

Acts of Negation: Modality and Spatiality in The Satanic Verses

Ebtisam Ali Sadiq

King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Received on: Sep. 2, 2012

Accepted on: June. 26, 2013

Abstract

This paper reads Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* through a postcolonial critical perspective. It argues that the author rewrites the history of Islam by utilizing postcolonial strategies of historiographic modality and spatiality in order to challenge Islam as a colonizing force and deconstruct what he considers its essentialist creeds. Ironically, Rushdie negates postcolonial discourse by essentializing Islam and evaluating it from an imperial perspective and a Eurocentric point of view. Such practice undermines his claims to modality and to spatial history writing and compromises his decolonizing project against Islam.

Keywords: Essentialism, postcolonial, modality, multiplication, spatiality, individuality.

Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988) is a work that generated intense and vehement religious and cultural debates. Critics were intrigued by its politics and wrote either to condemn or defend them. Objecting to its publication, M. H. Faruqi says: "to publish illiterate sacrilege and to try to make money out of it on the excuse that it is a work of great literary merit is not acceptable" (Faruqi, 1993, p.146). M. M. Ahsan and A. R. Kidwai explain that the "stand which Muslims have taken over the publication of Rushdie's novel is not one which seeks to suppress freedom of expression but rather one which refuses to give license for such abuse, ridicule and vulgar attack on Islam" (Ahsan and Kidwai, 1993, p.28). In defense of the book and its author, Norman Stone claims that "Islam is the religion, after all of the ferocious Ayatollahs" and he hails "Rushdie's right to publish his book ... beyond dispute" (Stone, 1993, p.77, 78). Daniel Easternman evaluates "Islamic law" as "not democratic" and the Faith as "a system rooted in a series of supposedly infallible and unchallengeable texts" and, according to his view, the public cannot sit and wait for "fundamentalists zeal" to "draw up an ever-expanding list of additional titles for the attention of the courts" in Britain, or to see that books "could be taken off shelves in London or Edinburgh," as Rushdie's book is subjected to such treatment (Easternman, 1993, p.79). In short, most objections came to the book's abuse of the principle of freedom of expression, while conversely supporters hailed its author's right to free speech.

Such dichotomy mellows down in Richard Webster's study of the piece that attempts a balanced reading between Rushdie and his Muslim opponents. Webster finds the

comparison of the Muslims' act of burning the book with "Nazi outrages ... unjust" for "it was the act not of a contemptuous and powerful political organization, but of a minority who had long been victims of racialism and who were expressing ... rage at their own sense of frustration and powerlessness" (Webster, 1990, p.126-127). This defense of the Muslim position is coupled with an explanation of Rushdie's intention that Webster identifies as one of "rational idealism to which post-modern and post-Marxist artists have increasingly succumbed" (Webster, 1990, p.27). Therefore, Webster asserts, Rushdie's "book should be read as ... a celebration both of the sacredness of art and of a utopian vision of society, in which the boundaries of race, class, sex and nationality melt mysteriously away" (Webster, 1990, p.27).

Victoria La Porte's reading is another study that attempts neutrality. Designating the work as "a real contribution to the postmodern tradition in the West," La Porte notes that its "relativist tendencies," affect Rushdie's "depiction of Islam and the Prophet" (La Porte, 1999, p.50, 45). However, contrary to critics who judge the work "as the product of a Western conspiracy to destroy Islam," she considers that Rushdie's "main intention behind the novel was to promote a secularist ideology" (La Porte, 1999, p.75, 86). Absolving the author from accusations of "racism, colonialism or conspiracy," she blames him for "promoting his own message" in a "disrespectful manner" and "without any detectable element of sympathy or courtesy in respect to the members of the faith he is criticizing" (La Porte, 1999, p.93).

