as unsuitable as a means of liberating women in fiction? Are we, as the feminist critic Merja Makinen questions, only to take on board those constructions of sexuality which make us feel comfortable? (13). In countering the critique on Angela Carter’s sexually violent female characters, Makinen suggested that if the feminist critics Patricia Duncker and Avis Lewallen fail to recognize that women can be “violent as well as active sexually, that women can choose to be perverse,” (Makinen 4) then they are the ones who “cannot see beyond the sexist binary oppositions,” (Ibid. 4)16. I think that this statement can be extended to Grewal and especially Ahmad’s critique on the women in Shame: they too, I would say, cannot conceive of women as violent and sexual human beings, two aspects they consider as necessarily negative. I agree with Deszcz and Sharpe that Sufiya can be seen as a
positive character because through her Grotesque portrayal, Rushdie succeeds in asking questions about our traditional perception of gender roles. He is encouraging the reader to reflect on traditional representations of women and the way women have been victims of patriarchal oppression for such a long time. Recognizing the existence of an active female sexuality might prove to be one of the liberating steps needed to give women back their voice.

In conclusion, we can say that Rushdie’s novel is an extremely complex work containing rather ambiguous representations of women. Nevertheless, it is a woman-focused novel in which Rushdie powerfully sketches how many women are victimized by male oppressors. The portrayals of the women themselves, however, have generated great controversy among many literary critics; while some accuse Rushdie of recreating misogynistic stereotypes and falling into the same binary oppositions which characterize patriarchal ideology, others have congratulated him on the strength of his female representations, believing that Shame carries a positive message. While I certainly agree that some of these portrayals are at times very ambiguous, I too believe that Shame should be approached from a positive point of view. I would argue that considering Rushdie’s attempt to liberate women in his fiction to be a failure because of the violence, is too limited a view; there are definitely instances where Rushdie opens up possibilities of female resistance. Especially female (and authorial) artistry might be potentially powerful in providing alternative, critical perspectives. Sufiya’s story, too, imagines the possibility of female resistance, even though the choice for violence can be deemed less fortunate. With Sufiya’s rebellion, Rushdie is, above all, asking the reader to reflect on traditional gender roles, to question patriarchal oppression of women and to engage in imagining a different outcome for women.
2.2 **The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy**

2.2.1 **Introduction to the author and the novel**

Although she only published one novel so far, Arundhati Roy can definitely be regarded as an important figure within postcolonial literature. Roy was born in 1961 in Shilong, in the Indian state of Kerala. Roy grew up as a child of divorced parents; her Syrian-Christian mother Mary Roy, a women’s rights activist, divorced her Bengali husband and decided to move back to her birthplace Ayemenem together with her daughter. After studying architecture, Roy married one of her fellow students, but, like her mother, ended up divorcing her husband. She later remarried the film director Pradip Krishen with whom she currently lives in New Delhi. With her debut novel *The God of Small Things* Roy gained immediate international success; she was suddenly placed alongside prominent Indian writers such as Salman Rushdie and Nayantara Sahgal. *The God of Small Things* won The Booker Prize in 1997 although her election generated quite some controversy. Despite its international success and the critical acclaim, some considered Roy’s novel unworthy of winning The Booker Prize, including the 1996 Chair of Booker judges, Carmen Callil, who called the novel “an execrable book” (qtd. in Glaister) that should not even have been shortlisted for The Booker Prize. In India, Roy was even summoned before court after the lawyer Sabu Thomas had denounced the novel as obscene. Luckily for Roy, his call to ban the novel was rejected by the Court.

Besides being a literary writer, Roy is also a well-known human rights activist who wrote a number of articles in which she campaigns for humanitarian causes. She famously spoke out against, for instance, the war in Iraq and the corruption of Indian politics. She also fiercely campaigned against the construction of the Narmada Dam in India, pointing out the
devastating consequences of such a project on the nearby population and environment. Roy used the attention she received after the publication of her novel to raise further awareness for humanitarian, environmental and economic problems in India (Mullaney 13). She was awarded the Sydney Peace Prize in 2004 for her social work and for speaking out against violence.

One of her most well-known articles is “The Great Indian Rape Trick” in which she discusses “the ways in which Indian women are and have been, historically, situated at the nexus of a variety of intersecting discourses of race, religion, gender, sexuality, caste, and class” (Mullaney 7). Roy further explores the implications of such a rigid classification in The God of Small Things in which Ammu, Rahel, Estha and Velutha are all victims of a social order that is regulated by both caste and gender differences.

