SALMAN RUSHDIE’S SHAME: A POSTMODERN EMBROIDERY TO THE MYTH OF PHILOMELA

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A thesis is not just a paper, it is the finalisation of a university career. I would thus like to start by thanking everyone who helped me throughout my university years. The persons I am most in debt to are my parents. Not only did they offer me the freedom to study what I liked most, their support and unconditional confidence gave me the courage to complete my studies in the best possible way. Moreover, they taught me that there is more to life than careers by demonstrating how important caring for others is. Due to this life lesson, I was able to put my work at university into perspective and explore the other aspects of life as well.

I would also like to thank my “extended family”, not all of those persons are really related to me, but what is more important is that I can relate to them. In my discussion of Salman Rushdie’s *Shame* you will meet the Shakil sisters. Three sisters who stick by each other through good and bad. From the first pages on they reminded me of my three best friends, or my holy trinity as I like to call them. They could not be more different, but in my mind they belong to the same realm as all three of them represent the best side of friendship.

There is another special “friend”, I would like to pay my respect to. Not all my family is related to me, but this friend is a relative and a rather special one indeed: my grandmother. There is no other person in this world that knows how to be proud of me so well. And there is certainly no other person who has burned so many candles for me. Even though she prayed to the Holy Rita, patron of the hopeless cases, I could feel how much hope she really had for me.

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since I became conscious of the existence of postcolonial literature, I knew that I wanted to dedicate my thesis to this research realm. My preference for English, postcolonial prose brought me to a city with one of the highest rates of immigrants in the UK: Birmingham. During my Erasmus stay there, I took up a course that was completely dedicated to my field of interest. During the course, several lessons were devoted to Anglo-Indian literature: I was swept away immediately. I can not give full credit for this obsession to the authors of the novels I read, as my inclination for the Indian subcontinent was in great part caused by the Asian people I met during my stay in the United Kingdom.

Upon my return to Belgium, I missed the colourfulness of Birmingham and the multiculturalism that was so current in Britain. But as an old proverb tells us: out of sight, out of mind. For a moment it seemed as if I had forgotten all about the Indian subcontinent because my interest had now turned towards trauma studies. Ironically, it was in a course on trauma, titled “Postmemory and Postmodern: Third Generation Jewish American Trauma Narratives”¹ that I found myself reminiscing about a novel on Pakistan. The novel in question was Salman Rushdie’s *Shame*, the book that has now become the lengthier half of my two-piece thesis. Philip Codde, the lecturer of the trauma course, was discussing *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, a novel by Jonathan Safran Foer, when he mentioned the myth of Philomela. In this myth, most famously known in Ovid’s version, tapestry is used to voice images that are held captive by trauma. This use of tapestry strongly reminded me of a traumatized character called Rani in Rushdie’s *Shame*. This thought restricted itself to a scribble in the margins of my notes until I had to choose a topic for my final research paper. That scribble transformed itself, over the last year, into an extensive study of both Ovid’s myth of Philomela and Rushdie’s *Shame*.

Of course, both stories have already been studied in other researches, my merit is thus merely the combined study of both works. The myth of Philomela belongs to the classical studies and has mostly been examined in the context of Ancient Greek and Latin culture. There are many versions available of this myth, but I restricted myself to Ovid’s version. Ovid’s account of Philomela’s tragic story was published in the *Metamorphoses*, one of Ovid’s masterpieces. However the studies that are most interesting for this research paper do not approach the myth from a classical point of view, but from a feminist angle. Philomela

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¹ Codde, Philippe. “Lecture:Trauma, part of the course ‘Postmemory and Postmodern: Third Generation Jewish American Trauma Narratives’” University of Ghent. 2009
uses art as a peaceful form of rebellion against her mistreatment by men and has thus become a symbol for the female writer who frees herself from the patriarchal chains. The most renown article in this feminist context is Patricia Klindienst Joplin’s “The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours” (2002). She insists that the myth is essentially feminine by nature and that the metaphor of the shuttle, of art as an alternative weapon, should not be used in male contexts. In order to prove her point, she had to demonstrate the patriarchal oppression that lies behind the myth of Philomela. To Joplin’s groundbreaking work a series of cultural studies on Antiquity are added in combination with some other feminist views on the myth itself. Philomela’s art consisted of embroideries. Because this art form arises both in Shame as in the myth itself, I incorporated it in the title of my study. Moreover, according to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, “to embroider” can also signify the “add[ition of] fictitious or exaggerated details”. This description fits Salman Rushdie’s novel *Shame* perfectly because it is written in a magic-realist style and pays loads of attention to meticulous descriptions.

Salman Rushdie is furthermore renown for his postcolonial novels that mix strands of India with the Western tradition. *Shame* is no exception and provides its readers with a black-comedy on the formation of the Pakistani state. Much of the research on *Shame* has thus focussed on the political details in the novel. Another current focus point in this novel is ‘migrancy’: not only is Rushdie himself a quintessential example of a migrant, the novel also describes one of the greatest migrations ever: Partition. Rushdie’s own essayist asides throughout the novel have incited many discussions on the novel of which the examination of the female stance is the most prevalent. Although the novel first presents itself as a masculine tale about national leaders, the novel itself is written from the females’ point of view.

Both these stories are interesting in their own right, but it is the comparison of the two that I am absolutely passionate about. It is intriguing, almost uncanny, how two tales, that are separated by two millennia, can show so much resemblance to each other. Of course, Rushdie’s novel, being the latter one, could draw upon the already existing myth. The fact, however, remains that despite two millennia passing by, nothing has fundamentally changed in patriarchal societies. Both contemporary Pakistan and ancient Greece are strongly based on a form of patriarchy that suppresses the females of the country. This lack of change is foreshadowed in both the myth and the novel, as both stories end with a miraculous transformation into birds instead of a solution.

Because Ovid’s myth preceded *Shame*, I will start off with an elaboration on Philomela’s tale. For a better understanding of the motifs, a short content of the myth is
provided in the first chapter. I will then proceed with an elaboration on the major forms of oppression – nationalism and patriarchy - that are concealed within Ovid’s myth. This oppression weighs down the female characters to such an extent that they become muted and traumatized. The muteness and the trauma will be discussed as consequences of the above mentioned methods of oppression. These consequences bring along some consequences of their own: as the female protagonists are no longer able to speak they start looking for other ways of expressing themselves. Procne and Philomela come up with two alternative forms of communication: violence and art. The end of my discussion on Ovid is devoted to the transformation into birds that the protagonist undergo in the final lines of the myth.

Due to the immense similarities between Shame and the myth of Philomela, and for clarity’s sake, the order of the discussion on Ovid’s myth will be reused for my elaboration on Shame. My discussion of Shame thus begins with a description of the methods of oppression that are present in the novel. To the nationalism and patriarchy that we found in Philomela’s myth a third source of oppression is added: colonialism. The women in Shame also suffer from the identical consequences of oppression as Philomela: muteness and trauma. The similarities do not stop there, the women also respond in the same fashion as Philomela to their traumatic muteness. The response, however, is slightly more dispersed because there are more characters to be considered. Whereas Philomela exemplified both art and violence as an alternative way of communication, the women in Shame just choose one form of expression. The combination of art and violence is thus split up by Rushdie, but is still present. As Ovid and Rushdie both ended their works with a transformation into birds, I will also conclude with an elucidation on the bird imagery that is used throughout Shame. This shared ending is not only quite remarkable, the bird imagery is also related to most of the discussed motifs.

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2 A full version of the myth can be found in the first attachment.
PART I: THE MYTH OF PHILOMELA

I. THE MYTH OF PHILOMELA

The myth of Philomela originated in Antiquity and since then many versions have taken form. The most renown Greek version is Sophocles’ tragedy *Tereus*. However this account lost much of its popularity during the Middle Ages when Ovid’s version became the most widespread variant of the myth. For this discussion, Ovid’s version will be the predominant source, but in order to fully understand Ovid’s account, occasional comparisons will be made with earlier and later versions. Moreover, most secondary literature on Philomela’s fate uses multiple classical sources to come to an end result.

On top of this, Ovid has a slightly different angle than the other classical sources. Whereas the latter focus mainly on the violence of the myth, Ovid reflects on the creative act of Philomela. The *Metamorphoses* are all about transformation, change and creativity. It is thus no wonder that “displays of creative activity of one sort or another, in which material is transformed or translated into another medium” (Johnson 22) play a predominant role in the myth of Philomela. It is this prominence of human creativity that sets Ovid’s Philomela apart from the earlier versions and that makes it a tale well worth exploring.

The tale opens on Attic ground at the moment when Athens is threatened by barbarian forces. In order to protect his kingdom Pandion decides to make an alliance with Tereus, the king of Thrace. “Pandion gave his child, Procne, in marriage” to validate the alliance with the Thracians, but the marriage never got the blessing from the gods (Ovid 134). Procne moves to Thrace and gives birth to an heir for Tereus, a son called Itys and for five years all is well. Procne, however starts longing for her country of birth and pleads Tereus to reunite her with her sister Philomela. Tereus answers her plead and embarks for Athens to ask Pandion’s permission to take Philomela back to Thrace for a reunion. Once Tereus arrives on Attic grounds, “the sight” of Philomela “sets [his] heart ablaze” (Ovid 135); fully conscious of the sinful nature of his thoughts he proceeds to convince Pandion to trust his second daughter to his hands. Pandion agrees and Tereus and Philomela start their journey towards Thrace. Once they have crossed the sea and set foot on the mainland, Tereus “locked her, and revealed his own black heart and ravished her, a virgin, all alone” (Ovid Book 137). As if this cruel deed was not gruesome enough in its own right, Tereus cuts off her tongue as well to ensure

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3 idem
secrecy and keeps her locked up in the woods. Upon his return to his wife, he tells Procne that her sister has died; Procne does not question Tereus’ honesty as he has “tears to prove it true” and starts mourning in the most sincere way (Ovid 138).

Philomela, mutilated and violated, is left completely powerless, or so it seems, as “there’s a fund of talent in distress, and misery learns cunning” (Ovid 139). She constructs herself a loom to weave a “clever fabric” that depicts her unfortunate fate (Ovid 139). After completing her story, she gives the tapestry to an old woman who delivers it to Procne. Procne, upon seeing the canvas, was “filled with visions of revenge” and decides to free her sister right away. Fortunately “it was the time of Bacchus’ festival”, a time in which disguises are appropriate, during which she could thus liberate her sister without raising any suspicion (Ovid 139).

When they are finally reunited, the two sisters start plotting their revenge. Ultimately it is Itys who brings illumination. As Procne regards her son, she is infuriated by his resemblance to his father. At that moment, she decides to murder her own son, cook him and feed him to his unsuspecting father. Procne sends away all the servants and serves the meal herself, and after the supper was consummated, Tereus asked for his son to join him. At that moment Philomela rushes in, holding high the head of Itys, revealing to Tereus the cruelty that had been done to him. As expected, Tereus goes mad with rage and starts to chase the two sisters, who transform at that very moment into birds and fly away. Tereus himself is transformed as well into a bird “that bears a crest, with, for a sword, a long fantastic bill- a hoopoe, every inch a fighter still” (Ovid 142).

As mentioned before, Ovid’s version places more emphasis on Philomela’s creative act of weaving as a form of resistance. This peaceful rebellion forms a sharp contrast with the more gruesome events, such as: rape, incest and cannibalistic murder. The violent acts in the myth are so incomprehensibly cruel that a social reading forces itself upon the reader. In order to understand the mechanisms behind the cruelty, we will link the crimes to the value system of the Ancient Greeks. Philomela’s tragedy, at first sight, might look like a family drama, but the impact of the story goes much further as Philomela is not just any girl, but a princess of Athens. Philomela’s fate is not just sealed by her father and Tereus, but by a nation that permits patriarchy and places nationalism above personal happiness. Philomela is thus oppressed by nationalism and patriarchy. The first part of this study will elaborate on the mechanisms behind this methods of oppression, as only a full understanding of this matters will permit us to link them to the consequences they have caused. The second part of this study will then be dedicated to the consequences of oppression, namely muteness and trauma.
Philomela reacts in two wholly different ways to this trauma, as she has lost her voice, she chooses violence and art to express and avenge herself.

II. MECHANISMS OF OPPRESSION

A. NATIONALISM AND PATRIARCHY

The most obvious form of oppression in the myth is the rape of Philomela. But behind this shocking crime an even more shocking value system is to be revealed. In order to understand the rape, one has to understand Ancient Greek culture and the mechanisms that permit violation. Our conception of rape forms a very common theme4 in ancient Greek literature, or so it seems, as neither ancient Greek nor Latin had a word “with the same semantic field as the modern English word rape” (Harris5). Thomas Harrison warns the modern reader for the wrongful presumption of a shared understanding of rape with the ancient Greeks in his essay “Herodotus and the Ancient Greek Idea of Rape” (as qtd. in Harris). In this work he frowns upon the contemporary reader’s tendency to project his own idea of heterosexual relationships onto the mythical world, hereby equalizing two societies which are two millennia apart (as qtd. in Harris).

To modern day readers two predominant features of rape are the absence of love and mutual consent, two features that are commonly associated with marriage or relationships, we could thus oppose rape to marriage. Harrisson, however, blocks this opposition, he states that “the scale along which sexual relations were judged and controlled (if we can reduce it to a single scale) was not one that ran between non-consensual intercourse and romantic, reciprocated love, but between one form of non-consensual intercourse and another” (as qtd. in Harris). Harrison thus sees the Athenian form of marriage for what it really is: an agreement between men about the exchange of women. It is not the consent of the woman involved that sets marriage apart from rape but the approval of the males surrounding her.

The myth of Philomela is unique in that it provides its readers with an example, not only of rape, but also of marriage, both performed by one person: Tereus. The contrast between Procne’s legitimate marriage to Tereus and Philomela’s violent rape builds up a

4 In the Metamorphoses itself we find numerous examples of rape. Io, Callisto and Europa are all raped by Zeus. Prosperina was raped by another god, Pluto. There is even another instance of tapestry depicting rape in Ovid’s masterpiece: Arachne weaves a tapestry that portrays different infamous rapes. (wikipedia)
5 Edward M. Harris wrote a review article on Rape in Antiquity an anthology, edited by Susan Deacy and Karen Pierce, Harrisons essays is part of that anthology.
tension that offers us an exceptional view onto the Greek imagination, a view that reveals the rigid frame of patriarchy.

It is that patriarchal frame that is to blame for Philomela’s suffering as it is patriarchy who reduced her to a mere object. Patricia Klindienst Joplin remarks that both Philomela and Procne “serve as objects of exchange between … two kings: Pandion of Athens and Tereus of Thrace” (264). Procne’s marriage revolves not around love, but around politics. She is reduced to a symbol of exchange, and this symbolic function makes her an excellent example of “Lévi-Strauss’ idea that ‘marriage is the archetype of exchange’” (as qtd. in Joplin 265). Strauss states that “women are exchange objects, gifts”, or “valuables par excellence”, whose transfer between groups of men “provides the means of binding men together” (as qtd. in Joplin 265).

According to Lévi-Strauss, “women are not only objects but also words”, words that are meant to communicate when appropriately used (as qtd. in Joplin 265). A marriage is thus a form of communication between two different families, or in this case, between two different countries. But what does the misuse of women, like Philomela, then tell us about language? Joplin sees the “rape of Philomela” as “a crisis in language… a violation of the exogamous exchange” between the two patriarchs:

If marriage uses the woman’s body as good money and unequivocal speech, rape transforms her into a counterfeit coin, a contradictory word that threatens the whole system. (Joplin 269, my emphasis)

The above explained system relates not only to the patriarchal core of the family but also concerns a much broader system: Greece and its identity. As Pandion is the king of Athens, his patriarchal stance automatically extends itself to a nationalist stance. The importance of Tereus’ foreign nationality cannot be overestimated as it creates a dichotomy throughout the story between “Hellenes, Greek speekers, and barbaroi, babblers” (Joplin 264). Procne is a typical example of a peace offering by which King Pandion tries to protect his country from foreign attacks. But Pandion oversees one thing; to give “his elder daughter to Tereus is for Greece to make an alliance with barbarism itself” (Joplin 264). The first exchange of women thus backfires, as even the wisest leader cannot make a save alliance with the most feared enemy. Moreover, by giving such a symbolical part of Greece to a barbarian, Greece gives away a part of its identity.
Matters even take a turn for the worst as “the giving of the first daughter as a gift only incites [Tereus] to steal the withheld daughter” (Joplin 265). Joplin remarks “that the fact that both acts”, marriage and rape, “are performed by the same man, Tereus, and that both daughters are taken from the same man, Pandion” indicates a collapse of the Greek identity (Joplin 269). Greek society strongly relied on the patriarchal rules of exchange. When one of the allies, in this case Tereus, takes part in both the “generative rite (marriage) and the dangerous transgression (rape)” (Joplin 269) the difference between right and wrong fades away.

According to René Girard, the rightful marriage and the wrongful rape are indeed much alike as they are both condoned by Greek patriarchy (as qtd. in Joplin 266). Philomela’s assault is used to balance out the alliance previously made by her sister. Whereas Procne had to secure the boundaries of Greece by creating peace between nations, Philomela’s rape ensures the coherence within Greece by creating a common enemy. By adopting the two sisters as symbols of two different messages, Greece creates a surrogate victim. René Girard claims that it is precisely that need for a surrogate victim that forms the “origin of symbolic thought” (as qtd. in Joplin 266). As all signs are arbitrary, a society can pick “a surrogate victim, someone marginal to culture” to symbolize, and subsequently save, something much more important (Girard in Joplin 266). In this case, Pandion’s daughters “serve a sacrificial purpose”, the two nations “agree never to be completely at peace, so that their members may find it easier to be at peace among themselves” (Joplin 266).

The dichotomy between the two countries also serves another purpose: because the rape takes place in Thrace the Greeks can expel the violence that “originated within Athens, with the father/king himself” (Joplin 271). The myth conceals Pandion’s cruel deed of offering his daughters for a “greater good”, in fact Pandion is shielded off by the story itself, as he disappears from the tale right after he agreed to let his second daughter go with the barbarian Tereus. Nationalism and the protection of the country is thus used as a cover up for the patriarchal violence that is inherent to Greek society. Both the damaged Philomela and the lawfully wedded wife Procne “are proverbial figures of the Greek imagination” (Joplin 265). “They are actors in a drama depicting the necessity for establishing and keeping secure the boundaries that protect the power of the key figure” and the key element of this story: Pandion and his patriarchy (Joplin 265).

B. A FEMALE’S PERSPECTIVE ON RAPE: PHILOMELA
We have now discussed the mechanisms of oppression from a male point of view, but it is important to look at the consequences of that oppression from a female focal point as well. Philomela, betrayed by her father, raped and silenced by her brother-in-law is almost reduced to an extra in her own story. The only element that saves her from utter silence and oblivion is the tapestry which recounts her side of the events. Though she carefully weaved her tragedy, her side of the story has often been neglected; on top of that, she is accused of seduction and unwillingly dragged along in an incestuous and adulterous triangle.

Philomela is betrayed not only by her father, but also by her other creator, by Ovid himself. He displaces Tereus’ lust “onto Philomela herself: as Ovid has it, the chaste woman’s body is fatally seductive. We are asked to believe that Philomela unwittingly and passively invites Tereus’ desire” (Joplin 273):

Her beauty; such the beauty of the nymphs…
The sight of her set Tereus’ heart ablaze
As stubble leaps to flame when set on fire
(Ovid 135)

English Renaissance Drama even takes it one step further: Nancy Guttierez remarks that the myth of Philomela “is enacted over and over again … in early seventeenth century plays” (430). Strangely enough, these plays “often transpose the adulterous act onto the wife” (Gutierrez 430). Ovid furthermore creates an ending that expels the violence done to Philomela. By transforming the protagonists into birds, the core of the matter, the violent exchange of women is neglected and covered up by animacy (Joplin 265). The combination of animacy and rape is not unfamiliar to Ovid, in his Metamorphoses numerous women are raped and subsequently turned into animals. Io and Callisto for example were respectively transformed into a cow and into a bear. Susan Deacy remarks that the offspring that results from this rape takes on remarkable forms as well: Callisto’s son for example is also transformed into a bear.

Susan Deacy established three categories of rape in myth on the basis of the female victim’s social status and behaviour:

1) parthenoi who reject normal female activities and wish to remain unmarried
2) parthenoi who are lured away from the paternal oikos, are raped and give birth to remarkable offspring
3) rape as a representation of marriage (Deacy as qtd. in Harris)

Philomela falls in between these categories, she is still unmarried and is “lured away from the paternal oikos” but neither rejects female activities nor is impregnated (Deacy as qtd. in Harris). As to the third category, as stated above, the myth does create a tension between marriage and rape. By placing Tereus at the centre of both actions, the normal distinction is blurred.