My paper attests to Rushdie's racist attitude, essentialist perspective and imperialist inclination. It builds on the observation that in his novel *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie rewrites the history of the Islamic Movement not once but thrice. There is a fictional biography of the Prophet Muhammad and his mission that Rushdie radically changes from the original; a sub-story of a modern female prophetess, Ayesha, who leads her people on a pilgrimage from Titlipur to Mecca; and the miniature sub-story of an exiled modern Imam (a religious leader) and his train in London, a third imaginative contribution by Rushdie. Both protagonists in the sub-story and the miniature sub-story, this paper suggests, are intended as replications of the Prophet Muhammad and their stories as echoes of his mission. Such an act of rewriting and multiplying history can best be understood by reference to postcolonial discourse.

A host of postcolonial critics like Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin observe that history has been used as an instrument of colonization. They find that "the emergence of history in European thought is coterminous with the rise of modern colonialism [which] found in history a prominent, if not the prominent, instrument for the control of subject peoples" (Ashcroft et al., 1999, p.355). The case is particularly so because "history and legitimation go hand in hand." Furthermore, when history "took upon itself the mantle of a discipline," Ashcroft et al. expound, historical events became a "myth of the beauty of order," the colonizers' that is to say (Ashcroft et al., 1999, p. 355). Colonial history thus depended on a "historiographic ideology" of "a single narrative truth which was 'simply' the closest possible representation of events" as conceived by the colonizer (Ashcroft et al., 1999, p.355).

By rewriting Islamic history and multiplying its main narrative, Rushdie intends an act of postcolonial resistance of Islam's "single narrative" of history. He deems Islam a colonizing force with historic records that ought to be subverted. There are, indeed,

some critics who share my view that Rushdie feels colonized by Islam in addition to the British colonization. Feroza Jussawalla introduces the issue of Rushdie's double colonization by Islam and the British culture. She affirms that while the "British were actually occupying India, post-Mughal colonialism ... held sway" with Urdu as language "of the Muslim invaders of the Subcontinent" (Jussawalla, 1996, p.51). To this double form of colonization Jussawalla attributes "the very hybridity that Rushdie manifests" for it "results from his being not only a 'post-British' colonial but also a 'post-Mughal' colonial" (Jussawalla, 1996, p.51). However, this critic shows some inconsistency in regard to Rushdie's colonization by Islam. On the one hand, she claims that "his fathers and forefathers" are "the migrants who created Mughal India" and that he "is rooted in a majority and dominant culture— the Mughal Muslim culture of India" (Jussawalla, 1996, p.52, 55). On the other hand, Jussawalla confirms: "In Rushdie the desire to appropriate both the British and the Mughal colonizers' sensibilities is acute" (Jussawalla, 1996, p.55). Such inconsistency leaves the question of whether Rushdie is a Mughal colonizer or is colonized by the Mughals open. I would argue that Rushdie feels colonized by Islam and wishes to undermine its power. He does so by reverting to history rewriting to counter Islam's cultural impact. His act involves a process of distorting historical records and another of multiplying figures and events. The Prophet Muhammad's biography is misquoted and two more mock prophets emerge in the novel.

Opponents to imperial history in postcolonial discourse reacted to the emergence of history in the European frame of mind by calling for heterogeneity in writing history and a return to the old "modality of interpretation" to allow "an awareness of the variety of ways of configuring a past which itself only exists as chaos of forms" to emerge (Ashcroft et al., 1999, p.355). They decided to challenge the imperial "story of history" and its claims to a rightful "construction of world reality" through acts of modality in historical documentation. A demand for replacing the "single narrative" of imperial history with heterogeneous possibilities in interpreting the past comes into being. The single narrative of history is multiplied.

Rushdie's triple act of rewriting Islamic history can be viewed as a heterogeneous process of modality, an act of multiplication of Islam's single narrative of history. He seems to view Islam as an essentialist religion that uses one historic "myth" of "beauty" to colonize human minds and ought, therefore, to be deconstructed. For one thing, he challenges Islam's "single narrative" of "truth" by rewriting and changing it. For another, he multiplies its main figure and events. The author seems keen on reproducing more than one fictional version of Islamic history by utilizing the postcolonial tools of modality and heterogeneity. The implication is that Muhammad is not such a unique figure. First he is reinterpreted and then easily multiplied. His mission is also reinscribed in modern contexts.