Now, what is The God of Small Things about?\(^{17}\) Set in Ayemenem, the novel circles around two tragic events in the lives of the twins Estha and Rahel: firstly, the tragic death of their cousin Sophie Mol, who accidentally drowns when the three children try to cross a river in a small boat; and secondly, the death of the beloved Velutha, their mother’s lover. Since both children are held responsible for the death of Sophie Mol, they are subsequently separated from their mother and each other. While we are informed of these tragic events from the very beginning, the writer meticulously retraces the preceding events and considers the dramatic implications for all those involved. Roy interweaves past and present by constantly switching between the events that happened back in the late 1960s and their repercussions that are still felt well into the 1990s. The events are mainly related through the eyes of the twins and their mother, but we are occasionally allowed a glimpse through the eyes of other characters as well. The present events are narrated through the adult Rahel. The novel as a whole is set against the background of the uprising of Communism in the state of Kerala in the 1960s.
The novel opens with Rahel’s return to Ayemenem in the 1990s after she divorced her American husband. We are introduced to the Ipe family, who are a remnant of the old colonial order. Pappachi, Estha and Rahel’s grandfather, once worked for the colonial regime as an imperial entomologist. After India gained independence, he became director of the entomology institute. We learn that Pappachi violently abuses his wife, Shoshamma Ipe (Mammachi). One day, however, he is stopped from beating up Mammachi by his son Chacko and forbidden to ever beat her again. From then on, Pappachi ignores his wife altogether. Mammachi, enjoying her new ‘freedom’, starts a small pickles business that operates from her own kitchen. Her son Chacko is an Oxford University scholar who moves back to Ayemenem after divorcing his English wife Margaret Kochamma. They have one daughter together: Sophie Mol. While Chacko is thus allowed to study at a university, his sister Ammu is denied any education because she is a girl. To escape the oppressive atmosphere at home, Ammu spends the summer with an Aunt in Calcutta where she meets her future husband Baba. Some years later, Ammu, tired of being beaten by her husband, asks for a divorce after she learns that he wanted to prostitute her to his boss in order to keep his job. She takes the two children, the twins Estha and Rahel, and moves back to her parents’ home. However, unlike her brother, she is not very welcome in the family house because of her status as a divorced woman. Her children, too, are constantly reminded of the fact that they are not wanted in the house; according to the rules of society, they should have been living with their father. Meanwhile, Pappachi has died and Chacko has taken over his mother’s successful business, calling it “Paradise Pickles & Preserves”. In the way his father was before him, Chacko becomes the dictator of the family, “a landlord forcing his attentions on women who depend on him for their livelihood” (Roy 65) as Ammu phrases it. Moreover, he is said to sexually exploit the female labourers in the factory. Mammachi is “aware of his libertine relationships with the women in the factory” (Ibid. 186) but excuses her son in the name of

Also living in the Ipes house is Baby Kochamma, Pappachi’s sister. As a girl, she fell in love with the Irish Father Mulligan, for whom she converted to Roman Catholicism and joined a convent in the hope of being closer to him. Unfortunately, he could not return her love and she became depressed. Her father pulled her out of the convent and sent her to the United States for an education since nobody would ever accept her as a wife anyway. Back in Ayemenem, she became the embittered aunt who delights in the misfortune of others. She is especially hateful towards Estha and Rahel, whose happiness she envies.

After Margaret Kochamma’s second husband’s death, Chacko invites his ex-wife and their daughter Sophie Mol to spend Christmas with his family. Before picking them up at the airport, the whole family goes to the cinema, where Estha is sexually abused by a food vendor whom he names ‘Orangedrink Lemondrink man’. He does not dare to tell anyone about it. The story rapidly evolves towards its tragic conclusion after Sophie Mol’s arrival in Ayemenem. The family discovers Ammu’s secret affair with Velutha, who belongs to the lowest caste in Hindu society: the untouchables or paravans. Because he is a very talented man, he is allowed to work as a mechanic in Mammachi’s factory. The other labourers, though, resent working with an untouchable. Estha and Rahel greatly admire Velutha and see in him the father figure they never had. Upon finding out about the disgraceful love affair, the family imprisons Ammu in her room. In her desperation, she yells at her children, blaming them for the fact that she cannot be free and love whoever she wants. The twins are convinced that Ammu does not love them anymore and decide to run away, talking Sophie Mol into coming along. That same night, while the three children try to reach the History House across the river, the boat capsizes and Sophie Mol drowns. Since it is too dark to find their cousin, Estha and Rahel spend the night in the History House, unaware that Velutha is there as well.
Meanwhile, the girl’s body is discovered and Baby Kochamma goes to the police, accusing Velutha of Sophie Mol’s death. She also claims that he kidnapped the other two children and raped Ammu. A group of policemen is sent to the History House where they beat Velutha to near death. The twins witness this horrible scene and are deeply traumatized by it. Velutha later dies of his injuries. When Estha and Rahel are interrogated, the Chief of Police realizes that Baby Kochamma falsely accused Velutha. Afraid that the communists might cause riots (Velutha was a member of the Communist Party), he threatens Baby Kochamma, saying that she will be held responsible for everything if she cannot talk the children into changing their testimony. By convincing the children that they would lose their beloved Ammu, she tricks them into confessing that Velutha is guilty. When Ammu tries to tell the police officer he made a mistake arresting Velutha, she is sent away. Baby Kochamma, afraid that Ammu might expose what she has done, convinces Chacko that Ammu and her children should be held responsible for the death of his daughter. Chacko sends Estha to his father, thereby separating him from his mother and sister, and orders Ammu to leave the house. Estha will never see his mother again as she dies impoverished and alone a few years later. Rahel is sent from one boarding school to another; in each of them she gets expelled for her rebellious behaviour. When she finally grows up, she marries the American Larry McCaslin, whom she met during her college education. Together they move to the United States in search of a better future. After divorcing her husband, Rahel returns to Ayemenem, where she is reunited with her twin brother for the first time since they were separated at the age of seven. By that time, Estha had “stopped talking altogether” (Roy 10) as a result of his childhood traumas. In their shared grief, Rahel and Estha turn to each other for comfort, committing another sinful transgression of the social order: incest. The novel ends with a flashback to the love affair of Ammu and Velutha, a flashback to what could have been a hopeful future for both lovers.
Arundhati Roy manages to create a hauntingly beautiful novel in which she shows how the ‘Big Things’ such as the caste system, gender divides and patriarchy are crushing the ‘Small Things’ like family bonds, friendship and love. In the part that follows, I will examine how Roy tries to address the position of women in a patriarchally oppressive society. An important difference with Rushdie is that Roy does not only give a voice to the women in the novel, but also to those other victims of a rigid social order: children and untouchables. As Ranga Roa argues, the book is about the cruelties committed against minority groups, the “Small Things: children and youth, women and untouchable” (qtd. in Prasad 124). I will mainly focus on the representations of the women in the novel, while also paying attention to the patriarchal oppression of the children and the untouchable Velutha.