Philomela thus does not fit neatly in one of Deacy’s three categories, and she has an even harder time to belong to a fixed category in the myth itself. As she is raped by her brother-in-law, she is not only a victim. She simultaneously belongs to the category of perpetrators as she takes part in an incestuous and adulterous act. She “experiences rape as a form of contagious pollution because it is both adultery and incest, the two cardinal transgression of the rule of exogamy” (Joplin 270). “Philomela experiences herself as the source of dangerous contagion, because once violated she is both rival and monstrous double of her own sister” (Joplin 270):

All is confused! I’m made a concubine,
My sister’s rival; you’re a husband twice,
And Procne ought to be my enemy
(Ovid Book VI, lines 533- 566, tr. by Melville 138)

Just as rape is a recurring subject in the Metamorphoses, so are adultery and incest. All violations by Zeus (Io, Callisto and Europa etc.) are adulterous as he was married to Hera. In these stories adultery plays an important role as the metamorphosis is often performed to conceal the crime for Hera, or the transformation is part of her revenge. There is even another instance in the Metamorphoses where rape and incest coincide: Prosperina was violated by her uncle, Pluto. But Philomela and Prosperina are not the only examples of incest. Byblis, for example, fell in love with her brother and Hyacinth was the result of an incestuous relationship.

III. CONSEQUENCES OF OPPRESSION: MUTENESS AND TRAUMA
The most obvious consequence of Philomela’s violation is her muteness. Tereus silenced Philomela by cutting off her tongue and locking her in the woods. She is thus no longer able to express the pain she has experienced in words. This inability to verbalize such cruel events is one of the main characteristics of trauma. Philomela’s muteness is not only caused by her loss of tongue, but also by her status, or rather lack of status, in Ancient Greek society. In order to comprehend the trauma Philomela suffers from, I will first elaborate on her speechlessness.

A. LOSS OF LANGUAGE: CUTTING OFF OF THE TONGUE

After having raped Philomela of her virginity, Tereus also robs her of her tongue by cutting it off. The wound here is more than a physical mutilation, as the tongue is metaphorically linked to a person’s ability or disability to speak. There even is an etymological connection between the metaphorical and literal meaning of tongue. In English, for example, the word tongue is often used in the construction ‘mother tongue’, but in Latin the word lingua shows an even clearer link as it refers “both to the physical body part as well as to the totality of language” (Marder 160). Philomela is not only deprived of her innocence but also of the one weapon that men fear in women: the tongue and the sharp speech that it brings forth (Burnett 185). However strong the power of the female tongue may be, it can never be significant unless it is heard by others, Tereus understands this paradox and shuts Philomela off for the public’s ears to hear (Joplin 263 & 261).

According to Marder, the loss of the tongue has another metaphorical meaning:

While the first, literal rape produces a linguistic, articulate, and articulated response from Philomela, this second rape - the cutting off of the tongue - violates the possibility of discourse both literally and figuratively. In other words, to be raped is also to be deprived of a language with which to speak of the rape. (Marder 160)

\[6\] Think of Hesoid on the subject of Pandora’s voice, which collaborated with her falsehood, her wily arguments, and her thievish character. Think of Electra’s tongue, honed to be an instrument of harm, and Iphigeneia’s that had to be forcibly stopped from cursing. (Burnett 185)
Marder thus shows how the physical rape, even without the literal cutting of the tongue, deprives its victim of speech. The gruesome mutilation just highlights one of the most common and most grave side effects of a traumatizing event such as rape. Ovid, although he could not have foreseen it, gives a beautiful example of how trauma works with two impact moments: an initial literal shock and a secondary shock that leaves the victim speechless. The two-fold, traumatic structure of the myth will be discussed as a separate chapter (cf. infra “Trauma”).

Ironically, the language that Philomela loses was not hers in the first place; it is a language based on patriarchal order. In the short moment between the violation and the mutilation, her tongue “calls for the name of the father” for “stability of place within the patriarchal law” (Marder 160). Whereas the literal rape was a transgression against paternity, the secondary, metaphorical rape subtly shows how that paternity is partially responsible for the transgressions against women.

Philomela has been doubly silenced, first by the rapist who transgresses the father’s law and then by the paternal law itself. …While the horror of the rape violates the paternal order, the effects of the rape disclose the implicit violation by the paternal order. (Marder 160)

Philomela is silenced to such an extent that all she can do is listen, and in her state of seclusion the only one to listen to is her own voice. When Tereus deprives her of her tongue, Philomela gains something far more important, she “uncovers the power of her own voice” (Joplin 261). Still, it seems like Tereus has won the fight, as Philomela no longer has a literal voice to express her newfound inner one.

Tereus had nevertheless “forgotten one important fact which was that Philomela, like Pandora and all other women, was doubly equipped. As a man had sword as well as penis, so a woman had shuttle as well as tongue” (Burnett 185). Philomela used a shuttle to weave a tapestry that depicted the crime and it is this work of art that enabled her to escape from the cabin. The creative act that followed from this loss of tongue will be discussed later on when I elaborate on the possible responses to trauma. As the use of visual images is bound up with trauma, I will first proceed with a discussion of the traumatic elements in the myth.

B. OVID’S MYTH AS A VISIONARY REPRESENTATION OF TRAUMA
In order to find the traumatic elements in Ovid’s myth we first have to establish the elements of trauma in general, for this end I will turn to Cathy Caruth, one of the pioneers in trauma studies. In the introduction to her groundbreaking work *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* she attempts to define one of the most complicated subject matters, trauma, as follows:

… there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (4, *my emphasis*)

The core of the definition lies in the first line, in the recognition of three stages: event, delay and response. Basically, trauma consists out of an “overwhelming event” and a second impact moment, the response. A person does not realize he has been traumatized right after the actual event, that knowledge only comes with the arrival of the second impact moment, the return of the event.

This binary structure was first established by Freud in his renowned work *The Actiology of Hysteria* (1986) at the beginning of the twentieth century (Codde lecture). It is thus quite remarkable that we can discern that twofold structure in Ovid’s myth of Philomela. Ovid followed a yet to be established blueprint of the mechanisms of trauma by creating a dual violation: the rape itself and the cutting of the tongue. Just as with traumatic events, “the rape itself does not become either fully figured or fully meaningful until it is repeated by the mutilation that ostensibly functions to cover it up” (Marder 158). In Cathy Caruth we find a similar, general description of trauma: “the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (4). Tereus’ mutilation of Philomela’s tongue was meant to cover up and suppress the rape, but the second violation backfired, and instead of concealing the initial rape, the repetition of it just emphasized the first rape.

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7 Codde, Philippe. “Lecture: Trauma, part of the course ‘Postmemory and Postmodern: Third Generation Jewish American Trauma Narratives’” University of Ghent. 2009
Rather than suppressing the rape, Tereus’ act of cutting off Philomela’s tongue both represents and repeats it. Philomela’s rape accrues meaning through multiple repetitions and varied representations. (Marder 158)

When Freud first established these two impact moments he believed that the period in between was one of repression, of willingly suppressing a gruesome event. It was only when he studied the model of a train accident that he realized that right after the first impact, the victims were “apparently unharmed” (Freud as qtd. in Caruth 7). What was first seen as repression, is now called latency, this change of terms has significant consequences, as “its blankness – the space of unconsciousness” is no longer a mere waiting period, but now forms the explanation for the pregnant literality that marks the traumatic relapse (Caruth 7). It is by the blankness, the complete and utter black-out that trauma victims can preserve the event in its totality, by not thinking or talking about it in the latent period, all the details are preserved and hit their victim with a filmic literality.

The literality of the trauma patient’s memory is caused by the victim’s inability to process the event at the time of occurrence. It is as if the victim recorded the events without processing them, or to use Caruth’s analogy: the trauma victim does not possess the event, but is possessed by the image of that event (Caruth 6). The choice of words is thus no coincidence, as traumatic memory consists of images, rather than words. Philomela’s loss of tongue can thus be seen as an extra instigator for her trauma, it is due to her inability to express herself in words that she is not able to process her memory of the violation. Therapy, by consequence, often focuses on the construction of a narrative, as by describing the images one can process them and store them amongst the rest of his memories. Pierre Janet even went so far as to distinguish two kinds of memory, a narrative and a visual, or traumatic memory. (Janet qtd. in Codde Philomela Revised 249) The traumatic experience has to be relocated from the visual, inaccessible memory to the narrative part of the brain. Ovid distinguishes similar categories in his Metamorphoses: he dedicates Book V to song and Book VI to the visual art of weaving. When Ovid then places Philomela in Book VI, a book devoted to visual arts such as weaving, instead of situating her, the nightingale, in Book V, he condemns her to a life of images, a life of trauma. It is thus no coincidence that there is confusion about the exact nature of Philomela’s weaving: “neither narrator, nor reader [gets] access to the experience of the raped body” (Marder 158), as even Philomela did not have total access herself. What is thus most likely to be depicted on the tapestry is the totality of the events, the literality, an urgency that reflects the pain.
There is still one question that remains unanswered: why did Philomela not register the violence done to her? It has already been explained that Philomela does have a mental image of the events, but that she only lives through them belatedly as the representation of the event is too literal. The enigma now lies in the reason for this literal representation and thus in the cause of the distorted mental storage. In her definition, Cathy Caruth, spoke of an “overwhelming event”, but this is quite the understatement as the event is so “overwhelming” that it is literally incomprehensible for the victim. A debate about the exact graveness required to trigger a trauma would be useless, as one of the unique things about trauma is the fact that the impact, or the possibility of trauma, lies not in the event itself but “in the structure of its experience or reception” (Caruth 4). An event becomes traumatizing when the victim is unable to place the event within their value system, this does not mean that witnessing a transgression of those values always results in a traumatizing event, as most transgressions are part of that value system. It is only when the transgression is literally inconceivable that the trauma patients mind refuses to absorb it. The Holocaust for example is one of those events that would seem inconceivable to most of us, and indeed, many survivors suffered from severe traumas, but the mystery of trauma lies in those who, despite the gruesome breaking of human boundaries did not block out the images. Every trauma case is thus to be regarded as a highly individual case. To understand that particular inconsistency in the victim’s memory, one must understand the values that memory consists of.

Ovid stresses the inconceivable nature of the events by refusing to describe them; instead of portraying Philomela as a victim of rape, Ovid results to “comparisons to animal predator/prey relations” (Marder 158). The rape remains undocumented, lacks description, “because the rape violates human powers of description” and thus the boundaries of human understanding (Marder 158). It is quite understandable that the rape seems inhuman to Philomela, but it is even more remarkable that Ovid, who has described so many rapes, that of Io, of Callisto, Prosperina and many more, that he deems this rape in particular as unredeemable.

What sets Philomela’s rape apart from the other rapes in the Metamorphoses is its total disregard for the values established in the myth itself. When Tereus raped Philomela, he raped “patriarchal social order” and the physical violation is thus interpreted as “a violation of social and familial positions” (Marder 158). This analogy is stressed by Ovid, when he makes Philomela’s cut off tongue “call out, in vain, for the nomen patris”, a last, desperate invocation of the stability that this patriarchal system used to offer her (Marder 160).
With outstretched hands, ‘You brute! You cruel brute!
Do you care nothing for the charge, the tears
Of my father…
…But as she fought, outraged, for words and called
Her father’s name continually…
(Ovid VI 533-566, tr. by Melville 138)

IV. REACTIONS TO OPPRESSION

Tereus ensured Philomela’s silence by locking her up in the woods and cutting off her tongue: “her speechless lips could tell no tale of what was done” (Ovid 139) I already stated that he had, however forgotten one thing: “misery learns cunning” The myth is dominated by oppression, oppression that leads to muteness, that in its own turn leads to trauma. Philomela reacts in two wholly different ways to this lethal combination: violence and art. I will respect the order of the story and start with an elaboration on Philomela’s use of art as a communication form. Although art will prove to be a powerful weapon in the battle against suppression, it will not be enough. At the end of the story, Philomela lowers herself by using the same forms of violence as her patriarchal oppressors, by murdering Itys, Tereus’ son.

A. ART AS COMMUNICATION: EMBROIDERIES

Philomela is robbed of her virginity, tongue and freedom by Tereus. At that point the situation looks futureless, “but there’s a fund of talent in distress and misery learns cunning” (Ovid 139). Although “her speechless lips could tell no tale of what was done” (Ovid 139), Philomela comes up with an alternative form of communication: weaving.

…On a clumsy native loom
She wove a clever fabric, working words
In red on white ground to tell the tale.
(Ovid 139, my emphasis)

In Ancient Greece, weaving was still a domestic art for which only a loom and a shuttle was needed. The shuttle is an archetypically female utensil, that was used during the weaving process. In former days it was so commonly used by all women that the appliance
itself got associated with femininity and more specifically with the image of a virtuous woman. The use of the shuttle in the story thus represents “the best and most Athenian side” of Philomela, as “it expressed the aspect of women that in the best cases rendered [them] valuable as wives – their potential for chaste and silent work” (Burnett 186). But, the shuttle was not all work and no play, as due to its wedge-shaped form and the close association with femininity, it could also refer to the female sexual parts (Burnett 186). Although the shuttle carried so much metaphorical weight, the actual practical use of the shuttle was not known amongst the Greek men. Johnson contends that “technical details” about the shuttle were “evocative of a world perhaps even less familiar to Ovid’s male audience than Mount Helicon” (77). Men thus did not understand the language of the shuttle, luckily Philomela did not want to be heard by men, but by a woman. Her means of communication was not only a female craft, it was also crafted for a female and for a very specific one indeed: her sister (Joplin 276). Ovid respected Philomela’s cry for help and kept the description of the tapestry very vague: “purples signs in threads on a white background” (Marder 161). Due to this vague characterization of the weaving, Philomela’s personal recount remains in the hands of its initial addressee, as “it is decipherable only to its recipient, her sister” (Johnson 23).

If there is a message, a moral, to be deduced from this intricate myth it is the power of communication, the power of art as a form of resistance. Indeed, the “voice of the shuttle” has become a symbol for the healing force that art contains at his best. But even in the adoption of the symbol, mankind succeeds in wronging the two sisters; luckily a contemporary ‘sister’ speaks up for them. In her renowned essay, “The voice of the Shuttle is Ours”, Patricia Klindienst Joplin disputes the wrongful application of the shuttle as a metaphor, in particularly Geoffrey Hartman’s use of “Sophocles’ metaphor ‘the voice of the shuttle’” (Joplin 260). According to Joplin, his adoption of the phrase “celebrates Literature and the male poet’s trope, not the woman’s elevation of her safe, feminine, domestic craft – weaving- into art as a new means of resistance” (Joplin 260). Joplin accuses Hartman of celebrating “Language” instead of applauding “the violated woman’s emergence from silence”, she hereby objects against a masculine reading of the myth that disregards the female cries for help (Joplin 260).

So far this discussion has assumed tapestry to be a form of art, but even this minor detail deserves some further explanation as weaving was only denominated an art form from the Hellenistic period onwards. According to Patricia Johnson, this period marked the

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8 “In the Bacchae, the metaphor for violent anti-structure ist he bacchante, the woman “driven from loom and shuttle” by the God Dionysus. (Joplin 273)
beginning of a new era, in which “not only fabrics but other minor arts [gained] the status of art and thus a place in the literary ekphrasis” (82). Sophocles’ *Tereus* - undoubtedly the most familiar version of the myth from that era - for example, represents Philomela’s tapestry “as both spectacle and song” (Burnett 191). He hereby draws attention to the distinction, or in this case lack of distinction, between spectacle as a representative of visual art and song as a representative for verbal art forms. In Ovid’s recount of the myth we find the same confusion. To call Ovid’s description of the embroidery vague would be an understatement, it is thus not clear “whether the weaving describes the rape through pictures or words” (Marder 161). Ovid lifts only a hint of the veil and entrusts his readers that the weaving consist of “purple signs on a white background” (Marder 161 & Johnson 26). Marder focuses on the Latin word that denotes signs, ‘notas’, and states that it can mean “marks of writing on a page … as well as marks on a body, and by extension, a distinguished mark of shame and disgrace” (161).

Even the exact meaning of Ovid’s description does not help the reader with his visualization of the embroidery, but maybe it is not important whether Philomela speaks to us through words or through pictures, what matters is that her art has an ekphrastic effect. Normally ekphrasis denotes the ability of a verbal description “to make the reader envision the thing described as if it were physically present” (Munsterberg), but Ovid’s poetry has been influenced to such an extent by the visual arts that the visual artefacts described are included and contribute to the ekphrasis. Philomela’s weaving is a literal reflection of her “shame and disgrace” but it also reflects Ovid’s preference for art and creativity (Marder 161). In the *Metamorphoses* he devotes two books to the description of “artists, their products, and particularly the conditions under which those artworks are created” (Johnson 23). As mentioned before, the two books in casu, book V and book VI, are both dedicated to a different form of art: book five is allotted to song and book 6 restricts itself to weaving (Johnson 23). Whereas Sophocles’ vision of Philomela’s tapestry is still one “that is both spectacle and song” (Burnett 191), Ovid categorizes Philomela’s art under an entirely visual category: weaving. Philomela is not the only one in this category, she is accompanied by prominent ladies such as Penelope and Helen, to which Joplin refers as “the false twins” (Joplin 273). According to Joplin there are two types of weavers to be discerned in Greek mythology. On the one hand we find a vicious woman that can take the frightening figure of Fate, but uses Helen of Troy as prototype, “weaving a tapestry depicting the heroics of the men engaged in the war they claim to fight over her body” (Joplin 273). On the other hand, we find the Athenian virtue for which the
shuttle stands in the alluring form of Penelope, who is “continually weaving and unravelling a shroud” (Joplin 273 & Burnett 186).

When we try to fit Philomela into one of these categories we return empty handed. This has a logical explanation: Philomela is not married. Both “vicious Helen” and “virtuous Penelope” have one thing in common, they are both weaving because the “structure of marriage is suspended” (Joplin 273). This in itself already shows us how patriarchal Greek society really was, there is no category for the women who are not linked to a husband. Helen and Penelope only weave because there respective husbands are at war, once the war ends, their creativity ends as well (Joplin 273). Philomela represents “another kind of weaving”, a weaving that is not just a form of occupational therapy, but a real form of therapy that cures the wrong done to her (Joplin 274). Just as Daedalus’ wings were “an escape from the tyranny of King Minos”, so Philomela’s web is “a direct response to tyrannical power”, the tyrannical power of patriarchy that caused her trauma (Johnson 26). Her weaving thus unmasks the tyranny that drives Greek society; her “weaving represents the unmasking of “sacred mystery” and the unmaking of the violence of rape” (Joplin 274).

The Metamorphoses offer us a similar example: Arachne weaves a tapestry that depicts rapes performed by the gods disguised in animal form. However, there is a difference, Arachne does not depict personal suffering but the violation of others. Philomela’s embroidery lies closer to the heart, her “writing is one of outrage and necessity: the text explains that “great pain is inventive, and cunning comes from wretched things” (Marder 161). Her writing is thus directly derived from traumatic pain, which gives it that extra urgency, moreover Philomela’s art forms an excellent example of Ovid’s expression “art makes up, what fortune has deny’d” (Ovid qtd. in Codde, Philomela Revised 242). Her art does not only make up what fortune has done to her, it is also the only option by which Philomela can expose her unfortunate fortune. On top of her deprivation of speech, she suffers from an inexpressible pain that can only be represented in images and not in words. This combination of pain, absence of speech and visuality makes the myth of Philomela into one of the first representations of trauma, a surprisingly accurate one, I might add.

B. FEMALE VIOLENCE

Philomela’s cunning does not limit itself to her clever use of the loom. Once she is reunited with her sister a gruesome plan for revenge takes form. Although the myth was set in motion by male transgressions, the most haunting transgression is performed by two women.
In order to avenge Philomela’s loss of honour, Procne and Philomela murder Itys and feed him to his father. Such forms of retaliation were mostly reserved for men and in some far stretched cases for goddesses, but in this particular myth we are confronted with the impossible: a vindictive mortal woman.

In Ancient Greece it was not the cruel revenge that flabbergasted the audience, but the fact that the revenge was executed by women. In those days, retaliation was seen as a solution and not as a problem, it was perceived “as a form of necessary repayment, the opposite twin to the gracious return of favours that was called charis” (Burnett xvi). Repayment moreover, “was an outward expression of the regularity that supported both society and the cosmos” (Burnett xvi). To modern day readers this conception of revenge is quite shocking, often enough they will try to find a deeper meaning behind the cruelty displayed in Greek drama by trying to proof that “though [revenge] is represented as success, the central action is somehow dispraised by the poet who staged it” (Burnett xv). However, this moralizing approach is to be avoided: just as Greeks had a different viewpoint on marriage, they also had a different attitude towards repayment, and an even more differing view on women.