The question of the historicity of Rushdie's book versus its fictionality is addressed by Rushdie's critics. The majority observe his mixing of historical and fictional elements. Joel Kuortti recognizes the novel as piece of work that "explor[es] the terrain between fact and fiction" (Kuortti, 2007, p.134). Aamir Mufti discerns the novel's "formal ambivalence" between a "revisionist account of the birth of Islam" and "fiction" and claims that it is "the fact that the novel equivocates formally between these possibilities

that allows it a positive political role in the postcolonial world” (Mufti, 1999, p.71-72). Yet this very positivity is a controversial issue among critics. Responses vary between objection to Rushdie’s strategy of mixing fact and fiction and approval. Quoting Rushdie on being asked “how far his novel was based on the Qur’anic text or Islamic history” and judging by his response, “[a]lmost entirely,” Ahsan and Kidwai mock the “great historian” on how he “managed to retrieve” the “dialogue between the archangel and the Prophet after 1400 years” (Ahsan and Kidwai, 1993, p.68-69). Robert Spencer, on the other hand, expresses his wish to free literature from the “literalist mindset” which asks “questions” that “betray one’s unresponsiveness to the kind of imaginative interrogation of which sometimes only literature is capable of inciting” (Spencer, 2010, p.257). Similarly, Mufti objects to “a reading that takes the offending passages literally (Mufti, 1999, p.71-72). However, Roger Y. Clark finds some critics’ claim that “Fiction is fiction; facts are facts” to be a “naiveté” that he would not leave “unchallenged,” for it is a kind of “play with sacred ideas in satiric ways” (Clark, 2001, p.143). La Porte also believes “that Rushdie, in depicting what he regards as historical events, in a fictional work, is more able to distort the truth,” and she confirms that “the novel deliberately manipulates the truth and in the guise of fiction gets away with it” (La Porte, 1999, p.116-117).

Rushdie has definitely used Islamic history to produce a fictional construct. His main narrative and multiplied mini narratives are distorted reproductions of historic facts. However, rather than correcting his fictional misrepresentation of Islamic history or critiquing his multiple misconceptions of its ideology, a feat that Muslim writers like Sayyed Hafez abu-al-Futuh (1989), Shams Al-Din al-Fasi (1989), Hadi al-Mudarrisi (1989), Nabeel al-Samman (1989), Sa’id Ayyub (1989) have thoroughly performed in Arabic texts, I will challenge the author’s employment of postcolonial strategies to deconstruct Islamic values and to highlight his erroneous digression into an imperial mood of writing in the midst of his postcolonial attack on Islam and its Prophet. I will counter his discourse by indicating a Eurocentric stance on his part that contradicts the principle of freedom in postcolonial discourse. The argument goes that while he considers Islam an essentialist religion and a colonizing force, Rushdie critiques it in an essentialist, and imperial manner.

Rushdie’s view of Islam as an essentialist religion permeates the novel. His protagonist Gibreel Farishta, named after the Archangel Gabriel (pronounced Gibreel in Arabic), faces some kind of a realization that the “separation of functions, light versus dark, evil versus good, may be straightforward enough in Islam ... but go back a bit and you see that it’s a pretty recent fabrication” (Rushdie, 1998, p.323) (Henceforth referred to as SV). Ancient religions are quoted for a contrast of their presumed broader perspective that fuses good and evil with what Rushdie wishes to establish as Islam’s narrowly dichotomous views. Amos is reported to have asked in the eighth century B.C.: “Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?” The text also claims that “Jahweh, quoted by Deutero-Isaiah ... remarks: ‘I from the light, and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things.’” The speaker who confronts Rushdie’s Gibreel with this contrast is a ghost of a dead woman who presumably speaks

from an otherworldly perspective. "Then Rekha, too, was perhaps an emissary of this God, an external, divine antagonist ... sent to wrestle with him and make him whole again" (SV, p.324). The sense of wholeness the ghost proposes is to make Gibreel embrace the ancient religions' fusion of good and evil against his growing essentialism of separating the two upon his becoming a modern reincarnation of Muhammad's archangel.