2.2.2 Analysis and discussion of female representations in The God of Small Things and literary criticism

Julie Mullaney, who wrote an interesting reader’s guide to The God of Small Things, argues that Roy’s novel can be seen as an illustration of what Gayatri Spivak has written about in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, that is, how to address the problematic representation of the ‘Third World Woman’(11). As we recall from the first chapter of this dissertation, Spivak notes that feminist critics, in discussing female representations, too easily consider native women as a homogeneous group. Like Spivak before her, Roy supports representations that take into account the diversity existing among native women. According to Mullaney Roy explores

the separate but overlapping and intricately braided lives of her female protagonists: Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Ammu, Rahel, and the family cook, Kochu Maria. She carefully delineates not their false homogeneity as representations of oppressed “third world woman” but the range
of options and choices, whether complicit, resistant, or both – to the dominant order which
structures each of their individual life stories and their relation to the larger tessellations,
familial, and cultural histories. (11)

Indeed, Roy offers us a view on the lives of three generations of women who deal with
patriarchal oppression in different ways. In doing so, she reflects on the “mutability and the
continuity of certain forms of oppression” (Filipa da Silva 92) and how women can resist that
oppression. For instance, as I will discuss further on in more detail, Mammachi and Baby
Kochamma represent those women who have accepted their fate; in fact, they have
internalized patriarchal values to such an extent that they themselves eventually become
complicit in the oppression of Ammu and her children. Ammu, as a representative of the
second generation, is the character that initiates rebellion while her daughter will be the one
who continues the struggle for female independence. I think that the diversity with which Roy
represents these women already prevents her novel from falling into the stereotypical binary
oppositions that separate men from women. Moreover, Roy shows that she is aware that not
only women have been crushed by patriarchy by including a lower-class man (Velutha) as a
victim of oppression.

In the last part of the first chapter I discussed the different ways in which postcolonial
writing can counter oppressive female representations. Bearing in mind Nagy-Zekmi’s
argument that by telling a story from different perspectives we are offered versions that
counter the official truth, I want to refer to the epitaph of The God of Small Things, where
Roy quotes John Berger: “Never again will a single story be told as though it’s the only one”.
So, Roy’s objective is already clear from the very beginning: she wants to offer the reader
various perspectives on what happened in order to avoid a conclusive reading; there is no
single truth, only versions of it. In this respect, Julie Mullaney compares Roy’s writing to
Mammachi’s pickling project in that both women offer a different version of ‘History’ (41).
They both avoid fixity: Mammachi’s recipes constantly evolve; they are a “metaphor for the attempt to record the many hidden ‘histories’” (Mullaney 42) much like Roy’s own project of writing:

Her project is one of disturbance, movement, unearthing, dusting down, and reassembly of the fixed and received narrative of public or national events (‘History’) to bring to light the hidden or eclipsed histories therein. (Ibid. 41)

Roy therefore tells her story from multiple points of view; she narrates the story through the eyes of those who have been victimized by patriarchy: primarily through the eyes of Estha and Rahel, but also through the eyes of the tragic lovers Velutha and Ammu. In doing so, she gives a voice to those people that would have been silenced by colonial and patriarchal discourse.

I will now consider how Roy offers critique on the aggressiveness with which colonial and patriarchal regimes treat women through an analysis of the characters of Pappachi and Chacko. In addition, I will have a look at how she criticizes the position women hold in a male dominated society, for which I will focus on two aspects: education and marriage. In this respect, it is also interesting to consider the impact of Ammu’s divorce on her children and their social position. Finally, I will have a look at the ways in which Roy attempts to counter female oppression and stereotypical female representations, and offer my own opinion on whether her strategies are successful or not.

Roy offers critique on colonialism and native patriarchy through her characterization of both Pappachi and his son Chacko. As an ‘Imperial Entomologist’, Pappachi belonged to the colonial establishment. His abusive behaviour towards female family members illustrates what Loomba has said about native men reinforcing their power at home as a consequence of colonial domination (cfr. Chapter 1):
Colonialism intensified patriarchal oppression, often because native men, increasingly
disenfranchised and excluded from the public sphere, became more tyrannical at home. They
seized upon the home and the woman as emblems of their culture and nationality. The outside
world could be Westernised but all was not lost if the domestic space retained its cultural purity.
(142)

Indeed, we find out that Pappachi violently beats his wife and daughter while maintaining the
image of the perfect man, a supporter of English civilization, in the public sphere:

He worked hard on his public profile as a sophisticated, generous, moral man. But alone with his
wife and children he turned into a monstrous, suspicious bully, with a streak of vicious cunning.
They were beaten, humiliated and then made to suffer the envy of friends and relations for
having such a wonderful husband and father. (Roy 180)

Chacko is lucky enough to be send away to school, while little Ammu has to face her
tyranical father every day. Mammachi even got used to being beaten by her husband; she
“suffered those beatings with mute resignation” (Roy 180); for example, at the funeral of
Pappachi Ammu explains to the children that Mammachi is crying “more because she was
used to him than because she loved him. She (...) was used to being beaten from time to time”
(Ibid. 50). Here, Roy is criticizing the way in which the postcolonial, patriarchal society
makes its women internalize patriarchal values up to a point where violent abuse is taken for
granted.