Whereas they are completely at ease with the concept of revenge, few things disturb them more than the idea of a woman seeking for retaliation. But there is one thing that alarms them to an even further extent: the idea of the child-killing mother. The myth of Philomela combines both disturbing concepts by bringing to the stage “a heroine who not only worked a revenge but did so in defiance of her own maternity” (Burnett 177). Though our conceptions are often very different from those of the ancient Greeks, “maternal love” forms an exception as it is universally deemed to be “the strongest of human passions” (Burnett 177). It is thus inconceivable that a mother would want to hurt her own child (Burnett 177).

However, in Ancient Greece, there was one conceivable reason why a mother would want to hurt her child, and especially her son. In The Glory of Hera Philip Slater describes the classical mother-son relationships as follows:

…the Athenian mother, confined to the home and envious of male privilege and power, vented her negative feelings on her male children, inciting them to achieve and then punishing their successes. (McClure 4)

This image of a frustrated mother returns in the work of Anne Pippin Burnett:
In early Greece … nurseries were under a separate and effectively feminine rule … small male children were thus in a sense hostages of the household truce, and the paternal apprehension that resulted was explored in many popular stories about vicious women who attacked children. (178)

But even the ancient Greeks craved for a more appeasing motivation than mere frustration. Even the gory and bloody tradition of Greek drama could not let a mother kill her son without there being a soothing benefit to it.

Burnett noticed that the cruelty in the myth of Philomela is toned down by several factors, a first indication of the assuage is the use of song:

\[\text{[Ovid] took the most frightening creature a man could imagine - the son-killing mother - and wrapped her in song, so that as nightingale she became a figure of melody and grief. Her child-killing rage was transposed into a lyric melancholy …(Burnett 179)}\]

Another assuaging factor is the transformation into birds, by which the two women are “sent into exile among the members of another species, thus leaving the masculine auditor of this darkest of tales with his sense of safety mysteriously enhanced” (Burnett 179).

Burnett continues with an even more remarkable statement: “the legend eventually became positively reassuring, as storytellers directly addressed its primal of female motives and produced a daughter’s devotion to her father as the one emotion that might prove stronger than love of husband, stronger even than love of child” (Burnett 179). Although Pandion contributed to Philomela’s fate and thus to her trauma, she still chooses the side of her country and her father. Patriarchy thus once again proves to be the basic mechanism behind the myth: Pandion does not only have the power to entrust his daughters to other men, even after the exchange his daughters are supposed to stay loyal to him as he, after all, is the patriarch.

The story of Philomela adds another dimension to the rules of patriarchy as this particular patriarch is not just the father of two daughters. As a king, he is also the proverbial father of Athens. The story is not merely about a vengeful woman, but about an Attic princess, striding for the Greek identity by staying loyal to her father, hereby conveying the message to all Athenians that they should “[strike] back against foreign injury” (Burnett 189).
So what first looks as the most inconceivable thing to do, killing your own son, suddenly changes into a heroic and even exemplary act. If there is still any doubt amongst the Athenians about Procne’s decision to give up her own son and to betray her husband, than the extra argument of nationality should convince all. In ancient Greece, the choice between an Attic father and a barbarian husband was easily made as this distinction was the same distinction as right from wrong. Nationalism is thus stronger than motherhood or marital love:

But then she felt her will was faltering-  
She loved him well, too well – and turned again
To Philomel, and gazing at them both
In turn, ‘Why,why’, she cried, ‘can one of them
Speak words of love and the other has no tongue
To speak at all? Why, when he calls me mother,
Does she not call me sister? See, just see,
Whom you have married, you, Pandion’s daughter!
Will you betray your birth? For such a husband,
For Tereus, love and loyalty are crimes!’
(Ovid Book VI, lines 630-659, tr. by Melville 141)

All wrongful actions, including cannibalism, were attributed to “barbaroi”. It is thus no coincidence that the women find their revenge in such a ‘barbarian’ (in the modern sense of the word) and uncivilized deed (Burnett 188). So when the “sisters force Tereus to swallow human flesh they make him act like what he is, a wild man from the outer regions” (Burnett 188). “More specifically the meal is appropriate to one guilty of incest, because eating human meat stands to acceptable dining much as raping your sister-in-law does to acceptable mating: cannibalism is a kind of dietary incest” (Burnett 188). Cannibalism was not only associated with non-Attics, but also with bloodthirst as the eating of humans was often used as a metaphor for an “avenger’s hung for violence” (Burnett 187). In this particular case, however, “the meal is not enjoyed in fantasy by the avenger but forced in

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9 The connection between cannibalism and in-law incest, is almost as common as the association of man-eating with barbarism, this connection can be “found again in Atreus’ vengeance on Thyestes which was well know to Attic theatregoers” (Burnett 188)
actuality upon his victim, and it is not enemy flesh that is eaten” but that of his own son (Burnett 187).

The barbarian Tereus broke the rules of patriarchy by taking what was not his to take, and although patriarchy has not been very beneficial to Procne and Philomela, they have to follow patriarchal logic in order to achieve the total annihilation they are looking for. In patriarchy, an heir is the highest good, so if the women want to destroy Tereus they have to rob him off his virility and thus his heir. Procne feeds her son to her husband, a symbolic deed, by which she gives back her “misplaced faith” and what resulted from that “misplaced faith, her son, to his source” (Burnett 188). The two women put a stop to procreation and turn “Tereus into a pathetic mimicry of a sterile, masculine maternity” (Marder 162).

Nancy Gutierrez cunningly remarked that the myth of Philomela “depicts the most basic fears that each sex has of the other” (429). Women, like Philomela and Procne fear “the male’s superior physical strength”, that brings about “violation and mutilation”. Men fear something entirely different, they have a deep felt fear that a woman will “undermine [their] very virility and his capacity of procreation” (Gutierrez 429).

Those fears alternate each other in a cyclical fashion. First, Philomela feared Tereus’ physical strength, then she fulfilled Tereus’ greatest fear- the stop of procreation- by taking his son’s life. This stop, however, does not signify the end of the alternation of fears. Philomela and Procne are once again threatened by male physical strength when Tereus chases them in order to avenge Itys’ death. The situation looks hopeless at this point in the myth; it is only a matter of time before Tereus catches up with the two sisters. It thus looks as if the cyclical alternation of fears will be brought to an end by the death of Philomela and Procne. The only possible escape from this deadly chase is a divine intervention. Fortunately for the two sisters, divine interventions are hardly improbable in myths. On top of that, the story would not belong to the Metamorphoses if it did not contain a miraculous transformation. In the midst of the chase, the protagonists of this incestuous triangle are all transmuted into birds. The gods did not choose this animal form lightly, because birds carry along many appropriate associations to the motifs of the myth.

V. TRANSFORMATION INTO BIRDS

At the very end of the narrative, Procne and Philomela are saved by an interference of the gods, whom transform the three remaining characters into birds. This save is surprisingly
also the first divine appearance in the story. Whereas “most … Ovidian tales depict conflicts between human and divine figures … the story of Philomela [presents itself] as a human drama among characters who are endowed solely with human powers, proper names, and social positions” (Marder 156). The question then arises, why then - besides the obvious reason that the tale is part of the wider framework of the Metamorphoses - did Ovid insert this divine metamorphosis in an otherwise very detailed, earthly story? In order to find an adequate answer to this question, the transformation will be divided into the metamorphosis or change itself and the feathered form this transformation takes on.

A. FUNCTION OF THE METAMORPHOSIS

The threefold transgression of Tereus cannot be redeemed by men and thus “he is exiled from the human species” by the gods (Burnett 189). The gods also transform the two women, Procne and Philomela, into birds so they can escape Tereus’ rage. By transforming all the characters the gods proof that even they cannot - or are not willing to - offer any redemption or solution to the protagonists of this complicated triangle. In fact, the trauma is left intact as all the gods bring about by their metamorphosis is a status quo:

... in the final tableau all movement is frozen. Tereus will never catch the sisters, but neither will the women ever cease their flight. Distance may neither collapse nor expand. In such stasis, both order and conflict are preserved, but there is no hope of change. (Joplin 272)

Tereus, Procne and Philomela are not only trapped in the bodily form of a bird, they are also fixed “in eternity”, in a “pattern of violation-revenge-violation” (Joplin 272). Patricia Klindienst Joplin states that “the end of the tale represents an attempt to forestall or foreclose a moment of radical transition when dominance and hierarchy might have begun to change or give way” (273). The change is thus motivated by an avoidance of significant change. “The Greek imagination uses the mythic end to expel its own violence” (Joplin 273), that is the violence that is inherent to their male dominated system which allows men to treat women as mere commodities. There is a common agreement to allow disagreement and cruelty in order to preserve the Greek identity. By condoning violence between Athens and the neighbouring countries, between men and female, the Athenian identity, the highest good, is preserved
(Girard in Joplin 266). The nationalist tensions are used in such a manner that they cover up the patriarchal violence of Ancient Greek society.

The protagonists of the story are thus merely puppets in the Athenian imagination, designed to invigorate and reinforce the existing order. The metamorphosis takes away their personality and hereby their humanity and reduces them to fluttering birds. But the transformation has one advantage: by creating a stasis, Philomela and Procne are able to avoid the rage of Tereus, hereby escaping an imminent death. The tale of Philomela is not the only instance in the Metamorphoses where “transformation is substituted for death” (Marder 162). “Characters rarely die: they fall out of human forms into animal or inanimate shapes” (Marder 162). Elizabeth Marder furthermore remarks that the abandon of human shape has another benefit for Procne and Philomela; as they leave behind their humanity, they also abandon their gender and the subsequent submissive role (162).

B. **THE METAPHOR OF BIRDS**

The different versions of the myth of Philomela have always contained a precise description of the species of the birds used in the story. The species of the birds have always been very precise and the three characters are even assigned an own individual variety of birds. This very specific allocation of the metamorphosis is due to the associations that are connected to the different birds. Tereus, for example is described as a hawk in the early versions, a bird associated with dominance, aggression and a strong will to conquer. In later retellings of the myth, especially in Aristophanes comedy *The Birds*, Tereus is mockingly transformed into a hoopoe, a preposterously pride bird “notorious for his filthy habits” (Burnett 183).

Two birds are a constant in the tale of Philomela: the nightingale and the swallow. Here the variation lies not in the choice of the birds but in the allocation of the two species to the two female characters. In Sophocles’ version, Philomela is appointed the role of the swallow, the silenced bird, and Procne is transformed into a nightingale. Currently, the story is better known in the reversed version of Ovid where Philomela is transformed into a

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10 Philomela, Procne and Tereus are not the only characters of the Metamorphoses who are transformed into birds. Alycone and Ceyx share the same fate after they infuriated the gods by calling each other Zeus and Hera. Ceyx was eventually killed at sea, saddening his wife to such an extent that she threw herself into the sea. As a act of compassion the gods changed both of them into ‘halycon’ birds. Aescacus’ story is quite similar to that of Alycone, he too lost the woman he admired, the nymph Hesperia and attempted to take his own life by jumping off a cliff. The gods froze his fall and transformed the desperate lover into a diving bird (Wikipedia)
nightingale, and hereby regains her ability to speak and to be heard. Ovid’s Procne subsequently turns into a swallow. Even today, Procne’s name is associated with a type of bird called ‘Progne’.\footnote{http://avibase.bsc-eoc.org/species.jsp?avibaseid=ACB9D1C6AB7F3371 (3 March 2010)}

The metaphors are not only linked to specific species of birds. Anne Pippin Burnett, for example remarks two other metaphorical meanings to the transformation into birds that are not related to just one sort of bird. Firstly, she mentions that in ancient Greece, the bird name of Philomela was “a slang term for female sexual parts because both were cut and had no tongue” (184). Moreover birds were linked to the shuttle, the symbol of female activity in Greece, because both the shuttle and the bird “flew”, “sang” and they both “marked the dawn… in the house of an industrious woman” (Burnett 185). The connection of birds to the vagina and the shuttle, indicates a deep felt association between birds and femininity.

The bird image is thus linked to the myth’s major themes. The transformation leaves the story unfinished and the characters trapped in yet another traumatic repetition of the initial event. The cycle of oppression may take on an animalistic form and offer the two sisters an escape from death, it also fixes the pattern of aggression in eternity. The same lack of fundamental change and a similar form of oppression can be discerned in a much more recent novel by Rushdie: \textit{Shame}. 


**PART II: SALMAN RUSHDIE’S *SHAME***

I. **INTRODUCTION**

Salman Rushdie is one of the most influential writers of the last decades. His first novel *Midnight’s Children* was rewarded with a ‘Booker Prize’ in 1981 and was later elected ‘Booker of Bookers’, a literary honour that cannot be taken lightly. However, Rushdie is even more renowned for his political ideas about freedom of speech and for the fatwa that befell him after writing another masterpiece: *The Satanic Verses*. The novel that will be the object of this discussion, *Shame*, was written in between the two above mentioned novels. Like the other two novels, *Shame* draws heavily on the distinction between the East and the West and employs the focal point of the migrant to demonstrate that tension. This migrant perspective originates from Rushdie’s own life: he was born in India, schooled in England, forced to live in Pakistan and then exiled to Britain. Rushdie has thus always lived on the faultline between the West and the East; an imaginary boundary that he kept on exploring in his first novels.

The migrant perspective might not make one’s life easier, but it certainly broadens your perspective. Rushdie believes that for a writer, this migrant stance, can be very beneficial. He contends that as a migrant “you might well become [a] mutant, but is out of such hybridization that newness can emerge” (Rushdie as qtd. in D’Cruz). The lack of roots, of one soil to feed on, forces the migrant to combine elements of different cultures, hereby creating a new stance, a new point of view. In his celebrated bundle of essays on migrancy, entitled *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie states that a migrant writer can “choose his parents” (21). “Parents”, here, refer to literary examples and traditions. By living on the fault between two worlds - the western world which is rich in capital and the eastern world which is rich in story telling - Rushdie was able to assemble his very own literary tradition. Jason D’Cruz sums up Rushdie’s main sources of inspiration: “Cervantes, Kafka, and Melville along with reams Muslim and Hindu poets and Eastern oral myths”. But India remains Rushdie’s main source of inspiration, especially the discrepancy between his memory of India and the history of the subcontinent. During the writing process of *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie “thought [he] would be writing about history” and believed that “the filter of memory would be removed, so one could get to what it was like if you didn’t have the distortions of the filter” (Rushdie as qtd. in Chaudhuri). As the novel developed further, he “became more interested in the filter” (Rushdie as qtd. in Chaudhuri), in the way memory influences and distorts history. The fragmentation of memory can be discerned in all of Rushdie’s works, not only
through the identity crises of his characters but also in the postmodern form that Rushdie applies to represent the chaos of the human mind. Rushdie described *Shame* as “a series of elaborations on the nature of shame, whether public or private” (as qtd. in Chaudhuri). Unsurprisingly, this description fits the novel perfectly. “A series of elaborations” is exactly what the structure of *Shame* is all about: there is no “dominant center” in the novel, “there is no narrator” just an intrusive “I’ figure” (Rushdie as qtd. in Chaudhuri) that offers essayist asides to the readers.

The content of *Shame* can indeed be described as a discussion on the nature of shame; a discussion that touches both the private and the public realm. In fact, Rushdie shows his readers how oppression of all kinds breeds shame. He furthermore demonstrates that that *Shame* leads to more violence and oppression:

> That people who feel, over a period of time, ashamed or are made to feel humiliated, which is one of the versions or variations of shame, will eventually become violent as a result, although they may not themselves be violent people. (Rushdie as qtd. in Chaudhuri)

The initial oppression can belong to both the private and the public sphere. The shame can thus be caused by a violent husband, an extremist government, a gruesome rape or a misogynist society. Rushdie combines all these kinds of oppression in one story and even in one character: Sufiya Zinobia. Her father belongs to Sufiya’s private sphere but at the same time, he is one of the leading Generals of Pakistan. It is in the form of this character, Raza Hyder, that we find the ultimate connection between shame and oppression on a private and a public level. In Ovid’s myth, Philomela’s father was also a national leader, and this is just one of the many similarities between the two stories. Although Ovid and Rushdie are separated by two millennia, the essential motifs of their accounts are disturbingly similar. In the discussion of Ovid’s myth, we saw how the violence within the family core was linked to violence on a national level. In *Shame*, we find the exact same thing: “… the society which does that [oppression] to women will allow some of the things to be done to itself as a whole” (Rushdie as qtd. in Chaudhuri).

In *Shame* we also find the same consequences to oppression: muteness and trauma. The combination of colonialism, patriarchism and nationalism leaves the characters traumatized and muted. Of course the female characters in *Shame*, just as Philomela, find alternative ways to express themselves. What is more remarkable is that they use the exact
same methods of expression as Philomela: art and violence. The resemblance between the two stories becomes undeniable when both stories end with a description of a transformation into birds.

II. THE STORY

Edward Said, a specialist in the Western perception of the East, established two remarkable concepts: “filiation and affiliation” (Yaqin 62). He describes filial relationships as relationships “which are fostered through natural bonds ‘involving obedience, fear, love, respect and instinctual conflict’” (Yaqin 63). Affiliation concerns “transpersonal forms” such as “collegiality, professional respect, class, and the hegemony of a dominant culture” (Yaqin 63). Whereas filiation carries connotations of nature and the core family, affiliation belongs to the realm of “culture and society” (Yaqin 63). Rushdie’s *Shame* balances on the cord between these two concepts.

To call Rushdie’s novel rich would be an understatement: there is an abundance of information contained in *Shame* that cannot be easily summarized. One literally has to stand back to discover the global mechanisms behind Rushdie’s enchanting tales. The thin line between affiliation and filiation is one of those mechanisms. This border between society and family, between history and the individual, plays a predominant role in Rushdie’s works (Bayapa 94). *Shame* forms no exception to that rule: on the surface the story presents itself as a family saga full of intrigues, but underneath the family narrative the reader discovers strands of Pakistan’s history. The references to Pakistan are incorporated seamlessly in the narration about two families. Together they form “a sort of modern fairy-tale” (Rushdie 68) that demonstrates how the moral codes of a society influence the political system and vice versa. Ovid already mixed oppression in the private sphere with oppression in the public sphere by linking national and marital violence. *Shame* also exposes how the patriarchal family life suppresses women and links it to other forms of suppression such as colonial rule and dictatorship:

Repression is a seamless garment; a society which is authoritarian in its social and sexual codes, which crushes its women beneath the intolerable burdens of honour and propriety, breeds repressions of other kinds as well. Contrariwise:
dictators are always - or at least in public, on other people’s behalf - puritanical. (Rushdie 181)

The family tale revolves highly around a character called Sufiya Zinobia. But even her origins are bleak and vague. In one of the many metafictional asides in Shame, Rushdie writes that it “is a novel about Sufiya Zinobia” (Rushdie 55). But he immediately undermines his statement by saying that “it would be more accurate, if also more opaque, to say that Sufiya Zinobia is about this novel” (Rushdie 55). Luckily another metafictional passage sheds some light onto the sources of inspiration used by the author.

Not so long ago, in the East End of London, a Pakistani father murdered his only child, a daughter, because by making love to a white boy she had brought such dishonour upon her family that only her blood could wash away the stain. … My Sufiya Zinobia grew out of the corpse of that murdered girl… (Rushdie 117-118)

Sufiya thus originates in central London, the current residence of Salman Rushdie. He describes in Shame how he was appalled by the crime. He furthermore narrates how he listened to the testimonies of “friends and relatives” of the father with abomination:

Sorrowing, they told radio-micro-phones and television cameras that they understood the man’s point of view…(Rushdie 117)

But what shocked him the most was “the realization that, like the interviewed friends etc, [he], too, found [himself] understanding the killer” (Rushdie 117). He realized that he too, belonged to an Asian culture, a culture based upon a “diet of honour and shame” (Rushdie 117). Moreover Rushdie came to the conclusion that his story was also Asian and that it required a change of location:

I realized that to write about her [the murdered girl], about shame, I would have to go back East, to let the idea breathe its favourite air. (Rushdie 119)

And indeed, the story is set out at the foot of the “Impossible Mountains” in the town of Q. (Rushdie 15). This description immediately incites images of Quetta, one of Pakistan’s
major border towns. It is in this city that Omar Khayyam Shakil, Sufiya’s husband to be, sees the light of the day. His conception is just as vague as Sufiya’s as he is an illegitimate child. After the death of Omar’s chauvinist grandfather, his three daughters decided to celebrate their freedom by throwing a party. They shocked the town by inviting the Angrez or colonisers. But they shock the inhabitants of Q. even more when one of them turns out to be pregnant. In order to avert the shame that comes from such an illegitimate conception, the three sisters share the blame and all claim to be Omar’s mother. The presence of the colonisers and the chauvinist father on the first pages announces two of the novels main forms of suppression: patriarchy and colonization. Omar is locked away in Nishapur, the ancestral house of the sisters, until his twelfth birthday when he starts attending school. It is in that schoolyard that he meets Farah Zoroaster who awakes his sexual consciousness. Farah shows no interest until Omar seduces her with one of his favourite past times: hypnosis. He rapes Farah, hereby impregnating her, and moves away to the big city to study medicine.