Rushdie's view of Islam as a limited, essentialist religion pervades the novel. Islam is accused of limiting human freedom. "Amid the palm-trees of the oasis Gibreel appeared to the Prophet and found himself spouting rules, rules, rules. ... It is as if no aspect of human existence was to be left unregulated, free" (SV, p.363-364). The Imam, the ardent follower of Muhammad's Faith and Rushdie's intended mock prophet, announces to the world on a modern radio wave that "Knowledge is a delusion, because the sum of knowledge was complete on the day Allah finished his revelation" to Muhammad (SV, p.210). This accusation of Islam as a regressive entity is enforced by many insinuations at the Faith as a narrow religion that negates scientific progress like space travel and moon-walking. When "the faithful were disputing [Muhammad's] views on any subject, from the possibility of space travel to the permanence of hell, the angel ... always supported [Muhammad], stating beyond any shadow of a doubt that it was impossible that a man should ever walk upon the moon" (SV, p.364). The passage with its playful censuring of the absence of twentieth-century scientific achievements from the sixth century AD verges on the absurd. But so are many parts of this postmodern piece of work. Significantly, the passage shows Rushdie's own essentialist stance that cannot liberate itself from modern science perspective when rewriting history.

Against the alleged essentialism of Islam Rushdie establishes his own position of skepticism.

Question: What is the opposite of faith?

Not disbelief. Too final, certain, closed. Itself a kind of belief.

Doubt.

The human condition (SV, p.92).

Although the lines resonate with doubt and negation of all creeds, Islam proves to be more of an object of skeptical scrutiny to Rushdie, and ultimately of direct harsh attack, than other religions. He translates its name into the English word "Submission" and mockingly repeats the term throughout the novel without allowing the genuine nature of such submission to explain itself. Gibreel, for example, is made to attack the Islamic God of submission: "Then how unconfident of Itself this Deity was ... [for] insisting upon the unqualified submission of even Its closest associates" (*italics mine*) (SV, p.332). The passage interprets the element of resignation to a divine being in monotheistic faith as a relationship of hegemony and servitude. Another character, Osama, faces the Muslim Ayesha on another occasion with similar views: "Then tell me why your God is so anxious to destroy the innocent [?] ... What's he afraid of? Is he so unconfident that he needs us to die to prove our love?" (SV, p.483). Exploring the ancient pre-Islamic world, Rushdie's

narrator comments: “There is a god here called Allah. ... Ask the Jahilians and they’ll acknowledge that this fellow has some sort of overall authority, but isn’t very popular: an all-rounder in an age of specialist statues” (SV, p.99). This statement is more in keeping with the spirit of Rushdie’s critique of Islamic monotheism than of what pre-Islamic idolaters could have conceived at the time. Despite the humorous tone, the concept of specialist statues is another modern science imposition on history that denies the Faith the chance of selfrepresentation.

Rushdie’s critique of Islamic ideology is a controversial matter among critics. Kuortti claims that “Islamic history is used as one of the settings in which [other] fundamentalisms are criticized” (Kuortti, 2007, p.133). Others, like La Porte, are more perceptive of his antagonism towards Islam. She points out that the “full force of Rushdie’s derision is reserved for Islam” (La Porte, 1999, p.68), a statement she makes in response to critics who claim an equal presence of secular blasphemy against the ‘Britons’ in *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie, I would say, feels colonized by two forces but he considers Islam a restrictive presence that ought to be subverted.