Now, like his father before him, Chacko is on the margins of both English civilization
and his native culture. He is “caught (...) between the newly independent India represented by
Mammachi’s ‘Paradise Pickles & Preserves’ and the model of England and Englishness
inherited via Pappachi and his own Oxford education” (Mullaney 34). He perfectly illustrates how many postcolonial citizens are caught up between two very different cultures and how they consequently never feel like they really fit into either one of these cultures. Chacko explains the colonial impact on the family to the twins by revealing that they “were a family of Anglophiles. Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history, and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away” (Roy 52). This image of footprints being swept away also reoccurs in the context of Velutha’s existence as a paravan: “He left no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors” (Roy 265). In my reading of the footprints imagery, Roy is criticizing Chacko for failing to recognize that he, as a representative of the postcolonial order, is equally complicit in the oppression of the ‘other’ – the ‘other’ being Velutha as well as his own mother, his sister and her children. At first, Chacko steps up as his mother and sister’s protector and in doing so earns Mammachi’s eternal adoration: “Mammachi packed her wifely luggage and committed it to Chacko’s care” (Roy 168). However, much like his father before him, Chacko rapidly becomes the tyrannical head of the house. First of all, he takes over control of his mother’s small pickles business, thereby removing “what was hers alone” (Mullaney 37). He turns it into a big factory which he names “Paradise Pickles& Preserves”. His incompetence quickly brings his mother’s successful business in financial problems, which he tries to solve by mortgaging the family’s rice fields. If Mammachi’s production of pickles symbolizes the ideal of postcolonial independence, then the takeover by Chacko – who symbolizes native patriarchy – represents the failure of the postcolonial state to carry through those ideals (Mullaney 40). Secondly, Chacko avenges the death of his daughter by victimizing the most vulnerable persons in the family: his sister Ammu, who has no legal standing, and her two innocent children. He blames them for what happened and together with Baby Kochamma, arranges for them to be sent away: Ammu is banned from the house, forced to live in poverty, which will eventually cause
her to die; Estha is sent away to live with his father, the final traumatic experience which literally silences him for ever; and Rahel is sent from one boarding school to another because she is constantly expelled for her rebellious behaviour. Chacko himself eventually moves to Canada, where he ironically starts an antique business, which symbolically refers to the fact that he is stuck in the past. In short, by making Pappachi a representative of the old colonial regime and representing Chacko as someone of the new postcolonial generation, I believe that Roy wants to point out how nothing has changed with regards to the treatment of women; the postcolonial state just continued the oppression by the colonial regime rather than bring any improvement.

I will now have a look at how Arundhati Roy voices her critique on the social position assigned to women by patriarchy. I will first consider how the educational opportunities offered or denied to the women in the novel are exemplary of female oppression. Secondly, I will look at the importance of marriage as a social institution, and finally consider the impact of Ammu’s divorce on the social status of her children.

The first aspect through which Roy voices her critique on the patriarchal oppression of women can be seen in the educational opportunities offered or denied to the women in the novel. The first woman who is denied an education is Mammachi. As a married woman, she is not allowed access to any sort of education as becomes clear, for example, when Pappachi forbids her to continue her violin lessons: “The lessons were abruptly discontinued when Mammachi’s teacher (...) made the mistake of telling Pappachi that his wife was exceptionally talented and, in his opinion, potentially concert class” (Roy 50). As a woman of the second generation, Ammu is no better off than her mother: she is refused any college education as her father considers it “an unnecessary expense for a girl” (Ibid. 38). Baby Kochamma is only allowed to study ornamental gardening in the United States because she “was unlikely to find a husband” (Ibid. 26) after displaying her love for father Mulligan and
her subsequent conversion to Catholicism. Her father decides that “since she couldn’t have a husband there was no harm in her having an education” (Ibid. 26). In other words, an education is considered to be damaging for a potential bride. In pointing out this sensitive issue, Roy is considering how the denial of education serves to keep women into submission; they remain dependent upon their husband. Rahel, on the other hand, seems to be able to enjoy more freedom than the women before her. Since there is no dominant figure around in her life who makes decisions for her, she is able to obtain a place at a College of Architecture in Delhi. Even though she never finishes her degree, I believe that the opportunity to study allows her to become more independent: she is free to do what she wants, far away from the controlling power of Mammachi and Chacko.

In her critique of Indian patriarchies, Roy also reflects upon the position of divorced women in Indian society. The traditional system does not provide for this “anomaly” as Filipa da Silva (94) calls it; these women do not have room to exist: “wives ‘endure’, they don’t ‘divorce’” (Ibid. 94). Since Ammu’s father lacks the necessary money to raise a dowry, she cannot find a husband and is destined to become an old spinster stuck in her parents’ house. In her desperation, she manages to convince her father to let her spend a summer with an aunt in Calcutta where she meets her future husband. Marriage is her way of escaping her father’s abuse; however, as we learn later on, her new husband turns out to be an alcoholic who beats her as well. Ammu thwarts tradition by divorcing her alcoholic, abusive husband when she learns that he wants to prostitute her to his boss in exchange for keeping his job. She then decides to move back to her parents’ home. Not only is she unwelcome there because she is a divorced woman, but her father also refuses to believe her story: “He didn’t believe that an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man’s wife” (Roy 42). Pappachi’s belief in the moral superiority of the former colonizers is so great that he fails to recognize his
daughter’s pain. Ammu’s presence in the Ayemenem house is considered to be a disgrace for several reasons:

(…) a married daughter had no position in her parent’s home. As for a divorced daughter – according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma’s outrage. As for a divorced daughter from a [sic] intercommunity love marriage – Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject. (Ibid. 45-6)

Filipa da Silva explains that in India, “daughters are not their parents’ responsibility beyond childhood” (91) because being married means becoming part of the husband’s family for the rest of your life. It is repeatedly said in the novel that Ammu has “no Locusts Stand I” (Roy 57), meaning that she has no legal position as a divorced woman nor as a daughter. Roy articulates her critique on this marginal position of women in society by exploring the difference in treatment between the adored son Chacko and the despised daughter Ammu. First of all, as I already mentioned earlier on, Chacko is allowed to study at Oxford College whereas Ammu is denied any educational opportunity. Secondly, Ammu has no rightful claim to the family business because she is a girl. She works as much as her brother but is not considered his equal, as Chacko plainly points out to Ammu: “‘What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine’” (Roy 57). Finally, Chacko’s numerous love affairs are easily excused in the name of “Men’s Needs” (Ibid. 168) whereas the family decides to intervene when Ammu falls in love with the untouchable Velutha. A divorced woman who falls in love with a paravan could not be any greater disgrace for the family so their relationship should be ended right away. Ammu’s isolated position within the family is reflected in the scene of Sophie Mol’s funeral in which she and her children are made to stand apart from the rest of the family (Filipa da Silva 95).
Ammu’s ‘shameful’ behaviour also affects the lives of her twins Estha and Rahel. Mullaney points out that “as children of mixed ancestry and divorced parents Rahel and Estha fall between traditions (Hindu and Syrian Christians) and are afforded no real recognition of what the novel calls ‘Locusts Stand I’ (legal standing)” (31). Moreover, we learn that Ammu refused to give her children a surname, which means that they are unclaimed (Ibid. 31):