After Omar’s departs for medicine school, the novel’s focus shifts to Sufiya’s mother: Bilquis. She is raised by her father, the proud owner of a movie theatre. During Partition all movie theatres had to choose a religion, but Bilquis’ father refused. His cinema, ‘The Empire Talkies’, went up in flames due to his tolerance. Bilquis survived the explosion but grew afraid of a hot wind called the Loo. As a consequence of the Partition, Bilquis, like many other inhabitants of India, had to leave behind her homeland and move to Pakistan. Sufiya’s mother thus belongs to the mohajirs, the group of “Indian Muslims” who were “displaced by Partition to Pakistan” (Nicholls 111). The immensity of the mass migration that arose during Partition is concealed within the novel. The author disguises Bilquis’ migration as a love story. Bilquis’ move to the newly founded religious country is incorporated in her encounter with her husband: Raza Hyder. They meet at the Red Fortress in Delhi: he a powerful soldier, she weak and helpless, covered only by a dupatta. It is only later on in the novel, when the author once again refers to the Red Fortress that the link between Bilquis and the mohajir country is made. Before Bilquis and Raza emigrate to Pakistan, they move in with Raza’s family, where “they still live in the old village way” (Rushdie 71). This means that all the females sleep in one bedroom, where the men can visit them once the lights are dimmed. It is in this bedroom that Bilquis meets Rani, a joyful woman who becomes a friend for life to Bilquis. The two women both long for a child, but not as much as their husbands, Raza Hyder and Iskander Harrappa, long for an heir. When Bilquis loses her first son during pregnancy,  

12 Cloth that symbolizes purity
the rivalry between the two husbands, Raza and Iskander begins to simmer. Matters even take a turn for the worst, when Raza’s second child is born it is a girl: Sufiya Zinobia, “the wrong miracle” (Rushdie 88). Iskander also gets a daughter, Arjamund, for a first-born but he does not seem quite as infuriated by this. It is Arjamund herself who will become furious about her sex when she grows up.

The two fathers take over the story with their military and political careers. Raza becomes famous when he conquers a strip of mountainous land, the same strip of land where Omar was conceived. A lot of time has passed, and during that time the three Shakil sisters had already given birth to a second miraculous son: Babar. He does not move away to go to college like his brother, but goes to fight with the rebels in the mountains. Babar is killed during the last days of the rebellion. “The great commander”, Raza Hyder, “himself was responsible for firing the bullet which knocked Babar down” (Rushdie 135).

Iskander and Raza do not only have a similar career path, they also fancy the same woman: Pinkie Aurangzeb. Iskander succeeds in seducing her and in taking up the presidential throne of Pakistan. “A man’s honour is in his women” (Rushdie 96) and so Raza becomes more and more competitive. Eventually, Raza succeeds in his revenge: he commits a coup and makes sure that Iskander Harappa is hanged. Iskander’s wife and daughter are imprisoned in the family estate, but as Rani cleverly remarks: “house arrest changes very little” (Rushdie 198). All the women in the novel had already been locked up after Partition. Both Rani, Bilquis and Sufiya found themselves locked up in their family ‘home’. Whereas the imprisonment of Rani and Arjamund got stricter, one woman got unleashed: Sufiya Zinobia. At that point in the novel Sufiya, now married to Omar Shakil, has already suffered from severe attacks of aggression. Omar was not only her husband, he also functioned as Sufiya’s physician; at one point he had to admit that there was no cure for her mood swings. The only way to protect her surroundings from her was to lock her up in the attic room. Sufiya’s rage, fostered on the numerous sources of shame, knew no limits and she broke through a brick wall. She haunts her family, who are already on the run after yet another coup, to Nishapur, the home of her husband.

Omar ends his life where he started it: in the household of his three mothers. He has taken along with him Raza and Bilquis whom are running from the rebels. His mothers, however, have not forgotten the death of their second son, for which Raza was responsible. The three sisters murder Raza and dissolve into air. Omar gets one last visit from his wife which is described in rather vague terms. Omar’s murder by his wife Sufiya is doomed to oblivion as the event is followed up by an even more gruesome event: the explosion.
Nishapur goes up in flames and Omar’s ancestral home and in-laws are consumed by the fire. Just as the Empire Talkies went up in flames, so is Nishapur reduced to a “silent cloud, in the shape of a giant, grey and headless man, a figure of dreams, a phantom with one arm lifted in a gesture of farewell” (Rushdie 305).

The family saga thus takes place in the East, in a country that “is not Pakistan, or not quite…” (Rushdie 22). Although Rushdie interlaces the familial narration with references to Pakistan and its politics, he is unwilling to say that it is a novel about Pakistan. He dismisses *Shame* as “a sort of modern fairy-tale”, so “nobody need get upset, or take anything […] too seriously” (Rushdie 68). The novel is not solemnly about Pakistan, that much is true. “It relates to India, it relates to Asia, [it] relates to most of the Third World as an idea” (Rushdie as qtd. in Mathur 92).

Although *Shame*’s motifs can be applied to much more than Pakistan, it still remains an “overtly political” novel with an abundance of allusions to Pakistan. In his article “Sense and Sensibility in *Shame*”, O.P. Mathur gives an excellent overview of the major similarities to the real country:

… the country of *Shame*, with its landmarks like “Q” (Quetta), “K” (Karachi) which includes a Defence Colony, and the new capital (Islamabad) is unmistakably Pakistan. Some of the characters have close parallels in history - President Shaggy Dog (Yahya Khan), Iskander Harappa (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto), Rani Humayun (Begum Nusrat Bhutto), Arjumand Harappa (Benazir Bhutto), and Raza Hyder (Zia ul-Haq). (Mathur 89)

But Pakistan is even more present in the deep-felt hatred for the country that runs through the novel. A hatred that is not pointed towards the inhabitants, but towards the origins of the country: “the famous moth-eaten Partition” (Rushdie 57). Pakistan arose out of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent after the decolonization. The ground idea was to construct a separate country for the Muslims. Rushdie describes these events as follows:

… Partition that chopped up the old country and handed Al-Lah a few insect-nibbled slices of it, some dusty western acres and jungly eastern swamps that the ungodly were happy to do without. (Al-Lah’s new country: two chunks of land a thousand miles apart. A country so improbable that it could almost exist). (57)
Of course, Partition had devastating consequences as over ten million people had to leave their homes to go and live in the robust country that is Pakistan. But Rushdie’s motives are not completely objective. His hatred for Pakistan originates in his love for his “imaginary country”\textsuperscript{13} India (Rushdie 86). Mathur remarks that Rushdie uses Pakistan as a looking glass that “helps him in an exploration of the self and a recognition and confirmation of the basically Indian features of his thoughts and attitudes” (90). Rushdie left India before the Partition and thus never lived in Pakistan, but the newly founded country became the new home of his family. For Rushdie Pakistan is thus a construction, not a reality. When he describes the three sisters Shakil, one cannot help but think of the three sistercountries: Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. Just as the sisters Shakil can “only be comprehended if you [take] them as a whole”, so one cannot understand the three countries without looking at their mutual bonds as “they [are] still not genuinely discrete” (Rushdie 34).

For Rushdie Pakistan is an improbable construction, one that can only be captured by an even more improbable novel. In a metafictional passage Rushdie remarks that “however [he chooses] to write about over-there, [he] is forced to reflect that world in fragments of broken mirrors” (66). Nicholls states that Rushdie conceives Pakistan as “insufficiently imagined” (Rushdie 87) and that Rushdie responded to this perception by writing a novel that is “insufficiently imaginative” (Nicholls 112). Pakistan is a broken country. In fact, Pakistan is a fragment of another country. What should be an epic, a tale about two leaders, subsequently turns into a chaotic account of disappointment.

The deceitful construct of Pakistan is emphasized by the numerous comments in the novel on the name ‘Pakistan’ itself. According to the narrator the term “was originally thought up in England by a group of Muslim intellectuals. P for Punjabis, A for Afghans, K for the Kasmiris, S for Sind and the ‘tan’, they say, for Baluchistan” (85). The narrator goes even so far as to blame the secession of Bangladesh on the acronym. There is no letter that represents Bangladesh, the East Wing “never got its name in the title, and so, eventually, it took the hint and seceded from the secessionists” (Rushdie 85). But Rushdie does not write about ‘Pakistan’ but about ‘Peccavistan’. In Latin ‘Peccavi’ means ‘I have sinned’, a pun that refers to a population segment of Pakistan. For Rushdie the Sinds and sin are one and selfsame.

\textsuperscript{13} One of Rushdie’s later works is entitled “Imaginary Homelands”. In this collection of essays he describes the postcolonial world through the eyes of the migrant, focussing on the peripheral position and the specific problems it brings along.
III. METHODS OF OPPRESSION

The narrator takes his readers to a troubled country, with two even more troubled families who fight each other over the power of that country. Trouble is inevitable and suppression is ubiquitous: people are bound to get hurt. The characters most likely to get hurt are the women, the ones most likely to hurt are the men. I will thus once again start my discussion of the narrative themes with a discussion of the powers of oppression that are spread throughout the novel and that make life hard on the female characters. To the patriarchal and nationalist violence that were already present in the myth of Philomela, a third power of suppression is added in the form of colonialism.

A. NATIONALISM, PATRIARCHY AND COLONIALISM

In the analysis of the myth of Philomela we discussed the importance of the two male leaders, Pandion and Tereus. In Shame we find a similar situation in the characters of Iskander and Raza. Just as Pandion was more than a pater familias, so are Iskander and Raza more than just patriarchs, they are political leaders as well. Due to their political function the tale’s subject moves from a patriarchal saga towards a sort of ‘national epic’. However, it would be a mistake to call Shame a national epic, as it is not epic at all. On the contrary, Shame is a novel about how the desire for an epic nation can backfire. In Iskander we recognize the contours of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, one of Pakistan’s first dictators. Underneath the character of Raza one can discern another dictatorial leader of the country: Zia ul-Haq. Pakistan had such a thirst for a national history, a sense of pride, that several dictatorships were able to hold the country in a tight grasp.

But where did that thirst come from? Why was nationalism such a hot topic in the newly-independent country? The source of this craving can be found in the colonial period and in the Partition that followed from it. When people are suppressed by another country, more emphasis is put on the specific nature of their own identity. In Ovid’s myth the Greek identity gains importance when it is threatened by the barbarians that are standing outside Athens’ gates. In the case of Pakistan, that specific nature was religion, more specifically, a strong belief in Al-lah. Before the colonisation India was one of the few countries where different kinds of religions could be practised side by side. Due to the colonizers, more and
more emphasis was put on the religious aspect. This shift had tremendous consequences; by the time the colonizers left the country it was already ripped in two by religion. In *Shame* we read that the three sisters Shakil, though Muslim themselves, were raised “with the help of Parsee wet-nurses, Christian ayahs and an iron mentality that was mostly Muslim” (Rushdie 5). This particular scene takes place before the Partition and proves that things were not as black and white as the Muslim dictators wanted the people to believe. The narrator remarks that “in those days, people were not so keen on the servants of God as we are told they become at present…” (Rushdie 38).

The colonizers subtly play a significant role in the novel, as Omar’s father was probably one of them (Chandra 78). Omar is conceived at his mothers’ party and he thus seems to “symbolize the illegitimate fruit of the encounter between the East and the West” (Banerjee 73). The humiliation that comes with being colonized robbed the inhabitants of their self-worth. Afzal-Khan remarks that Pakistani “still view themselves as objects because they have been unable to shake off the sense of shame and denigration heaped on them during colonial rule” (160). This has two effects: firstly, dictators have free rule as the population does not have the self-esteem to revolt in time. Secondly, under all that denigration, only the strongest personalities, the most puritanical persons can grasp power. These two effects left the Pakistani helpless against the succession of dictators that was bound to arrive, but it left a part of the population even more vulnerable: the women.

Colonialism and patriarchy are mutually reinforcing powers of misogynist subversion. This devastating observation can already be deduced from Raza Hyder’s name. ‘Raza’ reminds us of the British Raj or the British colonial rule of the Indian subcontinent that lasted for almost a century (Nicholls 114). Moreover, Zia ul-Haq, the political leader on whom Hyder was modelled, was responsible for the islamization of Pakistan that brought along a lot of misogynist laws (Petersson 178). “In an interview Rushdie has said that the political repression in Pakistan in a way is legitimated by the existence of a social code that is in itself oppressive. The people who experience this most strongly are women” (Petersson 169). The social code refers partially to the patriarchal norms in Pakistan and the political repression is the outcome of colonialism.

The suppressive combination of patriarchy, colonialism and nationalism is a widely discussed subject. Ania Loomba, a specialist in postcolonial studies, states two main reasons why colonialism intensifies patriarchy. The first reason is a shift in power from the public to the private area. Under colonial oppression, the colonized men feel disempowered and they compensate this exclusion from the public sphere by increasing there power within the
private sphere (Loomba 142). The loss of power in the public sphere makes men look for ‘pure’ emblems of their culture and nationality and they chose women as the personifications of these ideals. Not only do the characters in *Shame* believe that “a man’s honour is in his women” (Rushdie 96), the nation of Pakistan seems to be personified by Sufiya Zinobia (Petersson 117). In Ovid’s myth we find a similar situation: Philomela and her sister are used as a sort of currency of national pride. Due to their emblematic role as symbols of the nation, they have become surrogate victims that have to buffer external attacks. Their only purpose is to represent the nation, to be as pure as can be, and to succumb to the will of the patriarchs.

Ania Loomba sees the rise of nationality as a second reason for the intensification of patriarchy. Nationalism itself was, as stated above, the result of the colonial period and this new-found ideal of the self-fashioning nationalist “required his wife into a fresh subservience” (Loomba 185). This, again, can be proven by the character of Raza. As mentioned above, the character of Raza is based on the real life president Zia ul-Haq. This political leader introduced a lot of misogynist laws and hereby deteriorated the situation of women in Pakistan. This misogynist stance is reflected in Raza’s reaction to his first-born’s gender is quiet denigrating. Raza kept shouting at the doctors that it must be a mistake that his first-born is a girl (Rushdie 88). From this example, we can deduce the low status of women and the importance of a male heir. A male successor proves to be the ultimate question of honour in patriarchal societies. It is this measure of significance that makes the myth of Philomela so cruel. By murdering Tereus’ son, the two women took away Tereus’ most important possession. In Ovid’s myth we find another instance of this “fresh subservience”: when Athens gates are under attack, Proce has to follow her father’s wishes and marry one of the enemies to restore the order. Whereas male descendants embody a family’s success and status, women are merely treated as commodities to sustain that success.

The combination of nationalism, patriarchy and colonialism leaves the women in a misogynist environment, a world that offers nothing but bleak prospects. Bilquis’ father is nicknamed a woman and perceives this as a horrible insult: “‘Woman’.. Was there ever such a broad-backed and also dirty word?” (Rushdie 58). And indeed, in a land where some clubs still carry a sign that says “Woman and Dogs not Allowed beyond this point” (Rushdie 66), the term ‘woman’ is as grave an insult as there ever was. This misogynist climate brings Iskander so far as to say to his daughter that she should “rise above [her] gender as [she grows]” as her country “is no place to be a woman in” (Rushdie 129). But it is not just the fatherly advice that reflects the misogyny in Pakistan: when the mentally disabled Sufiya Zinobia receives a wedding offer, Bilquis eagerly agrees. She silences all the adversaries of
the marriage by saying that “a woman does not have to be a brainbox. In many opinions brains are a positive disadvantage to a woman in marriage” (Rushdie 169).

Being a woman is not just a disadvantage; it often entails one form or another of imprisonment. Unlike Philomela, the female characters of the novel are not locked away in a remote cabin in the woods but in patriarchal prisons, disguised as family homes. Bilquis, for example, ends up in the ancestral house of her husband that is ruled with iron fists by Bariamma. Even the rebellious Shakil sisters were so used to being “imprisoned in the zenana wing” of their home (Rushdie 5), Nishapur, that even after their father has died they keep themselves isolated from the rest of the world. But most of the confined women did not choose their prisons. Rani Harrapa, for example, did not choose to be sealed off from the outside world. First, her husband leaves her at the Mohenjo estate in total isolation. Later on in the story, the new government puts her under house arrest, and for another six years Rani cannot leave the family estate (Rushdie 197).

The men in the book even resolve to more concrete forms of imprisonment. Sufiya Zinobia, for example, is drugged and “at night, when the servants were asleep, Raza Hyder and Omar Khayyam carried [her] up the attic stairs” (Rushdie 250). The more literal immuration of Sufiya is probably the clearest echo of Philomela’s cabine. Imprisonment in the attic is also a common place in postcolonial and feminist literature. Petersson remarks that Sufiya’s second name, Zinobia, carries “a feministic charge” (174): “In The Madwoman in the Attic Gilbert and Gubar refer to a novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne, where a feminist, Zenobia, appears” (Petersson 174). But that same ‘attic’ also carries a postcolonial undertone. In Jane Eyre, Bertha Mason, a Jamaican creole is also locked up in the attic. Bertha represents the repressed third world woman (Staels)14. The novel provides us with an even more direct association of the attic room with the colonial period: “There was an attic room. (It was a house designed by Angrez architects)” (Rushdie 250).

B. SEXUAL TRANSGRESSION: RAPE

The three suppressive powers – nationalism, patriarchy and colonialism - are all emblematized in Shame by rape. In the myth of Philomela the transfer from patriarchy and nationalism to rape was quite literal. Philomela was raped as a result of her father’s will to

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14 The importance of Bertha Mason as a colonial symbol was discussed by Hilde Staels in a lecture on Canadian postcolonial literature. The novel in casu was Fall on your Knees by Ann-Marie MacDonald in which echoes of Jane Eyre can be found.
preserve the nation. In Rushdie’s novel the motifs are somewhat more dispersed. Over the years, rape has often become a metaphor in postcolonial writings for the invasion and colonization of a country by a foreign force. Here, in *Shame*, we find quite a literal example of the link between rape and colonialism in the conception of Omar. The author is very opaque concerning the precise nature of Omar’s conception, all the reader gets to know is that he was conceived at his mother’s party and that a lot of the invitees were colonizers. Nicholls noticed that the language used is a “suggestive and problematic discourse of sexual imposition” (116):

In phraseology that uncomfortably mimics the ‘music that acquired a fatally demonic quality when forced out of the virtuosi’s outraged instruments’, we are informed that ‘it began to be bruited in the bazaars of Q. that one of the three nose-in-air girls had been put, on that wild night, into the family way’ (Rushdie 16). (Nicholls 116)

Chandra dares to be more direct in her conclusion when she states that “their common shame is husbanded by an Angrez Sahib” (78). Banerjee confirms that Omar’s father was an Englishman but she describes Omar as “the illegitimate child of the romance between Pakistani mother and English military father” (73). The exact nature of the events cannot be retraced but rape seems to be the most plausible explanation. One of the Shakil sisters suffered the same denigrating violation as Philomela: not only were they both raped, they were also raped by the enemy.

When Bilquis’ father’s cinema goes up in flames it takes place “during a particularly suggestive love scene” (Rushdie 60). The explosion that follows from this “denudes Bilquis of all but her ‘dupatta of modesty’: an item of clothing that fails to completely repudiate the act of violation, even though it is symbolically crucial in preserving Bilquis’ dignity” (Nicholls 115). Bilquis’ fate, like that of her fellow migrants, is “to be stripped of history, to stand naked amidst the scorn of strangers” (Rushdie 60). During the explosion all her clothes are blasted away except for her dupatta and her history burns away before her eyes, searing her eyebrows off. According to Nicholls, “the language of denuding amidst hostile strangers gestures uncomfortably towards the scene of rape: a form of sexual violence that ran to ‘unaccountable numbers’ during Partition” (Nicholls 116). Bilquis, as a symbol of the mohajirs, emblematizes Partition and the migrancy that resulted from it. When Rushdie describes Bilquis’ bewilderment after the fire, he compares her baffled stance with that of the
millions of migrants. When he imagines his family members who were rounded up during Partition, he believes that “they might have felt some hint of the fictional presence of Bilquis Kemal, rushing cut and naked past them like a ghost” (Rushdie 61).

Bilquis also brings to mind one of the categories of rape in Antiquity, described by Susan Deacy. She resembles the “parthenoi who are lured away from the paternal oikos, are raped and give birth to remarkable offspring” (Deacy as qtd. in Harris). Bilquis is taken away from her homeland, raped by Partition, and her offspring – Sufiya Zinobia - is more than remarkable. In Bilquis we also find echoes of Proce. Just as the eldest daughter of Pandion she marries a leader of a foreign country and misses her homeland.