Availing himself of postcolonial strategies, Rushdie challenges what he deems an essentialist religion by rewriting Islamic history and multiplying its narrative. The first story in his postcolonial act of historic heterogeneity and modality is his distorted reinscribing of Muhammad’s biography that aims at challenging the Prophet’s claims to spirituality by calling him a “businessman” and, to bring dark humor to a peak, “the-businessman-turned prophet” (SV, p.95). Rushdie’s contestation of Muhammad’s spiritual claims extends to the Revelation. Drawing on an unsound historic report of what is known, in Orientalists’ writings, as the satanic verses incident, Rushdie uses the story to mock the Prophet and satirize Islam’s claims to monotheism. The disputed story Rushdie employs is one that claims the Prophet’s unscrupulous admission of three pre-Islamic goddesses into the heavenly train to pacify opposition and gain audience. The idolatrous satanic verses are falsely reported to say: “Have you thought upon Lat and Uzza, and Manat. ... They are the exalted birds, and their intercession is desired indeed” (SV, p.114). The three goddesses are presumably allowed to mediate between the human and the divine, a polytheistic element in worship that goes against the monotheism of Islam. Rushdie even uses the Prophet’s devout wife Khadija to authenticate the disputed incident. He claims that she said: “In the old days [Muhammad] wanted to protect the baby daughters of Jahilia, why shouldn’t he take the daughters of Allah under his wing as well?” (SV, p.119). Khadija’s blasphemous words are Rushdie’s fictional elaboration that even the false original does not carry. The leader of opposition, in Rushdie’s graphic delineation, “falls to his knees, and presses a deliberate forehead to the ground. His wife, Hind, immediately follows his lead” (SV, p.115). Muhammad has presumably admitted their goddesses into the heavenly train so they accept his God in return. The text of the novel also goes beyond the reported story to accuse the Prophet of materialistically compromising his divine call for the sake of gaining a seat in the Mecca council (SV, p.102). As critics say, Rushdie “will not only do what the Romans do, he would out-Roman them” (Ahsan and Kidwai, 1993, p.65).

Critics have variously responded to the satanic verses incident upon its reappearance in Rushdie's novel. While some have taken its veracity for granted, others cared to investigate it. Weller, for example, finds that the "story was dismissed by a number of early Muslim authorities on the grounds that its chain of transmission ... was weak. Hence it was not included in any of six authoritative collections of the Hadith," the collected proverbs of the Prophet (Weller, 2009, p.14). Kuortti, for another example, points out that the "historicity of the event is disputed by early Muslim historians" and that "it is a fabrication created by the unbelievers of Mecca in the early days of Islam" (Kuortti, 2007, p.134). La Porte also enunciates that Rushdie "does use Orientalist suppositions such as the veracity of the satanic verses incident ... in order to cast doubt on the authenticity of the Prophet and his revelations" (La Porte, 1999, p.113). Ahsan and Kidwai have historically investigated the sources of the "alleged" satanic verses incident, proved its fabricated nature and unsound origin (Ahsan and Kidwai, 1993, p.131-141). Muslim scholars such as abu-alFutuh (1989), al-Fasi, al-Mudarrisi (1989), al-Samman (1989) and Ayyub (1989) also did the same in Arabic scripts.