> For the Time Being they had no surname because Ammu was considering reverting to her maiden name, though she said that choosing between her husband’s name and her father’s name didn’t give a woman much of a choice. (Roy 36-7)

The twins’ presence in the Ayemenem house “is a continuous source of embarrassment for the family” (Filipa da Silva 94). Estha and Rahel’s presence constantly reminds the other family members of how Ammu dared to divorce her husband and claim a place for her and her children in her parents’ house. As Filipa da Silva phrases it: they are “the living testimony of Ammu’s failure to live up to expected patterns of decency and convenience” (94). The other adults in the house think the children are not their responsibility since the twins are living within the ‘wrong’ family. One of the comments of Kochu Maria, the house servant, illustrates how the children are not wanted there: “‘Tell your mother to take you to your father’s house,’ (…) ‘There you can break as many beds as you like. These aren’t your beds. This isn’t your house’” (Roy 83). After the tragic events the family decides that Estha and Rahel need to be separated because “together they were trouble” (Roy 302). Estha is therefore sent away to live with his father. The constant pressure of the family about how the children need a father in their lives eventually even makes Ammu doubt her original decision to raise the twins without a man: “Maybe they’re right (…) Maybe a boy does need a Baba” (Roy 302).
So far we have discussed how Arundhati Roy criticizes the colonial influence on native cultures and how both Western colonialism and local patriarchy collaborate in the oppression of women, through the characters of Pappachi and Chacko who abuse the women in their family. We have also seen how Roy condemns native patriarchy for pushing women to the margins of society by looking at issues such as education and marriage in the novel.

Next, I want to consider the ways in which the writer seeks to counter stereotypical female images in order to liberate women from oppression: Firstly, by constructing rebellious women who assert female desire and confound gender roles; and secondly, by turning the erotic transgressions of two generations of lovers into a defiance of the established order.

With her portrayal of Ammu and Rahel, Roy constructs two generations of strong rebellious women. Jullie Mullaney argues that “Ammu and Rahel confound inherited models of femininity” (59). Indeed, while the older generation, represented by Baby Kochamma and Mammachi, have accepted their fate, Ammu and Rahel refuse to submit; instead, they rebel against patriarchal oppression. Filipa da Silva rightly points out that Ammu and Rahel are inspirational characters in that they make us think about the possibility of liberation and social reform (95). Bearing in mind the short introduction to Roy’s life earlier on, I think that Rahel and Ammu can partly be regarded as fictionalized versions of the writer and her mother respectively. As I will come back to later on, Roy lets Rahel be inspired by Ammu’s rebellion much like she herself was inspired by her mother’s struggle for independence.

First of all, as a representative of the first generation, Ammu is a subversive character in that she acts as a critical voice. Roy offers most of her critique on colonial and patriarchal oppression through the character of Ammu. Ammu is best placed to voice that critique since she, as a woman, experiences what it is like to be pushed to the margins of society, or as Filipa da Silva phrases it; “she is then, because of her awareness of sexism, the better equipped to deconstruct colonial discourses” (80). A first illustration of her critical
perspective can be found in her rejection of the family’s wish to appear more ‘British’, which is considered synonymous with ‘civilized’. Ammu understands that this obsession to appear more civilized is a symptom of the Indian inferiority complex (Filipa da Silva 80). This inferiority complex had of course been projected upon them by the colonizers to such an extent that the colonized nation eventually ended up internalizing that same view. Ammu is very eager to expose this false construction of the Indian identity; for example, when the family is about to pick up Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol at the airport, Ammu resents the family’s theatrical behaviour: “Must we behave like some damn godforsaken tribe that’s just been discovered?” (Roy 180). Secondly, she is critical of native patriarchy. Ammu approaches her brother’s alleged male superiority with great irony; for instance, when Mammachi tells her children the story of how a professor at Oxford said Chacko was “made of prime ministerial material” (Ibid. 56), Ammu rightly questions how a person who cannot even run a factory could run a whole country. She criticizes her brother’s incompetence as the factory director and his abuse of the female labourers: “Just a case of a spoiled princeling playing Comrade! Comrade! An Oxford avatar of the old zamindar mentality – a landlord forcing his attentions on women who depended on him for their livelihood” (Ibid. 65). She exposes her brother as a self-important male chauvinist who does not recognize her contributions to the family business. I agree with Filipa da Silva that Ammu’s “remarks create a critical space to think outside of colonial discourse” (80). I believe that her cynical comments and sharp answers make the reader think about the inequality between men and women in native patriarchy. Ammu provides us with an alternative perspective that exposes the marginalized position women hold in a male dominated society. In doing so, she helps to reconstruct the silenced woman’s voice.