In Arjamund Harappa and Naveed Hyder we recognize the two other categories established by Deacy. Arjamund fits Deacy’s description perfectly: “parthenoi who reject normal female activities and wish to remain unmarried” (Deacy as qtd. in Harris). To Arjamund a “woman’s body... brings a person nothing but babies, pinches and shame” (Rushdie 107). She refuses to take on the role of a woman and hides her femininity as much as possible. Her reluctance to get married gave her an interesting nickname: the virgin Ironpants.

Bilquis’ second daughter had a wholly different approach to femininity she indulged in it. Her goal in life was to be the perfect married woman, but after an incredible amount of pregnancies she bitterly concludes that “no matter how hard you tried to be the most proper of ladies the men would come and stuff you full of alien unwanted life” (Rushdie 218).

Deacy’s third category of violation represents marriage. In Good News Hyder we find a tragic version of how much marriage can resemble rape in a world where there is no such thing as too much children. Just as Ovid’s myth displayed the thin line between marriage and rape, so does the character of Naveed Hyder in Shame.

A more obvious example of rape in Shame is provided in the form of Farah Zoroaster, the ‘playground love’ of Omar Khayyam Shakil. Although Rushdie, just as Ovid, does not describe the rape itself, the pregnancy of Farah forms irrevocable proof. Farah showed no interest in Omar as a lover, but when he displays his hypnosis skills she shows some interest in his newly acquired art.

‘Have you ever’, he asks Farah Zoroaster, ‘been hypnotized?’ – And for the first time in history, she looks at him with interest. Afterwards, when her womb began to swell… (Rushdie 48)
The description of the rape is thus non-existent. Like Ovid, the narrator stays painfully vague about the exact nature of the events. The interesting part of this rape is thus not the actual deed itself, but the excuse that Omar made up to console himself. He believed in one of the “first reassurances in the hypnotic process”: “You will do anything that I ask you to do, but I will ask you to do nothing that you will be unwilling to do” (Rushdie 48). Omar thus tries to console himself with an imaginary form of mutual consent. The topic of consent proves to be a redundant topic in patriarchal societies. Just as the consent of the woman involved was not of any importance in patriarchal Greece, so it is of no importance in islamitized Pakistan.

Rape is not a crime in such societies because it is not punished by law.

In Sufiya Zinobia we find another example of the lethal combination of patriarchy and rape. When she attacks Omar for the first time it is caused by Omar’s “assumption of culturally licensed sexual prerogatives that he might exercise via demand, rather than request” (Nicholls 116). Actually, Omar did not want intercourse, but Sufiya was so used to men taking instead of asking what they want that she proceeded to attack him anyway:

…he made the mistake of commanding her to lie down on the bed, without explaining that he had no intention of forcing her to, demanding his marital, so of course she misunderstood his purpose and at once the thing began, the yellow fire burning from her eyes, and she leapt from the bed and came at him with her hands stuck out like hooks. (Rushdie 249)

Omar thus never raped Sufiya, but she did however experience a sort of rape herself at birth. Raza Hyder, her father, was furious when he found out that his first-born was a girl and refused to accept her gender. He “tore away swaddling cloth; having penetrated to the baby within, he jabbed at its nether zones: ‘There! I ask you, sir, what is that?’” (Rushdie 89). For Nicholls this scene describes a “symbolic act of violation rendered in a language of sexualised aggression” (116).

Moreover, Raza’s non-fictional counterpart Zia ul-Haq was the one responsible for the Hudood Ordinances. A set of laws which were established in 1979 “as a first step in his Islamization policies” (Nicholls 117): “The legal interpretation of rape within the second of the ordinances, the Zina Ordinance, means that the rape victim’s testimony may amount to prima facie evidence of her indulgence in illicit fornication, as might any pregnancy resulting from the rape” (Nicholls 117). Raped women are thus associated with adultery (Nicholls 117); here we hear an echo of Philomela who saw herself as a traitor to her sister although
she had not wanted the intercourse. As I already stated, consent is of no importance in a patriarchal society as “evil tongues will say anything, especially about beautiful women” (Rushdie 5). A woman can never prove her innocence as it is believed that even an eight year old girl knows perfectly well how to lure a man: “Who knows what encouragement she [Farah Zoroaster] gives, because a woman knows how to tell a man if he is wanted or not wanted, of course, even at eight years old, these things are in the blood” (Rushdie 44).

On 18 July 2005, The Times published an article\textsuperscript{15} by Rushdie on rape in Pakistan and India. The subject thus lies close to the author’s heart and he condemns the law system of both countries for their inability to cope with the problem. Both countries are plagued with a persistent flaw in the law system: the tension between political law and religious, or Sharia, law. Too often the religious, orthodox Muslim law wins, as nobody dares to enrage the religious leaders. The patriarchal, chauvinist moral code that arose after Partition is partially accountable for the high numbers of rape during and after Partition.

The “culture” of rape that exists in India and Pakistan arises from profound social anomalies, its origins lying in the unchanging harshness of a moral code based on the concepts of honour and shame. Thanks to the code’s ruthlessness, raped women will go on hanging themselves in the woods and walking into rivers to drown themselves. (Rushdie, The Times)

Sufiya’s second name ‘Zinobia’ references the Zina law “and this reading is reinforced by the fact that Sufiya is a character inspired by a Pakistani father’s murder of his daughter …for … making love to a white boy” (Nicholls 117). Philomela was not only raped by Tereus, she was also raped by the patriarchal laws of her father. Due to the strict moral code she was unable to express her emotions in words as the only language she knew was the patriarchal language.

The name Zenobia “may not only reference the ‘Zina’ law but also the contemporary metropolitan injustice of ‘xenophobia’” (Nicholls 120). An injustice that proved not to be all that contemporary as even the ancient Greeks in Philomela’s myth suffered from a severe disgust towards ‘barbaroi’. The xenophobia alludes to the place of Sufiya’s origin: London.

\textsuperscript{15}Rushdie, Salman. “Where is the honour in this vile code that condemns women to die in Shame?” The Times<18 July 2005. 5 March 2010 <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article545117.ece>
The capital of the colonizing country, where two girls were violated. One was murdered by her father, another was attacked in the subway, and all this for reasons of colour.

Adultery was another male transgression found in Ovid’s myth and there is an abundance of adulterous examples in Rushdie’s novel as well. In fact, the comparison goes much further as many of the adulterous scenes involve a love triangle. At the very beginning of the novel we are faced with the case of “Zeenat and Farida” (Rushdie 40), two women who were caught up in an adulterous triangle. When their husbands come to understand that they are not the only ones involved in illicit relationships they murder each other. Zeenat and Farida respond in a wholly different way. Instead of hating “each other like poison”, they “shacked up together… and lived, after that triple killing, in unbreakable friendship and celibacy for the rest of their days” (Rushdie 40). Philomela and Procne also united against Tereus instead of hating each other and the same thing happens with Bilquis and Rani. These two women are silent bystanders of a love triangle in which Iskander, Raza and Pinkie play the roles of protagonists:

The fact is that Raza Hyder was smitten right between the eyes by Pinkie Aurangzeb. He desired her so badly that it made the bruise on his forehead ache, but he lost her to Iskander Harappa, right there at the Marshall’s reception. (Rushdie 105)

According to the author, this love triangle was the main reason for Iskander’s and Raza’s mutual hatred for each other, and thus for the political turmoil in ‘Peccavistan’ during the 1980s.

The importance of the number three cannot be overestimated in this novel. Not only does the love triangle between the two leaders play a predominant role, it is also a novel about one country being divided into three. In fact, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, seem to be caught up in an incestuous relationship of their own right. Chandra emphasizes the importance of the number by looking for other examples triangular constructions:

The story culminates in Bilquis, the wife of future president, conceiving thrice in her life-time…. After the murder of Iskander, Rani weaves three times twice three, eighteen shawls. The entire drama of Shame is enacted, however, by thirteen characters of major consequence. … The history of Pakistan, thus travels from three to thirteen – an ominous proposition. (77)
IV. CONSEQUENCES OF RAPE: MUTENESS AND TRAUMA

Pakistani women are bowed down by a mixture of nationalist, colonialist and patriarchal oppression. This lethal combination breeds feelings of shame but also of shamelessness. The provoked shame manifests itself in muteness. In the inability to express oneself due to a lack of self-worth that is caused by the many years of humiliation and annihilation. Due to their inability to vent their tragic fates they cannot process their memories properly. As their recollections never receive an adequate place in their minds, the images of violence disturb the general function of their consciousness and leaves the women severely traumatized.

A. LOSS OF LANGUAGE

Tereus showed us how scared men are of female speech. His reaction to this fear was twofold: first he cut off Philomela’s tongue and secondly he locked her up. Both reactions can be found in *Shame* as well. I already discussed the numerous cases of imprisonment in the novel, now I would like to demonstrate where this need for imprisonment comes from. There is one phrase in the novel that is repeated several times and that pins down this preoccupation with captivity:

But if a peacock dances in the jungle, there is nobody to see its tail. (Rushdie 93)

The jungle symbolizes isolation and more specifically the isolation that women in Pakistan suffer from as they are often confined to the family home. Due to their restriction to the private sphere, the women can easily be suppressed by their husbands and fathers because they are physically stronger. “In public however”, the female’s “voice, if heard, would make them equal” (Joplin 263). Tereus understood the tension between the public and the private sphere and decided to keep Philomela locked away in the ‘private sphere’ of a cabin in the woods. The patriarchs in *Shame* react in a similar way: the women hardly ever see the outside world as they are locked in family mansions and attic rooms by their male relatives.
Sufiya Zinobia is not only silenced by her father and husband but also by her other creator: the author. Much like Philomela, who was betrayed by Ovid when he displaced Tereus’ lust “onto Philomela herself” (Joplin 273). The narrator turns Sufiya “into a sort of an idiot” (Rushdie 118), automatically turning her into a muted woman, as who would ever listen to an “idiot”? We also find echoes of the cutting off of the tongue in *Shame* in one of the sources of inspiration for Sufiya: Anna. In order to fully understand Anna’s background, a full version of these pages are included in the attachments. Rushdie based his female protagonist on three casualties he read about in the newspapers. The importance of these lines thus demands an extensive study of this episode. Moreover every attempt at a recapitulation of this excerpt would end up in tragedy: the episode is so dense and improbable that a shortened version would automatically be deemed unbelievable. Anna’s story - and by extension Sufiya - can thus only be comprehended by reading the whole excerpt.

Anna’s “throat” was “slit like a halal chicken, lying in a London night across a zebra crossing, slumped across *black and white, black and white*…” (Rushdie 118, *my emphasis*). This particular cutting off “reif[ies] the murder” (Ben-Yishai 208), the “halal chicken” and the repetition of “black” and “white” foreshadow the motives behind the murder. The halal chicken refers to sacrificial slaughtering, to murdering in a way approved by God. The description of the girl’s throat thus “[implies] the God-instructed purifying process this murder brings about” (Ben-Yishai 211). The moral codes of Pakistani society seem to permit such crimes. A similar phenomena can be found in the myth of Philomela: the exchange of women is accepted as normal behaviour and the killing of a child is justified by loyalty to the nation. In *Shame*, loyalty to Al-Lah, to religion, replaces the loyalty for the nation. Although in the case of Pakistan, Al-Lah and the nation are often indiscernible.

Another sentence hints towards such a conclusion: “And the father left with *blood-cleansed* name and grief” (Rushdie 118, *my emphasis*). According to Ben-Yishai, the godly tone of the murder places it “within a mythological order” (208). This mythical feel is reinforced by Rushdie’s description of time through which he makes a clear distinction between the West and the East. The West lives “in the aftermath of the death of God and of tragedy”, whereas the East still lives in a time filled with God. Rushdie even uses another time calendar, “the Hegiran calendar” (Rushdie 6). He writes that “all this happened in the fourteenth century” (Rushdie 6) and for a moment the reader places the story in a far away time. That difference in time is never wholly recovered, hereby giving the story an even more mythical appeal and ignoring the narrators plead:
…don’t imagine that stories of this type always take place long long ago. Time cannot be homogenized as easily as milk, and in those parts, until quite recently, the thirteen-hundreds were still in full swing. (Rushdie 6)

Mathur remarks that “superimposition of the past on the present, of the Georgian fourteenth century on the Hegiran fourteenths, suggest that in Pakistan our twentieth century is really the medieval fourteenth” (85). This discrepancy brings “out the contradictions inherent in the life and values in Pakistan” (Mathur 85).

Let us return to Anna and focus on the colonial and racial aspects of her description. Anna’s “throat” was “slit like a halal chicken, lying in a London night across a zebra crossing, slumped across black and white, black and white…” (Rushdie 118, my emphasis). I already explained the image of “halal chicken” and the connotations that are connected to this image. Now, I would like to focus on the colours of the zebra crossing: “black and white, black and white” (Rushdie 118). The repetition draws attention to the underlying message of the colours: race. Anna was murdered for dating a white boy, a ‘crime’ that her father could not forgive. Here we find an instance of the East, of colour blocking out the whites, but most of the time the racial tension happens the other way around. The white West has played the dominator so many times that it has left the dominated broken, muted and powerless. Here we move away from a literal loss of tongue and go towards a more metaphorical loss of speech. Gayatri Spivak challenges the domination of the West in her renowned article “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. This essay contests the West as the eternal subject and the East as the eternal object. The Subject thus always belongs to the “exploiters’ side of the international division of labor” (Spivak 24), and as it is always the subject who acts, writes, speaks about it, only that side of the story is known to the world. There have of course been numerous instances were one of the westerners decided to write about the other side of the division. The East might then become the subject, the theme of the work, but it is never the Subject or agens of it. For Spivak, “the clearest available example of such epistemic violence…is the heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as the Other” (24-25). The “Other” takes up many forms in the intellectual debate, from Gothic characters to postcolonial characters, in fact anyone who belongs to the margins of a society is “Other”. This discrimination is not solemnly contemporary, in Ovid’s myth we could already observe the very strict distinction between “barbaroi” and “Hellenes” (Joplin 264). Everything and everyone outside of Athens gates was denominated inferior and hostile.
Those margins play an important role in Rushdie’s novel. In the metafictional asides Omar is described as “a minor character” (Rushdie 45), a “peripheral” (Rushdie 18) hero. Omar was not only born at the border of civilization in the mountain village of Q., he also lives in the periphery of this novel. He is not one of the great leaders, but an outcast that is tolerated by the elite. He also disappears from the novel for several chapters, only to return in yet another peripheral role as the husband of Sufiya. The narrator thus claims to look at the periphery, at the margin, but does he succeed in this? For Spivak the margins are constituted by “the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of urban subproletariat” (25). She also provides the reader with a schematized version of the different levels in postcolonial society (Spivak 26):

1. Dominant foreign groups.
2. Dominant indigenous groups on the all-India level.
3. Dominant indigenous groups at the regional and local levels.
4. The terms ‘people’ and ‘subaltern classes’ [are] used as synonymous throughout [Guha’s definition]. The social groups and elements included in this category represent the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the ‘elite’.

Rushdie’s male characters, just like Ovid’s protagonists, are all national leaders themselves or related to this group. They thus all belong to the second or the third group and all have extensive family estates to prove their elitist genealogy. The difference between the second and the third category raises some questions: do leaders of Pakistan belong to the all-India level or to the regional levels? Either way, they can hardly be used as a representation of the peripheries, as representative for the subaltern margins. Rushdie includes a counterargument in one of his asides: “every story one chooses to tell is a kind of censorship, it prevents the telling of other tales” (Rushdie 68). Spivak seems to support this stance: “[w]hen we come to the concomitant question of the consciousness of the subaltern the notion of what the work cannot say becomes important” (Spivak 28). When Spivak encourages her readers to turn to the margins she says that “one can just as well say the silent, silenced centre” to refer to those margins (25). Petersson gives us an oversight of the peripheral stories that are told in the novel:
Omar’s peripheral position in space as well as in relation to the power is stressed time and again, which charges this position with significance. The same position as he has vis-à-vis the course of events in the novel, the narrator has vis-à-vis the country and the women vis-à-vis society. (151)

The narrator’s greatest accomplishment lies in his description of the last category: women. According to Spivak, this is the category that suffers the hardest from silence:

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effected. ...the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow… (28)

The narrator’s most prominent female characters is without a doubt Sufiya Zinobia. I already enlightened some of the details concerning her origins and I will elaborate on them a little more in order to really grasp Rushdie’s treatment of female characters. Sufiya is based on three existing persons, the first one was Anna, the girl who was murdered by her father for dating a white boy. The narrator muses about her extensively, “in [his] imagination she spoke with an East London accent but wore jeans”, she is “lively, no doubt attractive, a little too dangerously so” (Rushdie 118). Even from these lines it becomes clear that Anna does not really have a voice, she is the object, not the subject, of Rushdie’s musings (Ben-Yishai 209). As the passage evolves, it becomes clearer and clearer that Anna “is contained within the male gaze” (Ben-Yishai 209). The male gaze, just like colonialism, is a common place for the tension between subject and object. John Berger wrote a book titled Ways of Seeing and explains how “patriarchal society entails that a woman be constructed as an object for the ‘look’ of the male spectator” (Berger in Walters 51). The male gaze is thus inherent to patriarchal societies in which “men act and women appear” (Berger as qtd. in Walters 51). The male gaze became one of the most studied subjects in feminist studies and was mostly considered in the context of cinema. The links between the male gaze and cinema are described by Laura Mulvey in her influential article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (Berger 53). She confirms Berger’s opposition between the male subject and the female object and links it “to psychoanalysis, specifically Lacanian psychoanalysis” (Berger 53). In
an interview with David Cronenberg, Rushdie reveals the links between the excerpt on Anna and cinema (Cronenberg):

CRONENBERG: Have you ever written a screenplay?

RUSHIE: Let me just say that I’m completely obsessed with movies. I’ve always said that movies had more impact on me than novels in a formational way. So the answer is yes, I’ve twice tried to write a screenplay and what happened on each occasion is that it turned into a part of the novel I was writing. For instance, I actually wrote a draft screenplay of an honour-killing which took place in England that I read about in the paper. You know where a father kills his daughter because she’s consorting with a white boy and she’s brought shame on the family so he kills her. I wrote a draft of a screenplay for that and then I realized that I was actually writing this novel about honour and shame. It was quite obviously an English variation on the theme that I was exploring over there, so, in the end, I made it into a chapter in the novel, *Shame*.

The filmic origins of the “Blushing”-chapter (Rushdie 117) explains Rushdie’s use of the male gaze. The author muses extensively about Anna hereby presenting himself as the spectator and Anna as the object of his musings.

She danced behind my eyes, her nature changing each time I glimpsed her: now innocent, now whore…(Rushdie 118)

According to Ben-Yishai, Anna “is trapped between the (male) imperative for her to be attractive” (innocence) “and the ‘danger’ (also from men) of being so” (whore) (209). Philomela also underwent the male gaze, “her beauty”, “finery” and “elegance” is gazed upon by Tereus who will later violate her (Ovid 135). In fact it is Philomela’s innocent embrace that incited him to turn her in to an adulteress.

Anna is thus described as passive and in order to let her come alive Rushdie consults two other casualties. For a full understanding of these three casualties, I would once again recommend a reading of the excerpt in the attachments. The second casualty, a girl, never
gets a name, she is not looked at through a male gaze and even earns a subject status. Her status as a subject, however, does not spring from her own specificity but from another set of Rushdie’s musings. The girl, in reality, was as passive as Anna, she was attacked in the subway for reasons of colour. The second object of Rushdie’s musings never lifted a finger towards the boys or never defended herself through active violence. It is the male narrator who “imagine[s] what would have happened if such a fury could have been released in that girl on her underground train” (Rushdie 119). The author uses Anna as an object: an emblem of shame. The second Asian girl is forced by the author to become a subject despite herself. Rushdie is thus very conscious about the opposition between object and subject. He wanted to write about the objectification of third world women, but he also wanted to prove that shame, over the years, can lead to retaliation. Anna still represents the idea of deep felt shame, the second girl already leads to the concept of retaliation. A third casualty will bring the two girls together so that they become a solid source of inspiration for the character of Sufiya. The third casualty is a self-combusting boy, again Asian, who is at once passive and active. This boy went up in flames, without any evidence of incentives: “the boy had simply ignited of his own accord” (Rushdie 120). Ben-Yishai focuses on the gender of the third victim and states that “it takes a boy to put the two together” (Ben-Yishai 210). The two girls, subject and object cannot be combined without the help of a male character. This lapse in construction clearly shows how strong the division between men and women, object and subject, really is in patriarchal

Ben-Yishai also turns to Spivak’s essay for enlightenment (Ben-Yishai 211). In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak argues that a women is never represented as both subject and object. In the case of Sati, for example, “the sexed subaltern is always the object, never the subject of her self-immolation” (Ben-Yishai 211). To Ben-Yishai, this argument is “corroborated by [Shame]” in which the self-combusting boy is “both subject and object of his pyre” (211). By giving the reader insight into Sufiya’s origins via an aside, Rushdie attracts attention to the difficulties of representation. Sufiya can hardly be called representative for Pakistani women but she does raise the right questions concerning the suppression of women. Ben-Yishai puts it as follows: “the novel formulates a critique of the domination of women not through the women represented, but through the representation of these women” (212). He also tries to answer Spivak’s question: “Can the Subaltern Speak?” He responds that the women in the novel do not get a voice of their own, Anna does not speak to us, neither does Sufiya. But the representation of their silence “can be read as exposing the violence and the silencing imposed on their voices by the selfsame
representation” (Ben-Yishai 212). Tereus and Pandion left Philomela silenced, but not powerless. This situation can also be found in Shame, the women might not be heard due to the blockage that is patriarchy, but they do have their own opinions. Philomela unloaded her opinions onto a canvas of threads and so will Rani and Bilquis. Before we proceed with an elaboration on the alternative expressions forms used by women to process the trauma, I will first discuss the representation of the trauma itself.