Thomas Carlyle has addressed much earlier in intellectual history the anxiety about the Revelation in Western epistemology. Through nineteenth-century transcendental philosophy, the Revelation becomes to Carlyle "[s]uch light" that the "Providence had unspeakably honoured [Muhammad] by revealing it" to him (Carlyle, 1846, p.51-52). Indeed, "God has made many revelations, but this man too, has not made him, the latest and the newest of all?" (Carlyle, 1846, p.41). For "Mahomet" is "an original man" a "messenger ... sent from the Infinite Unknown with tidings to us" (Carlyle, 1846, p.40). To the skeptics, Carlyle says: "Are we to suppose that it was a miserable piece of spiritual legerdemain, this which so many creatures of the Almighty have lived and died by? ... [A] more godless theory, I think, was never promulgated in this Earth" (Carlyle, 1846, p.40). Unlike Rushdie, Carlyle has chosen to positively respond to other cultures and to understand their faith. He explains the crisis of religious doubt in the Victorian culture by affirming that "such theories are the product of an Age of Skepticism; they indicate the saddest spiritual paralysis and mere death-life of the souls of men" (Carlyle, 1846, p.40). Rushdie's distorted rewriting of Muhammad's story is a revival of an archaic argument about Islam. Although intended as an act of liberation from Islam's influence, Rushdie's adoption of Western anxiety indicates subservience in another sense, to European epistemology in this context. It produces what some postcolonial critics describe as "a Eurocentric perspective that defines the position and the value of the rest of the world" from an imperial point of view in the middle of global discourse (Rabasa, 1999, p.362). Such subservience contradicts Rushdie's call for freedom and subsequently compromises his postcolonial act of resistance of Islam and its Prophet.

But Rushdie's reliance on the Orientalists' discourse as a source of his satanic verses incident has another side that deserves attention. Going beyond elaborating on an already false original, he modernizes the report. The act of modernizing occurs when the novel employs modern psychology to describe the Revelation. It introduces a crude sexual scene and claims that the Revelation is brought about by some kind of semi-sexual union between Rushdie's Gibreel and Muhammad. Describing the scene, Gibreel

says: "I got on top he started to weep for joy and then he did his old trick, forcing my mouth open and making the voice, the Voice, pour out of me once again, made it pour all over him, like sick" (SV, p.123). The Prophet is claimed to receive the Qur'anic verses through such union. In the process, a mixup occurs and the satanic verses are presumably dictated to the Prophet for the "Devil came to him in the guise of the archangel, so that the verses he memorized, the ones he recited in the poetry tent, were not the real thing but its diabolical opposite, not godly, but satanic" (SV, p.123). Once he discovers the mistake, the Prophet, the novel claims, had to go back to his opponents "as quickly as he can, to expunge the foul verses ... to strike them from the records for ever ... so they will survive in just one or two unreliable collections of old traditions and orthodox interpreters will try and unwrite their story" (SV, p.123). The passage slyly hints at orthodox interference in history that presumably worked to preserve a false image of Islam's monotheism. It thus becomes more than a simple voicing of personal anxiety about the Revelation. Rushdie soon quotes the repealing verses as if to affirm the existence of more than one version of the Qur'an: "Shall He have daughters and you sons ... These are but names you have dreamed of, you and your fathers. Allah vests no authority in them" (SV, p.124). The novel's attempt to generate doubt in Qur'anic scholarship is part of Rushdie's subversive stance towards Islam.

Another objective behind modernizing the incident soon becomes manifest. Besides challenging Qur'anic scholarship it goes to desecrate Islam's spirituality. Rushdie's Gibreel becomes instrumental in this respect, for he "knows one small detail ... namely that it was me both times, baba, me first and second also me. From my mouth, both the statement and the repudiation . . . and we all know how my mouth got worked" (italics in the original) (SV, p.123). The gibe hints to the fib of the semi-sexual union between Muhammad and Rushdie's Gibreel that presumably produced both passages of the Qur'anic verses, the satanic and the godly. Both the crudity and the import of these passages did not escape critics. Jaina C. Sanga observes that "Rushdie is clearly rendering a satirical reworking of the whole saga to cast doubt upon the authenticity and fixity of the holy text and the tenets of orthodoxy that legitimize it" (Sanga, 2001, p.112). I would add that Rushdie expands on the Orientalists' discourse in order to ensure the subversion of Islam. He modernizes that ancient discourse by exploiting behavioral science and modern psychology with their interest in sexual interpretations of human motivation to ridicule the Prophet. He uses his modernized version of the satanic verses incident to violate the sacredness of Islamic history. His act of imposing Western epistemology (ancient, modern and modernized) on Islam's narrative is a highly essentialist stance.