In her behaviour too, as we have seen before, Ammu resists female oppression. Ammu’s first act of rebellion consists in marrying a Bengali man out of love. Baba is deemed
unsuitable for a girl like Ammu because he does not belong to the same community and because he was not chosen by her parents. In addition, she defies tradition by daring to divorce her abusive husband and by demanding a place for herself and her children in her parents’ house. She thereby brings her whole family in disgrace. Her final rebellious act, which will eventually cause her to lose everything, consists in falling in love with the untouchable Velutha. By choosing to love another man after her first marriage, Ammu is said to “refuse a sex-less, body-less identity only because she was a divorced mother” (Filipa da Silva 96). Indeed, unlike her aunt Baby Kochamma, who “graciously accepted” (Roy 45) her fate, Ammu refuses to become a “wretched Man-less woman” (Ibid. 45). After all, she is only twenty-seven years old at the time of her affair with Velutha.

Like her mother before her, Rahel is a perfect illustration of female rebellion. Already as a child, she is said to have a rebellious nature. For instance, she is blacklisted for the first time after having decorated the Housemistress’s doorknob with cow dung. We also learn that she is expelled from school for the third time after “setting fire to her Housemistress’s false hair bun” (Roy 17). The teachers agree that Rahel is a strange child that does not seem to “know how to be a girl” (Ibid. 17). At home, too, she and her brother frequently disobey the rules. It is said, for example, that he twins are punished when they speak their mother tongue, Malayalam and are forced to practice their English pronunciation – “Prer NUN sea ayshun” (Ibid. 36) – by Baby Kochamma. However, they find ways to resist through inventive language games like reading backwards. Cynthia Vanden Driesen reads the twins language games as “a powerful subversion of the established order: they read the word as they read the world in oppositional mode to that ordained by the powers that be” (qtd. in Mullaney 65).

In discussing Rahel’s rebellion, it is also useful to mention how, in my opinion, she is paired off with her twin brother Estha; Arundhati Roy makes them confound gender roles. When the family is watching The Sound of Music, for instance, Estha is compared to Julie Andrews
singing “in a nun’s voice, as clear as clean water” (Roy 101) while Rahel identifies most with the male protagonist Captain von Trapp. Another example includes Estha dressing up as a Hindu woman together with his sister and cousin as part of a game. He is said to be “the draping expert” (Ibid. 189). A much more traumatic instance of feminization, as Julie Mullaney argues, is the fact that Estha becomes the victim of sexual abuse (59). As a consequence, Estha retreats into silence, becoming “a quiet bubble floating on a sea of noise” (Roy 11). By becoming the ‘silent other’, I believe that he takes on the same role as many oppressed women. At his father’s home Estha also refuses to make use of his male privileges; instead, he behaves like a female servant doing house chores “much to the embarrassment of his father and stepmother” (Ibid. 11). His sister, on the other hand, takes on a more powerful position than is expected from a girl by following in her mother’s footsteps. As an adult, she too defies the traditional female role imposed by patriarchy by choosing a husband for herself from outside the community and by divorcing him later on.

During her childhood and adolescence, Rahel is neglected by Mammachi and Chacko: “They provided the care (…) but withdrew the concern” (Roy 15). There is no dowry raised for her, like there was none for her mother. However, “neglect seemed to have resulted in an accidental release of the spirit” (Ibid. 17) as the author points out. As I have said before, Rahel can partly be interpreted as a fictionalized version of the author. In this respect, I want to recall what Roy has said about her own upbringing and link it to Rahel’s: “I thank God that I had none of the conditioning that a normal, middle class Indian girl would have. I had no father, no presence of this man telling us that he would look after us and beat us occasionally in exchange” (Roy Interview). In my opinion, Roy’s quote equally applies to Rahel: without a father – or anyone else for that matter – around to arrange a marriage for her, Rahel is free to make her own choices: “she remained free to make her own enquiries (…) into life and how it ought to be lived” (Roy 17).
It is also no coincidence that the novel starts with Rahel’s return to Ayemenem. According to Mullaney, Rahel’s “physical act of return facilitates other returns” (29). She emotionally confronts herself with the past in order to find closure. She symbolically returns to the house of her childhood at a time when “all the castrating figures, like Baby Kochamma, are old, emigrated or have died” (Filipa da Silva 98). In other words, she is free to go her own way now, free from the constraints imposed by her family and societal codes. Her freedom is symbolically reinforced by her status as an emigrant, who “represents someone with better possibilities and wider roads to travel” (Ibid. 81). When she arrives in Ayemenem, Rahel has the same age as Ammu when she died and she has by then also divorced her husband. Her arrival means a new start; inspired by her mother’s example, Rahel will continue the struggle for female independence where her mother left off. Again, this is partly an autobiographical element because, like Rahel, Arundhati Roy felt inspired by her mother for choosing a life without a husband, as she admits in an interview with Barsamian: “to have seen a woman who never needed a man, it’s such a wonderful thing, to know that that’s a possibility, not to suffer” (Roy interview). Mary Roy thus set the example for her daughter, much like Ammu does for Rahel in the novel.

The second way in which Roy tries to counter patriarchal oppression can be found in the transgression of the ‘Love Laws’ made by Ammu and Velutha on the one hand, and the second generation lovers Estha and Rahel on the other hand.

Filipa da Silva reads the erotic transgression in the novel (i.e. the love affair between Ammu and Velutha) as a political act (83). Indeed, by falling in love with an untouchable, Ammu is breaking the social laws, the “Love Laws” that “lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much” (Roy 177). As an untouchable, Velutha is not supposed to be loved, especially not by a woman from a higher caste like Ammu. Unfortunately, the affair
has terrible consequences for both lovers. When Mammachi first hears about the love affair she is utterly sickened by the thought of it:

Her tolerance of ‘Men’s Needs’ as far as her son was concerned, became the fuel for her unmanageable fury at her daughter. She had defiled generations of breeding (…) and brought the family to its knees. For generations to come, for ever now, people would point at them at weddings and funerals. At baptisms and birthday parties. They’d nudge and whisper. It was all finished now. (Roy 258)