B. REPRESENTATION OF TRAUMA

The women in Shame have lost their power of speech to their male surroundings. Like Philomela, Shame’s female protagonists translate their muteness into traumatic symptoms. Ovid’s heroin was silenced by trauma, a psychological condition that befalls several of Shame’s protagonists as well. Philomela’s trauma turned Ovid’s myth into “one of the earliest literary renditions of a traumatized mind” (Codde Philomela Revised 246).

Philomela’s trauma was triggered by an incestuous rape. This cause is echoed in Sufiya’s metaphorical rape by her father Raza. This incident traumatized Sufiya to such an extent that the only way she could express herself was by blushing: “They say the baby blushed at birth. Then, even then, she was too easily ashamed” (Rushdie 89). Her inglorious birth caused her to dislike all sexual encounters, a repulsion that she shared with many other women in the book including her mother:

‘Just imagine having a fish up your fundament, an eel that spits at your insides,’ Bilquis said, ‘and you won’t need me to tell you what happens on a woman’s wedding night.’ (Rushdie 151) ‘You must think of yourself as the ocean,’ she[Shahbanou] told Sufiya Zinobia. ‘Yes, and he, the man, imagine him a sea creature, because that is what men are like, to live they must drown in you, in the tides of your secret flesh.’…” Sufiya Zinobia pulled a face at these incomprehensible maternal abstractions and replied obstinately in her voice of a seven-year-old girl, which was also the eerily disguised voice of the latent monster: ‘I hate fish’. (Rushdie 209)

Sufiya’s trauma did not limit itself to her ferocious blushing, she also “discovered in the labyrinths of her unconscious self the hidden path that links sharam to violence” (Rushdie 144). Nicholls states that “Sufiya acts out what she is unable to say”, “she responds bodily to
her infantile violation…with acts of traumatic repetition” (Nicholls 118). ‘Acting out’ is in fact a widespread response to trauma. Sigmund Freud described this phenomena in “Remembering, Repeating, and Working –Through”:

The patient does not remember anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but acts it out. He reproduces it not as a memory, but as an action; he repeats it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it. (Freud 115)

In Sufiya’s case there is only a thin line between ‘acting out’ and ‘passage à l’acte’, two related, albeit completely different forms of expression. When acting out, one is coping with a mental injury by repeating it, when one turns to ‘passage à l’acte’, he or she literally turns to action often of a criminal kind. Sufiya’s acts are indeed quite violent, but so is her trauma. It is in the utter unbelief that she experiences when overseeing the devastation she brings on that I find reason to believe that Sufiya acts out, rather than turns to criminal acts. In a general description of suppression, the author states that when you “humiliate people for long enough… a wildness bursts out of them. Afterwards, surveying the wreckage, they look bewildered, uncomprehending, young” (Rushdie 119). It is in this incomprehension that we recognize the signs of latency and the inability to process the memory of the traumatic event. Sufiya performs her acts of violence in an unconscious state, oblivious to the consequences and the devastation she is leaving behind. Talvar, one of the characters describes her unconscious state quiet well, when he says, after foretelling one of her wrecksages in a premonition, that “Sufiya Zinobia has been sleepwalking again” (Rushdie 229). Sufiya does not perform her acts consciously, after “awakening she was as surprised as anyone by the force of what had been unleashed” (Rushdie 144). Sufiya is plagued by images of her deeds, repetitive images that she does not understand:

A picture of herself with dead birds. Who put that in there? And another one: she is biting somebody, hard. Sometimes these badnesses start repeating themselves like stuck records and it isn’t easy to push them away and pick up her father’s smile or the skipping rope instead. (Rushdie 225)

As a surrogate victim, Sufiya is not only plagued by her own memories but also absorbs the traumas of others and especially her mother’s.
...on seeing the devastation around her she fainted echoing her own mother on that far-off day when Bilquis found herself naked in a crowd and passed out cold for shame. (Rushdie 143)

Whether trauma can be actually transferred from one person to another remains questionable. There is however a widespread discussion concerning this topic, the most extreme point is made by the Lamarckists. This group of scientists believes in the ideas of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, who believed in the transferral of life experiences from a parent to his child. If we translate these ideas to trauma, a parent, like Bilquis, can pass on his or her trauma to their child. A more moderate point of view is provided by Marianne Hirsch in *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*. She believes that it is possible for a child to re-experience the traumatic past of its parents through what she calls “postmemory”: a kind of memory that “is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection” (Hirsch 22). The generational distance between Sufiya and her mother is a bit too narrow to speak of postmemory as such, but the existence of the concept proves that trauma can be inherited via vicarious experiences. These kind of experience arise when a child absorbs the stories of its ancestors and falsely stores them under his or her own experiences. Sufiya’s ability to absorb all shame is thus a preposterous magnification of the vicarious experience.

One of the main sources for Sufiya’s vicarious trauma is her mother Bilquis. Her trauma can be traced back to a symbolical rape by which she was deprived of her roots, of her father and of her clothes: the explosion of her father’s movie theatre. She never voices this trauma as she could not record the event during the disaster itself. Rushdie describes the shock she experiences meticulously:

…”the hot firewind of apocalypse began to blow. The walls of her father’s Empire puffed outwards like a hot puri while that wind like the cough of a sick giant burned away her eyebrows (which never grew again), and tore the clothes off her body until she stood infant-naked in the street; but she failed to notice her nudity because the universe was ending, and in the echoing alienness of the deadly wind her burning eyes saw…(Rushdie 59, my emphasis) An instant later she was crushed by the reborn awareness of her nudity… (Rushdie 61)
The author’s description fits the image of the apparently unharmed trauma patient perfectly. The victim does not experience the event itself fully, and even when they regain their full consciousness and stop living on automatic pilot they do not recall the exact nature of the drama that befell them: “[s]he must have walked, or run, unless a miracle occurred and she was lifted by some divine power out of that wind of her desolation” (Rushdie 60). The trauma is repressed until it is brought to life again through a trigger. In Bilquis’ case the experience is recalled by the Loo, a hot wind that reminds her of the warmth of the explosion and that “awakened strange terrors in Bilquis” when she was older (Rushdie 65). “In later years it would visit her sometimes, the way a forgotten relative comes to call” (Rushdie 60). Bilquis, like her daughter, coped with her mental injury by acting it out, in fact, she did not act the exact event out, she tries to protect herself at all times from such kinds of explosions. In order to protect herself from the memory of the “flying seats, ticket books, fans, and… pieces of her father’s shattered corpse” (Rushdie 59), she “placed an embargo on the relocation of even the most trivial of household items” in her new home (Rushdie 65).

…she would shout for the household servants to come and hold down the furniture in case the wind blew it away like the contents of a long lost Empire, and scream at her daughters (when they were present) to cling tight to something heavy, something fixed, lest the firewind bear them off into the sky. (Rushdie 65)

Like her daughter, Bilquis is plagued by the images in her head:

The worst Loo in living memory, releasing demons into the world, forcing its way through shutters to plague Bilquis with the insupportable phantoms of her past, so that although she buried her head under a pillow she still saw before her eyes a golden equestrian figure carrying a pennant on which there flamed the terrifyingly cryptic word Excelsior. (Rushdie 142, my emphasis)

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16 In the article “The East Wind and the Loo in Waterland and Shame”, Anjali Singh contends that the Loo represents “nature’s power, and triumph over man, who can never conquer her”. A comparison is made in this article to Waterland by Graham Swift, in which an vicious East Wind carries the same characteristics as the Loo in Shame. Both winds are ominous signs that carry with them disease, oppression and all sorts of tribulation. (http://www.postcolonial.web.org/pakistan/literature/rushdie/srwind.html)
The image of Excelsior is a literal memory of the explosion, it was the last image Bilquis caught of the theatre before it collapsed completely: “embedded in the topmost storey of her high tin house was the figure of a golden knight on whose pennant she did not need to read the comically unknown word Excelsior” (Rushdie 60). The predominance of images instead of words is characteristic for trauma. Van der Kolk & van der Hart, two trauma specialists, have emphasized that the “failure to arrange memory in words and symbols leaves it to be organized on a somatosensory or iconic level” (as qtd. in Codde Philomela Revised 249), the knight is one of those icons. The myth of Philomela was one of the first literary attestation to place emphasis on the predominance of images in times of sorrow, this is probably why this myth has become a popular inspiration source for postmodern trauma literature.

Bilquis’ trauma is not only a source of inspiration for her daughter, her trauma also represents the much wider spread trauma of migrancy (cf.infra). Partition left the continent torn, but it was not just landmasses that were sliced up, many families and friends were separated as well by the mass migration Partition entailed. According to Nicholls, Shame is a “national narrative animated by a traumatic history” (111). The change was so sudden that the inhabitants could not accustom to the idea, let alone form a new idea:

I must tell you what things were like in those early days after Partition: the city’s old inhabitants, who had become accustomed to living in a land older than time, and were therefore being slowly eroded by the implacably revenant tides of the past, had been given a bad shock by independence, by being told to think of themselves, as well as the country itself, as new. Well, their imaginations weren’t up to the job. (Rushdie 79)

V. REACTIONS TO OPPRESSION

A. ART AS COMMUNICATION: EMBROIDERIES

One of the characteristics of trauma is its visual nature. In Shame the visual character of trauma is most obvious in the character of Sufiya. Our female protagonist is faced with inexplicable pictures in her head that she cannot explain and that are symptomatic of her trauma:
A picture of herself with dead birds. Who put that in there? And another one: she is biting somebody, hard. (Rushdie 225)

But not all pictures just pop up, some are crafted, deliberately for “six years” on “a total of eighteen shawls” (Rushdie 200). Rani, Iskander’s wife, repeats Philomela’s act of silent rebellion. Rani found herself, much like Philomela, imprisoned in Mohenjo, first by her own husband and later on by the government. She worked through this period with the help of the “feminine art of embroidery” (Dayal 55). She embroiders “in the midst of the punitive riot” (Rushdie 96), “beneath the suspicious eyes of soldiers” (Rushdie 198) and eventually her silent craftwork even empowered her. Where she was first a prisoner in the family estate, she became the “true mistress of Mohenjo by dint of the unassailable calm with which she embroidered shawl after shawl on the verandah of the house” (Rushdie 157). Her craftwork frightened her surroundings, as they contributed magical powers to the shawls. The villagers believed that “she was composing the tapestry of their fate” and that “she could foul up their lives by choosing to sew a bad future” (Rushdie 157). In fact, Rani’s shawls did not contain any spells. They depicted something else entirely.

The shawls “perpetuat[e] memories” forming “an epitaph of wool” with as main subject “the shamelessness” of her husband, “Iskander the Great” (Rushdie 201). Iskander’s shamelessness entails both crimes he committed towards his family, such as adultery, and some of the numerous political crimes he was guilty of. Nicholls remarks that the “shawls articulate a suppressed memory of Iskander” a memory that his daughter Arjamund is oblivious to (115). “… no two sets of memories ever match, even when their subject is the same” (Rushdie 201). Later on, Rani sends of a trunk containing the shawls to her daughter Arjamund “who swallowed everything he dished out” (Rushdie 201). But Arjamunds “ears” remain “selective” and Rani’s lifework is never fully appreciated (Rushdie 203).

Rani signed the shawls with her own name, “Rani Humayun”, “retrieved from mothballs of the past”, hereby putting emphasis on her own voice, the voice she retrieved out of the patriarchal mess she found herself in (Rushdie 201). Like Philomela she finds her voice in the feminine art of embroidery. Rani’s voice has a lot to tell and it thus takes no less than eighteen shawls to comprise her memories. All the shawls are named: “the badminton shawl”, “the slapping shawl”, “the kicking shawl”, “the hissing shawl”, “the torture shawl”, “the white shawl”, “the swearing shawl”, “the shawls of international shame”, “the election shawls”, “the allegorical shawl”, “the autobiographical shawl”, “the shawl of the fifteenth
“Pinkie’s shawl”, “the shawl of hell” and “Little Mir Harappa on the last of all the shawls” (201-203).

What is remarkable about Rani’s shawls is not only their preciseness but also the interesting mix of subject material. All the shawls depict something that is related to her husband, some shawls depict him as a chauvinist in the private sphere and others depict him as a dictator in the public sphere.

As garments that embroider history with memory, Rani’s shawls are perhaps the best indication of the seamlessness of oppression. They are patiently worked expressions of how chauvinism and political suppression converge. (Nicholls 115)

Rani embroiders her personal history on “the autobiographical shawl”, and even dedicates an entire shawl to her husband’s mistress Pinkie. In fact she dedicates two shawls to his adulterous behaviour as “the badminton shawl” depicts his “pink-skinned concubines” (Rushdie 203,201). The shawls reveal a particular preference of Iskander, his love for the West, not only for Western badminton girls but also for the Western ideologies. His hung for “whiteness” becomes painfully clear on “the white shawl, embroidered white on white, so that it revealed its secrets only to the most meticulous and squinting eyes” (Rushdie 202). The shawl shows how he dressed the policemen in white clothes that hint of the colonial period and how he partied in a westernized fashion in “discothèques in which the booze flowed freely” (Rushdie 203). The white shawls thus shows how Iskander tried to model his country onto Western patterns: “[H]e wanted the police strong and the Army weak, he was dazzled... by whiteness” (Rushdie 203). The first non-military President of Pakistan’s motives were thus not just democratic, he was just infatuated with the white West.

On the shawl of hell, Rani shows just how far her husband went for “democracy”, “for the sake of no-more-secessions” (Rushdie 202). This shawl is embroidered in the very same colours as Philomela’s tapestry: “scarlet and nothing but scarlet”. Just as Philomela’s shawl depicted what her father’s hung for Attic unity had done to her, so does Rani’s shawl depict the price the people had to pay for unity in Pakistan. In one of the asides Rani states that there is “not enough scarlet thread on earth to show the blood” (Rushdie 203).

The allegorical shawl depicts “Iskander and the death of democracy” (Rushdie). “His hands around her throat, squeezing Democracy’s gullet” (Rushdie). Rani based the figure of Democracy on the “memory of an idiot, and consequently innocent, child, Sufiya Zinobia
Hyder” (Rushdie). Much like the narrator used Sufiya to represent repression, so does Rani use her to depict just the same thing. Herein we find a miniature version of the allegorical mechanisms the author uses.

There are three other women who use embroidery to their advantage: Pinkie, Rani and Sufiya. As we already know, Pinkie possessed a shawl on which “minute birds appeared to be flying…down the graceful meridian of her spine…” (Rushdie 105). Pinkie thus uses embroidery to emphasize her femininity, her desirability. When Iskander dies she no longer feels the need for seduction:

She remained faithful to Iskander … until the day of his death, when after setting fire to an old embroidered shawl she hacked out her own heart with a nine-inch kitchen knife. (Rushdie 107, my emphasis)

Bilquis’ uses her weaving skills in a wholly different manner than Pinkie. Whereas Atiyah Aurangzeb used it to bring out her beauty, Bilquis uses her sewing to cover herself up. “Bilquis was not Rani” either, “she embroidered no shawls. Her activities were both simpler and more mysterious, consisting of sewing large expanses of black cloth into shapes that were impossible to decipher” (Rushdie 263). It took a while before even her husband dared to ask what exactly she was doing:

‘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. (Rushdie 263)

It is only when Raza and the rest of the family are seeking a way out of their family mansion that the real shape of the garments, and Bilquis’ profetic “shrouds” are revealed. She went up the attic stairs where the men were already hiding “carrying a heap of shapeless garments, a selection from the work of her isolated years” (Rushdie 278). It is Omar who understands what she is carrying: “Burqas… head-to-toe cloaks of invisibility, veils” (Rushdie 278). “…hope bursts inside him” as these burqas are a way to escape the house in anonymity. What was first a “symbol of female oppression” (Yaqin 68) now has to save Raza, the President who oppressed women like no other. In italics we find a first sneer at the ironic situation: “The living wear shrouds as well as the dead” (Rushdie 278). This aside implies that wearing a burqa equals being dead, and thus forms a serious complaint against Raza/ Zia
Ul-Haq’s islamization policies. A second sneer comes straight out of Bilquis’ mouth: “‘Your son became a daughter,’ she tells him, ‘so now you must change shape also. I knew I was sewing these for a reason’” (Rushdie 278).

Like her mother, Sufiya used the “shrouds” as a cover up for her nightly escapades. Talvar, Good News’ husband had powers of premonition and dreamed of “the woman in the veil” (Rushdie 229). A dream that turns out to be “a horror story” in which “her burqa was sodden and dripping with something too thick to be water…blood” (Rushdie 229). The burqas are not only used to save people or suppress people, they can actually murder people as well. Hereby, the “shrouds” of suppression take their own revenge. But the women in *Shame* also take a more blunt form of revenge: violence.

### B. FEMALE VIOLENCE

*Shame* first presents itself as a family saga. However, later on, it is presented as “an almost excessively masculine tale, a saga of sexual rivalry, ambition, patronage, betrayal, death, revenge” (Rushdie 180). And indeed, *Shame* is a tale about revenge; but not so much of the masculine kind as the core of the story is formed by a female aggression: Sufiya.

…the women seem to have taken over; they marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories and comedies, obliging me to couch my narrative in all manner of sinuous complexities, to see my ‘male’ plot refracted, so to speak, through the prisms of its reverse and ‘female’ side. It occurs to me that the woman knew precisely what they were up to – that their stories explain, and even subsume, the men’s. (Rushdie 181)

*Shame* thus tells the tale of repressed women by giving us a chronicle of their silent suffering. But the author strongly believes that “not all women are crushed by any system, no matter how oppressive” (Rushdie 181). Rushdie does describe “their chains”, the patriarchal chains that “are getting heavier” (Rushdie 181), but he also highlights the power of his female characters. His novel shows that when “you hold down one thing”, for example women, “you hold down the adjoining” (Rushdie 181). In the interview with Chaudhuri, Rushdie states that sexual and political suppression are “the same thing” (Rushdie in Chaudhuri). When
women live under suppression they are unable to contribute to a better society, to speak up for their children and to provide a better education. By holding women down you hold down their descendants, by holding down their descendants you deprive a country of its future. “In the end, though, it all blows up in your face” (Rushdie 181). In this case, Sufiya is the one who blows up in the end. She thus does not only personify the shame that comes from suppression, she also emblematizes the violence that comes from it.

Sufiya symbolically avenges the suppression of her mother, of Rani and of all the Pakistani women. At one point in the novel she rapes and murders four youths. This rape is an inversion of the Hudood Ordinances which were introduced by the non-fictional counterpart of Sufiya’s father. One of the laws included in the second ordinances states that in “order to register a rape crime”, the “witness of four adult males” is needed (Yaqin 68). According to Petterson the raping of the four boys may also reference another Islamic tradition: “The Muslim man [is] allowed to have four wives and the four houris ‘untouched by man or djinn’, who wait in paradise for every fallen warrior” (173). Sufiya slaughtered the boys with a cannibalistic power so indulgent that parts of the boys were never retraced: the heads were never found” (Rushdie 228). She battles men with the same cruelty as they unleashed on women. Her existence was covered up by the nation, because the recognition of her existence would also mean that they had to admit the possibility that “barbarism could grow in cultured soil” (Rushdie 210). In this we find another echo of the patriarchal mechanisms behind Philomela’s myth: the men are fought with their own weapons, from within, rather than outside society.