In their rage, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma imprison Ammu in her room and send the police after Velutha. When Ammu hears about their false accusations, she goes to the police herself to “try and set the record straight” (Roy 259). However, as a woman without a legal standing, she is quickly dismissed by the police. After her children are taken away from her, she is banned from the house by Chacko. Ammu ends up living in poverty and eventually dies all alone. Filipa da Silva argues that “Ammu is (…) to a certain extent, a ‘failed’ model of transgression because she follows the traditional narrative scheme of shame, marginalisation and death” (96). The love affair indeed turns out to be disastrous for both lovers as they both die. However, I refuse to see their deaths as a failure to escape the established order. Their transgression can be read as a powerful attempt to break with the established order and to give a voice to the most marginalized people in Indian society: women and paravans. Moreover, their act of rebellion has not been in vain because the next generation – represented by Ammu’s children Estha and Rahel – is ready to take over and continue the struggle. Estha and Rahel are symbolically thirty-one years old, the same age as their mother when she died. As Filipa da Silva points out, this “circularity of time (…) suggests that the twins are starting off where former rebels left” (87).
Julie Mullaney reads the twins’ incest as “another moment of defeat, of tragic loss, of hideous grief”. Indeed, the narrator tells us that “what they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief” (Roy 328); they share the trauma of loosing the ones they loved, including each other. As children, the twins thought of themselves as a single unity that shares dreams and experiences: “Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities” (Ibid. 2). After their traumatic separation, however, their bond is severed:

(...) now she thinks of Estha and Rahel and They, because separately, the two of them are no longer what They were or ever thought They’d be (...) Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits have appeared like a team of trolls on their separate horizons (Ibid. 3).

I disagree with Mullaney’s reading of the incest scene because I think that their final transgression of boundaries can be read as a way to reconnect, to mend what was once broken by the betrayal by their family members. I thus interpret their transgression more positively as a powerful break with the oppressive social codes of conduct. They follow in their mother’s footsteps in that they too “broke the Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much” (Ibid. 328). Like Ammu and Velutha, Estha and Rahel “dare to assert their emotional needs and risk uncharted ways of living” (Filipa da Silva 98). They start their rebellion where the former rebels Ammu and Velutha left off. The novel ends with the hopeful last word ‘tomorrow’, thereby leaving the story open-ended. In doing so, I believe Roy encourages the reader to think about how Estha and Rahel’s transgression of boundaries can continue Ammu and Velutha’s attempt to throw off the constraints imposed by patriarchy.
In conclusion, I think that The God of Small Things is an extraordinary novel in which Roy manages to interweave social critique and fiction without falling into clichés. She vigorously denounces the unjust treatment of women by the established patriarchal order through an exploration of the marginal position of three generations of women. Not only does she alert the reader to the ways in which women are victimized by men, a victimization which often goes hand in hand with violent abuse, but she also gives account of a history of female resistance against that patriarchal oppression. Through the strong and rebellious characterization of Ammu and her daughter Rahel, Roy shows how the struggle for female liberation can become reality. Roy succeeds in creating a narrative frame in which binary oppositions find no ground to exist; all the main, transgressive characters – Ammu, Velutha, Estha and Rahel – resist stereotypical gender roles and reach out to each other across the boundaries of gender and caste. They are critical of patriarchal society and its codes of conduct, and try to find an existence outside of that oppressive frame. In doing so, they become inspirational figures who suggest possible directions for social change.
Conclusion

A short comparison between *Shame* and *The God of Small Things*

In chapter one, I gave a brief introduction to the field of Postcolonialist Studies and examined how colonial texts represent the ‘other’. I paid considerable attention to the stereotypical, oppressive portrayals of women in colonial discourse and considered the suggestions made by some postcolonial theorists to liberate native women through postcolonial literature. In chapter two, I elaborately discussed how both Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy are concerned with countering stereotypical female representations and how they seek ways to liberate female voices from patriarchal oppression. Both Rushdie and Roy imagine how they can empower women; yet, their approaches differ greatly. To conclude my dissertation, I want to briefly compare *Shame* and *The God of Small Things* in order to answer one of my preliminary questions: if Rushdie’s attempt to liberate women is said to fail because of the violence, does Roy’s novel then offer a better alternative?

We saw how *Shame* has been criticized harshly by critics such as Inderpal Grewal and Aijaz Ahmad. The latter even accused Rushdie of misogyny mainly because of the fact that he makes Sufiya Zinobia turn into a violent monster that kills men. As I admitted before, Rushdie’s portrayals are indeed somewhat ambiguous at times and the violence with which Sufiya terrorizes the land is often unsettling for the reader. In this respect, Ammu and Rahel’s rebellion in *The God of Small Things* is of course less controversial. They rebel against their
oppression through the choices they make in life and through their critical commentary and perspective on patriarchal society. In doing so, they undermine the established order which is determined by gender and caste. However, as I explained in the conclusion of my analysis of *Shame*, I believe that Rushdie’s novel should be approached from a more positive point of view. I supported this belief by referring to critics like Justina Deszcz and Jenny Sharpe who approach Sufiya’s character from a more positive angle. Deszcz reads *Shame* as a powerful rewriting of “Beauty and the Beast” in which Sufiya refuses to take on the stereotypical submissive role of the fairy tale princess. Sharpe, on the other hand, signals the importance of Sufiya’s character in imagining a different outcome for women who are victimized by men. I too believe that *Shame*’s greatest strength is located in its imagination: Sufiya’s story imagines the possibility of strong female resistance. With Sufiya’s rebellion, I think that Rushdie is, above all, asking the reader to reflect on traditional gender roles, to question patriarchal oppression of women and to engage in imagining a different outcome for women. Moreover, we should not forget that Rushdie opens up another possibility of female resistance through his portrayal of Bilquis and Rani. Like the writer, these women provide alternative, critical perspectives on the official truth through their artistry.

Rushdie’s *Shame* is of course a typical postmodern novel in which metafiction plays an important role; Rushdie is very self-conscious about his own project of writing. He deliberately relies on parody and the tradition of the Grotesque to criticize Indian politics and the patriarchal oppression of women among many other issues. Because of its postmodernist nature, I think that *Shame* remains rather abstract when it comes to offering real-life changes for women. Roy’s project of liberating women, on the other hand, is more realistic than Rushdie’s because she proposes concrete social changes: she suggests the abolishment of the oppressive caste system and fiercely advocates equal rights for women. The example set by Ammu and Rahel – and thus also by Roy and her mother in reality – can inspire women to
claim their place in society and shows them that women can lead their lives without having to depend on an abusive husband. The God of Small Things is also more realistic in its representations of women and Indian society in general. Roy gives a more diversified and realistic portrayal of Indian society by including both women and men among the oppressed and among the oppressors. Rushdie, however, does not portray any man as a victim of oppression and solely focuses on the upper-class. Therefore, I personally prefer Arundhati Roy’s novel; her realistic approach offers more concrete solutions whereas Rushdie’s proposals for female liberation remain mostly imaginative, especially in the case of Sufiya Zinobia. However, that does not diminish Rushdie’s value as a feminist writer. He is definitely as successful as Roy in exposing the abuse and marginalization of women by patriarchal society; but, unlike Roy, he is not a socialist writer pleading for concrete reform. Overall, we can say that, despite their different approaches, both writers greatly contributed to the project of giving the female subject a place within the postcolonial struggle.
Notes

1 See Appendix 1.


7 The text included in The Postcolonial Studies Reader is a shortened version of the original essay, which was first published in Nelson, Cary and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture. London: Macmillan, 1988. 271-316.


11 For more information on The Satanic Verses Affair and its consequences, read Anthony, Andrew. “How one book ignited a culture war.” Guardian.co.uk. 11 Jan. 2009. 5 Apr. 2010 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/jan/11/salman-rushdie-satanic-verses>. Andrew Anthony sketches a very interesting picture of the political agenda behind the fatwa, and points out the difficult living situation Rushdie had to endure for several years as a consequence of being declared an ‘outlaw’. He traces back the impact of the affair on the freedom of expression in our multicultural society.

12 A family tree is included in Appendix 2 for a more visual overview of the connections between the different characters.

13 The Hudood Ordinances were introduced by General Zia-ul-Haq in 1979 as part of his Islamization policy. Zia-ul-Haq wanted to secure his military power “through ‘alliances with right-wing religious parties’” (Nicholls 117). They state that in case of a rape, four male eyewitnesses are needed before the rapist can be punished. Moreover, one of the Ordinances,
the *Zina* Ordinance, recasts rape as adultery, making women the victims of conviction rather than their rapists (Nicholls 117; Fletcher 137).


16 In my Bachelorpaper, I examined how Angela Carter rewrites fairy tales to liberate female characters from patriarchal oppression. Like Rushdie, Carter has been criticized by many critics for representing her female protagonists as violent and sexually deviant characters. For more information, see Vandamme, Margaux. “Representations of Women in Fairy Tales: ‘Beauty and the Beast’ and Rewritings by Angela Carter.” Diss. Ghent University, 2009.

17 For an overview of the family relations, see Appendix 3.

18 The word ‘Mol’ means ‘girl’. Boys get the word ‘Mon’ behind their name.


Appendix 1

“The White Man’s Burden” by Rudyard Kipling (1899)

Take up the White Man’s burden
Send forth the best ye breed
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives’ need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.

Take up the White Man's burden
In patience to abide,
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
An hundred times made plain
To seek another's profit,
And work another's gain.
Take up the White Man's burden
The savage wars of peace
Fill full the mouth of Famine
And bid the sickness cease;
And when your goal is nearest
The end for others sought,
Watch sloth and heathen Folly
Bring all your hopes to nought.

Take up the White Man's burden
No tawdry rule of kings,
But toil of serf and sweeper
The tale of common things.
The ports ye shall not enter,
The roads ye shall not tread,
Go mark them with your living,
And mark them with your dead.

Take up the White Man's burden
And reap his old reward:
The blame of those ye better,
The hate of those ye guard
The cry of hosts ye humour
(Ah, slowly!) toward the light:
"Why brought he us from bondage,
Our loved Egyptian night?"

Take up the White Man's burden
Ye dare not stoop to less
Nor call too loud on Freedom
To cloke your weariness;
By all ye cry or whisper,
By all ye leave or do,
The silent, sullen peoples
Shall weigh your gods and you.

Take up the White Man's burden
Have done with childish days
The lightly proferred laurel,
The easy, ungrudged praise.
Comes now, to search your manhood
Through all the thankless years
Cold, edged with dear-bought wisdom,
The judgment of your peers!
Appendix 2

**Family tree *Shame* (cfr. Rushdie, 10)**

Old Mr. Shakil

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chunni, Munnee and Bunny Shakil (the ‘three mothers’)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Babar Shakil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omar Khayyam Shakil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bariamma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 sisters</th>
<th>3 brothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 legitimate sons</td>
<td>Many illegitimate offspring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 daughter</th>
<th>32 boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mahmoud ‘the Woman’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raza Hyder</th>
<th>Bilquis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sufiya Zinobia Hyder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naveed Hyder (‘Good News’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 brother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sir Mir Harappa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rani Humayun</th>
<th>Iskander Harappa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arjumand Harappa (‘the Virgin Ironpants’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>27 children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Naveed Hyder (‘Good News’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talvar Ulhaq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Mir Harappa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haroun Harappa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Margaux Vandamme
Appendix 3

Family tree *The God of Small Things*

Father Mulligan: Roman Catholic priest whom Baby Kochamma is in love with.
Joe: Margaret Kochamma’s second husband
Kochu Maria: Mammachi’s housekeeper
Bibliography