In Shame we also find two other dispersed resemblances to Philomela’s epic revenge: Naveed Hyder and Arjamund Harrappa. The latter resembles Philomela in her unconditional devotion to her father, the second shows strong similarities to Procne because she too kills her own child. Arjamund Harappa’s admiration for her father Iskander knew no limits. Even when her mother donates her the shawls that depict Iskander’s misbehaviour, she turns a deaf ear to them. Rani comments on her daughters lack of understanding: “how selective, Arjamund, your ears” (Rushdie 203). Although her father participated to the establishment of “the man’s world” (Rushdie 129) and thus contributes to her suppression, Arjamund stays loyal to him. Similarly, Procne killed her own son out of loyalty for her father even though Pandion was partially responsible for the tragedy that befell her.
Unlike Arjamund, Naveed Hyder indulges herself in her femininity, she wants to get married and have babies but she did not expect to get so many of them. In a moment of desperation, Naveed Hyder kills herself and her unborn child:

That night Begum Talvar Ulhaq, the former Good News Hyder, was found in her bedroom at the Hyder residence, hanged by the neck, dead. On the floor beneath her dangling feet lay the broken rope of her first attempt, snapped by the enormous weight of her pregnancy. (Rushdie 241)

Naveed, once so anxious to be a mother and to live up to the patriarchal ideal of a woman, is crushed by her own fertility. Mathur remarks that “the birth of twenty-seven children of Naveed Hyder and her consequent suicide bring out the immensity of the problem of population explosion” (87). Although the population explosion is quite problematic in Pakistan, procreation remains one of a female’s primary tasks. Procreation’s main goal in patriarchal societies is to produce a male heir. The murder of Itys looks gruesome to modern day readers, but the immense impact of this loss of the heir exceeds our modern viewpoints. This becomes painfully clear in the race for a first-born son between Rani and Bilquis. Raza’s heart and honour was broken when Bilquis lost their first son. After the birth of Sufiya Bilquis states that: “He wanted a hero of a son; I gave him an idiot female instead” (Rushdie 101).

Even though Rani and Iskander never conceived a son, Raza despises them for giving birth earlier and in the darkest corners of his mind he even blames Iskander for the death of his son. “A man will wait a lifetime for revenge. The killing of Iskander Harappa avenges the still-born child” (Rushdie 244). When Iskander is locked up by Raza he gets lost in an interior monologue:

Comprehension comes before the end. He, Harappa, brought the General [Raza Hyder] from the wilderness into the world. The General of whom this cell is one small aspect, who is general, omnipresent, omnivorous: it is a cell inside his head. Death and the General: Iskander sees no difference between the terms. From darkness into light, from nothingness into somethingness. I made him, I was his father, he is my seed. And now I am less than he. They accuse Haroun of killing his father because that is what Hyder is doing to me. Then another step, which takes him beyond such aching simplicities. The
father should be superior and the son, inferior. But now I am low and he, high. An inversion: the parent becomes the child. He is turning into his son. His son. Who emerged dead from the womb with a noose about his neck. That noose seals my fate…. Yes: I am being unmade. (Rushdie 243)

In this stream of consciousness we find a mix up of the different characters. Iskander sees himself as Raza’s father, but instead becomes his still-born child. Bilquis’ non-existant son becomes a protagonist in the story, a catalyst that incites the emergence of the nationalist race for power. In fact, one could easily compare the still-born child to the idea of Pakistan, both are conceptions that never lived up to the expectations of their conceivers.

In the three Shakil sisters we find another example of how much vengeance the death of a child can incite. Their second son, Babar, a poetic rebel, had been killed by Raza Hyder himself during one of his military debacles. In the apotheosis of the story, Raza ironically has to look for refuge in their ancestral home. The sisters however, have not forgotten about the death of their beloved son and take a more than cruel revenge. In the chapter, wittingly called “Judgment Day”, the three sisters murder Raza with the help of “a spear with a badly rusted, but undeniably pointy head” (Rushdie 298) and “the dumb-waiter” (Rushdie 299) they had installed after the conception of Omar. They locked him up in the deadly dumb-waiter, while telling him: “you must agree, revenge is sweet” (Rushdie 300).

In the discussion of Philomela’s myth, I have demonstrated how Ovid assuages Philomela’s crime by song and by loyalty towards her father. Sufiya’s motifs are somewhat more dispersed, more opaque and thus come across a lot harsher. The author seems to turn her into a monster. However, there is one factor that excuses Sufiya’s behaviour: the brain-fever that caused her mental illness.. In one of the metafictional strands, the author muses: “Why did I do that to her?” (Rushdie 119). He suggests that “the fever was a lie” (Rushdie 119) but does not motivate his lie immediately. A few pages further down the line he gives a more solid explanation:

I did it to her, I think, to make her pure. Couldn’t think of another way of creating purity in what is supposed to be the Land of the Pure… and idiots are, by definition, innocent. (Rushdie 123)

Still, the mentally disturbed characteristic is hardly flattering to the female protagonist. Although the author claims to write a tale about the “female side” (Rushdie 180), the women
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in the novel are all flawed characters. The women’s prominence is thus not only masqueraded by their peripheral position, it is also overshadowed by their own deficiencies. Aijaz Ahmad remarks that:

[…] what we find is a gallery of women who are frigid and desexualized (Arjamund, the ‘Virgin Ironpants’), demented and moronic (the twenty-odd years of Zinobia’s childhood), dulled into nullity (Farah), driven to despair (Rani, Bilquis) or suicide (Good News Hyder), or embody sheer surreal incoherence and loss of individual identity (the Shakil sisters). (Ahmad 1996, 469)

Did the author succumb to the misogyny in his novel? Is he contaminated by the patriarchal moral codes of his work? I would argue that the female flaws do not stem from misogyny on the author’s part, as every single flaw of the women has an allegorical reason. Naveed Hyder’s abnormal amount of children and her subsequent suicide, for example, foreshadow the population problems that the Indian subcontinent faces. Another example can be found in Farah’s silent retreat: she symbolizes the numerous raped women whom are ostracized by their environment. The women’s flaws are not to be interpreted literally, because they demonstrate how flawed the patriarchal system really is. Just as Sufiya’s hot flashes, the women’s flaws are psychosomatic symptoms of a sick society. The author appears to have foreseen this accusation:

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. (Rushdie 181)

The portrait that Rushdie gives of his female characters is harsh because they live in a harsh environment. The author does exactly the opposite from Ovid, he does not wrap the women in song to flatter them like Ovid did with Philomela, but shows them as they are: muted and broken. Although Rushdie does not use song to tone down the harshness of the female characters, the song motif does get another place in the novel. In Shame, song does not represent female vulnerability, but the muteness of the Pakistani and especially that of the Pakistani artists. The oppressive regime’s unacceptable stance towards freedom of speech is
emblematized through the censorship of artists. In one of the metafictional asides the author muses on the concept of a realistic novel about Pakistan and concludes that the “[t]he book would have been banned, dumped in the rubbish bin, burned. All that effort for nothing!” (Rushdie 68). The chapter “Stability” opens with a description of a London play that the author visited with three Pakistani visitors. They are amazed that controversial plays can be brought to the stage in England and recount a story from their homeland:

They told me the story of a recent attempt to stage *Julius Caesar* at the University of P. It seems that the authorities became very agitated when they heard the script called for the assassination of a Head of State… Extreme pressure was brought to bear on the University to scrap the production. … the producer came up with a brilliant, a positively Solomonic solution. He invited a prominent British diplomat to play Caesar, dressed in (British) Imperial regalia. .. the play opened… the house lights went up to reveal a front row full of Generals, all applauding wildly… (Rushdie 255)

It is widely known that Rushdie himself suffered from the restrictions of censorship with his later novel *The Satanic Verses*. In *Shame* the victims of censorship are represented by a befriended poet of the author, Omar Khayyam and Babar. The author himself gives us an oversight of the poets in his novel on page 164:

It was explained to me by one of the world’s Greatest Living Poets…. There was my friend who hung upside-down and had the poetry shaken out of him, and Babar Shakil, who wanted to be a poet, and I suppose Omar Khayyam, who was named for one but never was… (Rushdie 164)

Omar Khayyam, the eldest son of the Shakil sisters, was named after a famous Indian poet. The non-fictional Omar Khayyam was a Persian poet whom is mentioned by the author during one of the metafictional strands of the novel:

I, too, am a translated man. I have been borne across. It is generally believed that something is always lost in translation; I cling to the notion- and use, in evidence, the success of Fitzgerald-Khayyam - that something can also be gained. (Rushdie 23)
In this passage the author refers to Edward Fitzgerald’s translation of Khayyam’s work. One of the best examples of multicultural translation. Omar, our “peripheral” hero (Rushdie 18) never writes a verse, but his brother did compose “a series of love poems” during his time with the mountain rebels (Rushdie 132). Bayapa believes that the portrayal of artists and the attention given to them serves a special purpose. To him the fate of “the reputed poet in Karachi”, who “is put in jail for his patriotic compositions…reflects ostensibly the state of affairs prevailing in Pakistan” (Bayapa 95).

The author realizes how important it is to use your voice, how crucial it is to convert matters to words. Let us not forget that part of Philomela’s tragedy was the loss of her tongue, the loss of her voice. Raza’s family also understands the importance of stories:

Bariammas’ mildly droning recital of the catalogue of family horrors had the effect of somehow defusing them, making them safe, embalming them in the mummifying fluid of her own incontrovertible respectability. The telling of the tales proved the family’s ability to survive them, to retain, in spite of everything, its grip on its honour and its unswerving moral code. (Rushdie 73)

Nicholls too understands the importance of story-telling. To him Sufiya “is a muted woman”, “a subject without a narrative” (Nicholls 118). He sees it quite clearly when he states that it is due to her inability “to voice the shame that she absorbs from all the other characters” that “Sufiya erupts into acts of violence” (Nicholls 118).

VI. TRANSFORMATION INTO BIRDS

The myth of Philomela ended with the transformation of the protagonists into birds. In Shame we find similar examples of transformation, but the motif is more dispersed with Rushdie than with Ovid. The most important metamorphosis in the book does not entail a bird-like form, but the transmutation of Sufiya Zinobia into a killing machine. The bird image, however, does appear on several other occasions in this novel. Like in the myth of Philomela, birds are used as a metaphor for femininity, the nation etc. Moreover, Shame also ends with a transformation into birds. Here, it are the Shakil sisters that escape persecution by
transmuting themselves into birds. Once again, the metamorphosis into birds is split up in the function of the transmutation and the metaphorical power that is attached to birds.

A. Function of the Metamorphosis

We saw how Sufiya Zinobia’s name references different sorts of suppression: misogyny and racism. But Sufiya is more than a victim. In the discussion of Ovid’s myth of Philomela, René Girard’s theory of surrogate victims was used. In Shame, Sufiya can be regarded as the ultimate surrogate victim as she absorbs all the unfelt shame:

Sufiya Zinobia Hyder blushed uncontrollably whenever her presence in the world was noticed by others. But she also, I believe, blushed for the world. (Rushdie 124)

Sufiya personifies all kinds of shame, the author explains where all this shame that Sufiya absorbs come from:

…the brain-fever… made Sufiya Zinobia preternaturally receptive to all sorts of things that float around in the ether enabled her to absorb, like a sponge, a host of unfelt feelings. Where do you imagine they go? – I mean emotions that should have been felt, but were not… Imagine shame as a liquid, let’s say a sweet fizzy tooth-rotting drink, stored in a vending machine. Push the right button and a cup plops down under a pissing stream of the fluid. … but how many human beings refuse to follow these simple instructions! … Then what happens to all that unfelt shame? What of the unquaffed cups of pop? … so into the ether goes the unfelt shame of the world. Whence, I submit, it is siphoned off by the misfortunate few, janitors of the unseen, their souls the buckets into which squeegees drip what-was-spilled. (Rushdie 125)

Sufiya is one of the “misfortunate few”, a “janitor of the soul” who absorbs the shame that orders refused to feel. But what is shame? “What does it feel like?” The sisters Shakil answer to this question with a premonition-like response:
‘Your face gets hot’, says Bunny – the youngest, ‘but your heart starts shivering.’ ‘It makes women feel like to cry and die,’ said Chunni-ma, ‘but men, it makes them go wild.’ ‘Except for sometimes, his middle mother muttered with prophetic spite, ‘it happens the other way around’. (Rushdie 33, my emphasis)

And indeed, Omar’s wife has a “Beast… lurking inside” her, a beast that feeds itself “on certain emotions”, namely on emotions of shame (Rushdie 208). Rushdie meticulously describes how he created her character. He muses about the two girls in London, about “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” (Rushdie 119). Sufiya is thus not exactly a surrogate ‘victim’. She is indeed a surrogate, but not so much a victim. She absorbs the shame felt by others, she sucks up the humiliation like a sponge: “[h]umiliate people for long enough and wildness bursts out of them” (Rushdie 119). The unfelt humiliation transforms her into a wild Beast, a white panther.

Her transformation is foreshadowed by the change from her maiden name, Hyder, to the name of her husband Shakil. In these names we recognize “Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde”. However, there is a slight change of plans, “Sufiya is born Hyder but marries Shakil, that is, an inverted development compared to the original” (Petersson 172). The transformation of Sufiya has thus wholly different reasons than Philomela’s transformation into a bird. Whereas Philomela transmuted into a bird to escape the rage of a man, Tereus, Sufiya transforms herself to unleash her rage on men. Or, ironically onto birds, as is the case when she murders Pinkie Aurangzeb’s turkeys. Sufiya’s beast-like appearance thus lies miles apart from the frightened nightingale Philomela.

I contend that the Shakil sisters do bring us one step closer to our source of inspiration: Philomela. Like Ovid’s heroine they fly away at the end of the story in order to avoid persecution for a murder they had committed. Their transformation is foreshadowed by their victim’s observation: “He heard birds outside, they were only crows, but they sounded as sweet as bulbuls” (Rushdie 297). The crows allude to ‘old crows’, a term often used for elder ladies. That they sounded as sweet as bulbuls is no wonder, as the vindictive sisters pretended to be very hospitable.

…the Shakil sisters had vanished…crumbling, perhaps, into powder under the rays of the sun, or growing wings and flying off into the Impossible Mountains
in the west. Women as formidable as the three sisters Shakil never do less than they intend. (Rushdie 303, my emphasis)

In Ovid’s myth the main function of the metamorphosis was the avoidance of death and the creation of a stasis. None of the protagonists are persecuted for their deeds and life is able to run its normal course. In Shame we find a different story, here all the male perpetrators are punished in cruel ways. The women, however, are spared of karma and are all able to get away and escape their prisons. However, this does not mean that Rushdie believes in fundamental changes, the succession of dictatorships is described in a cyclical time. The same thing happens over and over again; although Raza is brutally punished, his successors will make the same mistakes as he did.

B. THE METAPHOR OF BIRDS

Shame contains many dispersed images of birds, that are often used as metaphors. Raza Hyder, for example is compared to a tilyar “a skinny little migrating bird good for nothing but shooting out of the sky” (Rushdie 106, my emphasis). This comparison brings to mind the comparison of Tereus with a hoopoe, a bird “notorious for his filthy habits” (Burnett 183). In the tilyar comparison we find an important characteristic of birds in general: migration.

Rushdie thus employs birds as a metaphor for migrancy. While describing the specific characteristics of migrants he states that they “have performed the act of which all men ancienly dream, the thing for which they envy the birds; that is to say, we have flown… The anti-myths of gravity and of belonging bear the same name: flight. Migration, n., moving, for instance in flight, from one place to another. To fly and to flee: both are ways of seeking freedom…” (Rushdie 84). Rushdie feels part of the migrant community, he, “too, [knows] something of this immigrant business” (Rushdie 23). He is “an emigrant from one country (India) and a newcomer in two (England, where [he lives], and Pakistan, to which [his] family moved against [his] will” (Rushdie 23). Rushdie minglest fleeing and flying, hereby emphasizing the thin line between forced migration and wilful migration. This can be interpreted as another comment on Partition and the mass migration that resulted from it.

Birds are also used to represent suppressed emotion. In a description of Rani’s isolation at Mohenjo, the author writes:
The birds here beak up clods of earth, spit, build nests out of mud; there are few trees, except in the little haunted wood, where even the iron horses bolt… an owl, while Rani embroiders, lies sleeping in a burrow in the ground. Only a wingtip can be seen. (Rushdie 94)

The wingtip hints of rebellion, it is the tip of Rani’s emotions. The rest of the emotions are immortalized on the shawls that she embroiders. It is on one of those shawls that birds reappear. Yes, reappear indeed, as the same birds had already appeared on a shawl worn by Pinkie:

…and bearing upon irresistibly vulnerable shoulders a light shawl whose miraculous work could only have been the product of the fabled embroiderers of Aansu, because amidst its miniscule arabesques a thousand and one stories had been portrayed in threads of gold… minute birds appeared to be flying, actually flying, down the graceful meridian of her spine… (Rushdie 105)

The exact words are restated when Iskander sees his wife coming out of her boudoir with the exact same shawl:

Iskander went pale at the sight of the shawl she had wrapped around her shoulders, a completed shawl as delicately worked as anything made by the craftswomen of Aansu, a masterpiece amidst whose miniscule arabesques… tiny birds flew along the soft meridian of her spine… (Rushdie 111)

In these excerpts birds are associated with a seductive femininity. Like in the myth of Philomela, birds are linked to femininity through fabric. In Greece it was the association of birds with the shuttle that revealed hidden sexual entendres (Burnett 185), here we find almost the exact same thing. The birds are linked to the female craft of embroidery which contributes to a woman’s desirability. In Nishapur we find another crafted depiction of birds on a “carved walnut screen on which was portrayed the mythical circular mountain of Qaf, complete with the thirty birds playing God thereupon” (Rushdie 27).

Rushdie also uses the metaphor of a bird for the trio of countries: India forms the body, Bangladesh the East Wing and Pakistan the Right Wing:
...a country divided into two Wings a thousand miles apart, that fantastic bird
of a place, two Wings without a body, sundered by the land-mass of its
greatest foe, joined by nothing but God. (Rushdie 186)

This image also reappears on one of Rani’s shawls where “Harappa and Shaggy Dog” are
depicted “like cruel boys slitting the throat of an emerald chicken and plucking the feathers
from its east wing” (Rushdie 203). Shaggy Dog is the fictional alter ego of Yayha Khan,
Bhutto’s predecessor. Both these presidents contributed to the secession of Bangladesh and
mistreated the country heavily.

Another bird image that flabbergasts the reader is the murder of Pinkie’s Aurangzeb’s
turkeys by Sufiya. Pinkie, the woman that incited Raza’s heart like no other woman,
ironically became his neighbour. As if this was not insulting enough to Bilquis, Pinkie
decided to raise huge numbers of turkeys. Bilquis “yelled at Raza in the presence of both her
daughters: ‘O, a fine day for me! Now you humiliate me with birds’” (Rushdie 139). Sufiya
absorbed her mother’s shame and the next day the turkeys “were all dead, every one of the
two hundred and eighteen turkey’s of Pinkie’s loneliness” (Rushdie 143). This was the first
of many aggressive excursions of Sufiya Zinobia.
CONCLUSION

In this study I have made a comparison between two tales: Ovid’s myth of Philomela and Rushdie’s novel *Shame*. My main goal was thus to focus on the common motifs of these two stories. A first, undeniable similarity was the presence of oppression. In both tales the female characters were the ones suffering from this suppression. Their hardship was caused, both in *Shame* and in Ovid’s myth, by the patriarchal laws of their nations. Ovid and Rushdie both demonstrate how women in patriarchal societies are often treated as commodities, as mere objects by their husbands, fathers and by the leaders of their country. In both myths, the husbands and fathers of the female characters are also the male leaders of their respective countries. This collision of the nation and the family puts emphasis on the links between oppression within the private and the public sphere. Whereas Ovid probably never intended for his story to prevail such a feminist message, the modern reader cannot help but to discover, between the lines of this ancient myth, a rigid form of misogyny. Rushdie on the other hand, seems quite conscious about the moral of his story and highlights the oppression of women through a number of metafictional asides.

Just as oppression is a universally spread phenomena, the consequences of oppression are universal as well. The women in *Shame* suffer from the same consequences as Philomela: muteness and trauma. Due to their object status, the women have lost their power to speak. In Philomela’s case this loss of speech is represented quite literally by the cutting off of her tongue. In *Shame* this motif of muteness is much more dispersed: a girl’s throat gets slit, the protagonists are locked up in family estates and attics, there is no education for women nor are they represented in the public sphere. This lack of voice of the ability to form a narrative of your own experiences is one of the characteristics of trauma. Rushdie understands the importance of story telling and the traumatic consequences that muteness brings forth and thus incorporates traumatic elements in his novel. Although Ovid could not possibly have understood the mechanisms of trauma, he also included traumatic elements, such as repetition into his myth.

The female characters that appear in this study are not just passive victims, they also react actively to their perilous situation. Philomela chose the art of tapestry, a female craft, to voice her complaint against her treatment by men. The use of art as an alternative form of communication reoccurs in *Shame*, where Rani and Bilquis weave their testimonies of suppression. There is however, another, even more ‘active’ reaction to oppression: violence.
The murder of Itys by Philomela and Procne is echoed in *Shame* in the various examples of female revenge: Naveed’s suicide, Sufiya’s murders, the Shakil sister’s dumb-waiter…

Both the myth and the novel are seeped with blood, rivalry and revenge. At first sight these cruel acts might look like an easy way for making a story more interesting, but every drop of blood from one person is symptomatic for a much broader problem. The vicious cycle of violence and fear that appears in Rushdie and Ovid’s work is fixed in eternity when the perpetrators of the last crime, respectively the Shakil sisters and the Attic princesses, are transformed into birds and hereby escape their punishment. A transformation is normally an exemplary of change, but in these two tales, change proves to be impossible. The only thing the transformation really changes is the outward appearance of the protagonists. The core of the stories, the cyclical alternation of shame and violence, of male fear and female fear, remains intact.

The more I compared the two stories, the more I realized how much they were alike in content. However, there is a slight disproportion between the two narratives. *Shame* is built up out of thousands of tales that reference both fictional and non-fictional stories. The most prominent subtext is without a doubt the Pakistani history, specifically the lives and families of Zia Ul-haq and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. *Shame* also functions as a palimpsest for a number of classics, among which *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Kafka’s *The Trial*, *Sleeping Beauty* and so on. The myth of Philomela is thus just one of the many subtexts of Rushdie’s novel. At times this asymmetry hindered my research, as it is not easy to retrace the elements of just one myth in such a rich and crowdedly postmodern novel. Moreover, *Shame*’s richness in details and subject matter made it difficult to restrict myself to the original objective of my study.

Fortunately, the motifs that interested me the most in *Shame* were already present in the myth of Philomela: the postcolonial nation, female suppression, patriarchy and trauma. Although *Shame* is flooded by intertextuality, the myth of Philomela is certainly the subtext that shares the most common ground with the entire novel. The resemblance in subject matter certainly overcomes *Shame*’s richness. Moreover, certain motifs, key points of the myth are clearly highlighted in the novel. The most obvious examples of this are the chapter devoted to Rani’s tapestry and the ending lines of the novel. The description of Rani’s shawls, the shawls that echo Philomela’s tapestry, takes up several pages. These pages are one of the few excerpts in the book that carry only one focal point. This focus accentuates the importance of the use of art as communication but also highlights the connection to Philomela, the mythic patroness of repressed women. At the end of the novel, I was delighted to find a reference to Philomela and Procne’s divine escape: “… the Shakil sisters had vanished, … perhaps
…growing wings and flying off” (Rushdie 303, my emphasis). Rushdie, by inserting “perhaps”, even mimics the doubtful stance that Ovid attributed to the description of the transformation. “You’d think they float on wings. Yes, sure enough, they float on wings!” (Ovid 142). Paradoxically these miraculous escapes stress the inability of change without a change in morals. As long as women are not allowed to speak freely in the public sphere, as long as they are told they are unworthy they will feel ashamed and muted. Both tales clearly demonstrate what horrors can arise from that shame. I, for one, am thankful that I live in a society were women are able to express themselves, through research papers, politics, television etcetera.
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ATTACHMENT 1: THE MYTH OF PHILOMELA


Sea-borne bands
Of wild barbarians held [Athens'] walls in fear.
Tereus of Thrace with his relieving force
Had routed them and won a victor's fame;
And, seeing he was strong in wealth and men
And, as it happened, traced his lineage
From Mars himself, Pandion gave his child,
Procne, in marriage, thus to link their lines.
When they were married, Juno was not there
To bless the rite, nor Hymen nor the Graces.
The Furies held the torches, torches seized
From mourners' hands; the Furies made their bed.
An unclean screech-owl like a nightmare sat
Above their chamber on the palace roof.
That bird haunted the couple's union,
That bird haunted their parenthood. Of course
Tereus' and Procne's marriage gave delight
To Thrace, and they too gave the gods their thanks;
And those glad days when that illustrious prince
Married Pandion's child, and when their son,
Itys, was born were named as holidays:
So deep men's true advantage lies concealed.
Now season followed season, as the sun
Led on the years; five autumns glided by,
And Procne coaxed her husband, 'If my love
Finds any favour, give me leave to visit
My sister, or invite my sister here,
Giving my father your sure word that she
Will soon return. To see her once again
Will be a gift most precious.' So her husband
Had his ship launched, and gained by sail and oar
Athens' great port and reached Piraeus' shore.
There King Pandion gave him audience,
And hand clasped hand, their meeting seemed set fair.
He had begun to speak of Procne's plan,
The reason of his visit, and to pledge
Her sister's swift return, when suddenly
In entered Philomela, richly robed
In gorgeous finery, and richer still
Her beauty; such the beauty of the nymphs,
Naiads and Dryads, as we used to hear,
Walking the woodland ways, could one but give
The nymphs such finery, such elegance.
The sight of her set Tereus' heart ablaze
As stubble leaps to flame when set on fire,
Or fodder blazes, stored above the byre.
Her looks deserved his love; but inborn lust
Goaded him too, for men of that rough race
Are warm for wenching; Thracian villainy
Joined flaring with his own. An impulse came
To bribe her retinue, suborn her nurse,
Even assail the girl herself with gifts,
Huge gifts, and pay his kingdom for the price-
Or ravish her and then defend the rape
In bloody war. Nothing he would not do,
Nothing not dare, as passion drove unreined,
A furnace barely in his heart contained.
Now he'll not linger and turns eagerly
To Procné's plan again, and under hers
Forwards his own. Love made him eloquent;
And, if at times he pressed his pleas too far,
Why, Procné wished it so: he even wept,
As if she'd ordered tears. Ye Gods above,
How black the night that blinds our human hearts!
The pains he took for sin appeared to prove
His loyalty; his villainy won praise.
Why, Philomela had the same desire,
And threw her arms around her father's neck,
And begged him, as he wished her happiness,
(Alas for happiness!) to let her go.
As Tereus watched, already in his thoughts
He fondled her, and when she saw her kisses
And how she hugged Pandion, everything
Thrust like a goad, his passion's food and fire.
As she embraced her father, would he were
Himself her father! Nor would his sin be less!
Pandion yields, since both his daughters plead,
And, filled with joy, she thanks him. Hapless girl,
She thinks they both have won a victory,
Though what both won will end in tragedy.
Now the Sun's team, the day's toil nearly done,
Were pounding down the slope that led them home.
A royal banquet was arrayed, with wine
In golden goblets, and anon they lay
Relaxed in slumber. But the Thracian king,
Though he too had retired, was simmering
With thoughts of her, as he recalled her face,
Her hands and gestures, and his mind's eye shaped,
To suit his fancy, charms he'd not yet seen.
He fuelled his own fire, and, as he lay,
The turmoil in his heart drove sleep away.
Daylight had come, and now, as Tereus left,
Pandion wrung him by the hand and gave
IRIS STEENHOUDT

His daughter to his trust with many a tear:
'My son, since links of love leave me no choice,
And both have set their hearts (and your heart too,
My son, is set), I give her to your keeping;
And I beseech you by your honour, by the ties
Of family and by the gods above,
To guard her with a father's love and send
Back soon (each waiting day will be so long)
The darling solace of my sombre age.
And you too, Philomela, if you love
Your father, come back soon—it is enough
That your dear sister is so far from home.'
So he adjured them, weeping tenderly,
And kissed his child goodbye, and took their hands
And joined them, his and hers, to seal their pledge
And charged them to remember his fond love
To Procne and his grandson far away.
He scarce could say farewell for sobs and tears,
Such dire forebodings filled his soul with fears.
Once Philomel was on the painted ship
And the oars struck and thrust the land away,
'I've won!' he cried, 'I've won! My dearest wish
Is mine on board with me!' His heart leapt high;
The brute could hardly wait to seize his joys,
And never turned his eyes away from her.
So, when Jove's bird of prey has caught a hare
And in his talons carries it aloft
To his high nest, the captive has no chance
Of flight, the captor gloats over his prize.
The voyage now is done, and now they leave
The weary ship and land on their own shore;
And then the king drags off Pandion's daughter
Up to a cabin in the woods, remote
And hidden away among dark ancient trees,
And there pale, trembling, fearing everything,
Weeping and asking where her sister was,
He locked her, and revealed his own black heart
And ravished her, a virgin, all alone,
Calling and calling to her father, calling to
Her sister, calling, even more, to heaven above.
She shivered like a little frightened lamb,
Mauled by a grizzled wolf and cast aside,
And still unable to believe it's safe;
Or as a dove, with feathers dripping blood,
Still shudders in its fear, still dreads the claws,
The eager claws that clutched it. In a while,
When sense returned, she tore her tumbled hair,
And like a mourner bruised her arms, and cried
With outstretched hands, 'You brute! You cruel brute!
Do you care nothing for the charge, the tears
Of my dear father, for my sister's love,
For my virginity, your marriage vows?
All is confused! I'm made a concubine,
My sister's rival; you're a husband twice,
And Procne ought to be my enemy!
You traitor, why not take, to crown your crimes,
My life as well? Would God you'd taken it
Before you wreaked your wickedness: my ghost
Had then been free from guilt. Yet, if the gods
Are watching, if heaven's power means anything,
Unless my ruin's shared by all the world,
You'll pay my score one day. I'll shed my shame
And shout what you have done. If I've the chance,
I'll walk among the crowds: or, if I'm held
Locked in the woods, my voice shall fill the woods
And move the rocks to pity. This bright sky
Shall hear, and any god that dwells on high!
In anger at her words and fear no less,
Goaded by both, that brutal despot drew
His dangling sword and seized her by the hair,
And forced her arms behind her back and bound
Them fast; and Philomela, seeing the sword,
Offered her throat and hoped she would have died.
But as she fought, outraged, for words and called
Her father's name continually, he seized
Her tongue with tongs and, with his brutal sword,
Cut it away. The root jerked to and fro;
The tongue lay on the dark soil muttering
And wriggling, as the tail cut off a snake
Wriggles, and, as it died, it tried to reach
Its mistress' feet. Even after that dire deed
Men say (could I believe it), lusting still,
Often on the poor maimed girl he worked his will.
After this bestial business he returns,
Brazen, to Procne. When they meet, she asks
Her husband for her sister, and he groans
As if in grief and tells a lying tale
About her death, with tears to prove it true.
Then Procne snatches off her gleaming robe,
With its wide golden fringe, and clothes herself
In weeds of black and builds a cenotaph,
With offerings to the ghost that is no ghost,
And mourns her darling sister's tragedy.
And right she was to mourn—though differently.
Through all the twelve bright signs of heaven the sun
Had journeyed and a whole long year had passed.
But what could Philomela do? A guard
Closed her escape, the cabin's walls were built
Of solid stone, her speechless lips could tell
No tale of what was done. But there's a fund
Of talent in distress, and misery
Learns cunning. On a clumsy native loom
She wove a clever fabric, working words
In red on a white ground to tell the tale
Of wickedness and, when it was complete,
Entrusted it to a woman and by signs
Asked her to take it to the queen; and she
Took it, as asked, to Procne, unaware
What it contained. The savage monarch's wife
Unrolled the cloth and read the tragic tale
Of her calamity-and said no word
(It seemed a miracle, but anguish locked
Her lips). Her tongue could find no speech to match
Her outraged anger; no room here for tears;
She stormed ahead, confusing right and wrong,
Her whole soul filled with visions of revenge.
It was the time of Bacchus' festival,
Kept by the Thracian women each three years.
Night knows their sacraments; at night the peaks
Of Rhodope resound with ringing bronze;
At night the queen, arrayed to celebrate
The rites, went forth with frenzy's weaponry.
Vines wreathed her head, a light spear lay upon
Her shoulder and a deerskin draped her side.
Wild with her troop of women through the woods
She rushed, a sight of terror, frenzied by
The grief that maddened her, the image of
A real Bacchanal. At last she reached
The lonely hut and, screaming Bacchic cries,
Broke down the door, burst in and seized her sister,
Garbed her in Bacchic gear and hid her face,
Concealed in ivy leaves, and brought the girl
Back, in a daze, inside her palace wall.
Then Philomela, when she realized
That she had reached that house of wickedness,
Shuddered in horror and turned deathly pale.
And Procne, in a private place, removed
The emblems of the revels and revealed
Her sister's face, a face of misery
And shame, and took her in her arms. But she,
Convinced that she had wronged her, could not bear
To meet her eyes and, gazing on the ground,
She made her hands speak for her voice, to swear
By all the gods in heaven that her disgrace
Was forced on her. Then Procnè, in a flame
Of anger uncontrolled, sweeping aside
Her sister's tears, 'This is no time for tears,
But for the sword', she cried, 'or what may be
Mightier than the sword. For any crime
I'm ready, Philomel! I'll set on fire
These royal roofs and bury in the blaze
That scheming fiend. I'll gouge his wicked eyes!
I'll pluck his tongue out, cut away those parts
That stole your honour, through a thousand wounds
I'll sluice his guilty soul! Some mighty deed
I'll dare, I'll do, though what that deed shall be,
Is still unsure.' As Procne spoke, her son,
Ity, approached—she knew what she could do!
Looking at him with ruthless eyes, she said
'You're like, so like your father!' and she planned
In silent rage a deed of tragedy.
Yet as the boy came close and greeted her
And hugged her, as she stooped, in his small arms,
And mingled kisses with sweet childish words
Of love, her mother's heart was touched, her rage
Stood checked and broken, and, despite herself
Her eyes were wet with tears that forced their way.
But then she felt her will was faltering—
She loved him well, too well—and turned again
To Philomel, and gazing at them both
In turn, 'Why, why,' she cried, 'can one of them
Speak words of love and the other has no tongue
To speak at all? Why, when he calls me mother,
Does she not call me sister? See, just see,
Whom you have married, you, Pandion's daughter!
Will you betray your birth? For such a husband,
For Tereus, love and loyalty are crimes!'
Then—with no pause—she pounced on Itys, like
A tigress pouncing on a suckling fawn
In the dark jungle where the Ganges glides,
And dragged him to a distant lonely part
Of the great house. He saw his fate and cried
'Mother! Mother!' and tried to throw his arms
Around her neck. She struck him with a knife
Below the ribs, and never even looked
Away; one wound sufficed to seal his fate.
And Philomela slit his throat. Alive,
And breathing still, they carved and jointed him,
And cooked the parts; some bubbled in a pan,
Some hissed on spits; the closet swam with blood.
Then to the banquet Procne called her husband,
Unwitting, unsuspecting, and dismissed
The courtiers and servants; on this day,
So she pretended, at her father's court,
This holy day, the husband dines alone.
So, seated high on his ancestral throne,
King Tereus dines and, dining, swallows down
Flesh of his flesh, and calls, so dark the night
That blinds him, 'Bring young Itys here to me!'
Oh joy! She cannot hide her cruel joy,
And, bursting to announce her deed of doom,  
'You have him here', she cries, 'inside!' and he  
Looks round, asks where he is, and, as he asks  
And calls again, in rushes Philomel,  
Just as she is, that frantic butchery  
Still spattered in her hair, and throws the head  
Of Itys, bleeding, in his father's face.  
She never wanted more her tongue to express  
Her joy in words that matched her happiness!  
With a great shout the Thracian king thrust back  
The table, calling from the chasms of Hell  
The snake-haired Furies. Gladly, if he could,  
He'd tear himself apart to vomit back  
That frightful feast, that flesh of his own flesh.  
He wept and wailed and called himself his son's  
Disastrous tomb, then with his naked sword  
Pursued Pandion's daughters. As they flee,  
You'd think they float on wings. Yes, sure enough,  
They float on wings! One daughter seeks the woods,  
One rises to the roof; and even now  
The marks of murder show upon a breast  
And feathers carry still the stamp of blood.  
And he, grief-spurred, swift-swooping for revenge.  
Is changed into a bird that bears a crest,  
With, for a sword, a long fantastic bill-  
A hoopoe, every inch a fighter still.
Not so long ago, in the East End of London, a Pakistani father murdered his only child, a daughter, because by making love to a white boy she had brought such dishonour upon her family that only her blood could wash away the stain. The tragedy was intensified by the father’s enormous and obvious love for his butchered child, and by the beleaguered reluctance of his friends and relatives (all ‘Asians’, to use the confusing term of these trying days) to condemn his actions. Sorrowing, they told radio microphones and television cameras that they understood the man’s point of view, and went on supporting him even when it turned out that the girl had never actually ‘gone all the way’ with her boyfriend. The story appalled me when I heard it, appalled me in a fairly obvious way. I had recently become a father myself and was therefore newly capable of estimating how colossal a force would be required to make a man turn a knife-blade against his own flesh and blood. But even more appalling was my realization that, like the interviewed friends etc., I, too, found myself understanding the killer. The news did not seem alien to me. We who have grown up on a diet of honour and shame can still grasp what must seem unthinkable to peoples living in the aftermath of the death of God and of tragedy: that men will sacrifice their dearest love on the implacable altars of their pride. (And not only men. I have since heard of a case in which a woman committed the identical crime for identical reasons.) Between shame and shamelessness lies the axis upon which we turn; meteorological conditions at both these poles are of the most extreme, ferocious type. Shamelessness, shame: the roots of violence.

My Sufiya Zinobia grew out of the corpse of that murdered girl, although she will not (have no fear) be slaughtered by Raza Hyder. Wanting to write about shame, I was at first haunted by the imagined spectre of that dead body, its throat slit like a halal chicken, lying in a London night across a zebra crossing, slumped across black and white, black and white, while above her a Belisha beacon blinked, orange, not-orange, orange. I thought of the crime as having been committed right there, publicly, ritually, while at the windows eyes. And no mouth opened in protest. And when the police knocked on doors, what hope of assistance had they? Inscrutability of the ‘Asian’ face under the eyes of the foe. It seems even the insomniacs at their windows closed their eyelids and saw nothing. And the father left with blood-cleansed name and grief.

I even went so far as to give the dead girl a name: Anahita Muhammad, known as Anna. In my imagination she spoke with an East London accent but wore jeans, blue brown pink, out of some atavistic reluctance to show her legs. She would certainly have understood the language her parents spoke at home, but would obstinately have refused to utter a word of it herself. Anna Muhammed: lively, no doubt attractive, a little too dangerously so at sixteen. Mecca meant ballrooms to her, rotating silver balls, strobe lighting, youth. She danced behind my eyes, her nature changing each time I glimpsed her: now innocent, now whore, then a third and a fourth thing. But finally she eluded me, she became a ghost, and I realized that to write about her, about shame, I would have to go back East, to let the idea breathe its favourite air. Anna, deported, repatriated to a country she had never seen, caught brain-fever and turned into a sort of idiot.

Why did I do that to her? – Or maybe the fever was a lie, a figment of Bilquis Hyder’s imagination, intended to cover up the damage done by repeated blows to the head: hate can
turn a miracle-gone-wrong into a basket case. And that hakimi potion sounds pretty unconvincing. How hard to pin down the truth, especially when one is obliged to see the world in slices; snapshots conceal as much as they make plain.

All stories are haunted by the ghosts of the stories they might have been. Anna Muhammad haunts this book; I’ll never write about her now. And other phantoms are here as well, earlier and now ectoplasmic images connecting shame and violence. These ghosts, like Anna, inhabit a country that is entirely unghostly: no spectral ‘Peccavistan’, but Proper London. I’ll mention two: a girl set upon in a late-night underground train by a group of teenage boys is first. The girl ‘Asian’ again, the boys predictably white. Afterwards, remembering her beating, she feels not angry but ashamed. She does not want to talk about what happened, she makes no official complaint, she hopes the story won’t get out: it is a typical reaction, and the girl is not one girl but many. Looking at smoking cities on my television screen, I see groups of young people running through the streets, the shame burning on their brows and setting fire to shops, police shields, cars. They remind me of my anonymous girl. Humiliate people for long enough and a wildness bursts out of them. Afterwards, surveying the wreckage of their rage, they look bewildered, uncomprehending, young. Did we do such things? Us? But we’re just ordinary kids, nice people, we didn’t know we could… then, slowly, pride dawns on the, pride in their power, in having learned to hit back. And 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.

I never gave this second girl a name. But she, too, is inside my Sufiya Zinobia now, and you’ll recognize her when she pops out.

The last ghost in side my heroine is male, a boy from a news clipping. You may have read about him, or at least his prototype: he was found blazing in a parking lot, his skin on fire. He burned to death, and the experts who examined his body and the scene of the incident were forced to accept what seemed impossible: namely that the boy had simply ignited of his own accord, without dousing himself in petrol or applying any external flame. We are energy; we are fire; we are light. Finding the key, stepping through into that truth, a boy began to burn.

Enough. Ten years have slipped by in my story while I’ve been seeing ghosts. – But one last word on the subject: the first time I sat down to think about Anahita Muhammad, I recalled the last sentence of The Trial by Franz Kafka, the sentence in which Joseph K. is stabbed to death. My Anna, like Kafka’s Joseph, died under a knife. Not so Sufiya Zinobia Hyder; but that sentence, the ghost of an epigraph, hangs over her story still:

‘“Like a dog!” he said: it was as if he meant the shame of it to outlive him.’