Yet Rushdie does not only distort the Prophet's biography but continues to practice what he believes to be his postcolonial right to deconstruct Islamic history now by multiplying its main narrative. His historiographic modality produces a story of an Indian prophetess, Ayesha, to replicate the Prophet of Islam. Ayesha makes claims to the revelation, for "the Archangel Gibreel had appeared to her in a vision and had lain down beside her" (SV, p. 225), a scene that recalls a similar union between Muhammad and Rushdie's Gibreel. Made to echo the Prophet, she also leads her people on a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Critics interpret her case differently. A feminist postcolonial critic like Sara Suleri considers her story a “feminization of prophecy” and a means of “allowing the prophet as woman to rearticulate the powerful erotics of faith” (Suleri, 1989, p.623,620). Sanga suggests that the “sequence alludes to the violent military campaign led by Ayesha [the Prophet’s wife] after the Prophet’s death against the next Khalifa—Ali” (Sanga, 2001, p.115). (It is worth noting that Ali is the fourth Khalifa.) Rushdie’s Ayesha, I believe, is a mock prophet figure whose pilgrimage is intended as a failed echo of the Prophet’s triumphant return campaign to Mecca. Muhammad’s journey is rewritten into a mock modern episode in which Ayesha and her followers unnecessarily and foolishly drown. It is Rushdie’s a way of contesting the faith that inspires such journeys and his secular commentary on the annual Islamic call for a pilgrimage to Mecca. Sanga’s insight is significant in this respect for she claims that the Ayesha episode “questions the importance of traditional practices such as the hajj and the mindless devotion of pilgrims” (Sanga, 2001, p.116). Clark finds that the novel “tempts humanity from strict monotheism by making the sensual and polytheistic aspects of the Indian Ayesha seem more appealing than her austerity and devotion” (Clark, 2001, p.176). Spencer also perceives the Ayesha segment as a “sustained indictment of religious indoctrination” and suggests that “her self-serving revelations ... are a parody of Muhammad’s” (Spencer,2010,p. 256). It is evident that Rushdie employs replication to subvert Islamic creeds. He mirrors the Prophet into the modern Indian Ayesha for the purpose. But his mockery transfigures resistance into a prejudiced act that abuses the principle of historiographic modality by employing it to evaluate the Prophet, his mission and Islamic rituals from an alien perspective. Such an act of evaluation is essentialist in its denial of the principle of self-representation to the targeted objects and its imposition of value judgment on them.

Another fictional construct that Rushdie introduces for further multiplying and undermining of Muhammad and his mission is of the modern Imam exiled in London. Described as having “set his face” against “progress” and “science” (SV, p.210), this figure leads his followers to a suicidal death: “go, be a martyr, do the needful, die” (SV, p.213) for “[w]e seek the eternity, the timelessness, of God” (SV, p.211), and “shall be born again . . . in the eye of Almighty God” (SV, p.214). Links are established with the Prophet, significantly through further acts of replication of some minor historic figures. The historic Bilal is the Prophet’s muezzin (his caller for prayers), and the novel mirrors him as a modern radio announcer who broadcasts messages adverse to knowledge and civilization on behalf of the Imam. “The Imam chose Bilal” the novel claims, “for this task on account of the beauty of his voice” (SV, p.211). The image of the historic Bilal’s blackness and his beautiful voice is invoked to create Rushdie’s modern counterpart of the same man and to subtly enforce the association of the Imam with Muhammad. Just as the historic Bilal was a companion of the Prophet and his muezzin, the modern Bilal becomes the companion of the Imam and his mouthpiece on a radio station. Critics perceive Rushdie’s Imam as a “caricature of Ayatollah Khomeini” (Clark, 2001, p.173). However, Clark comes close to my reading of this figure as a mock prophet when he perceives his case as Rushdie’s “example of those who resemble [Muhammad] in their uncompromising religious stance and in their desire to impose an otherworldly scheme

on the world" (Clark, 2001, p.173). Rushdie attacks through this second act of replication other sides of Islam. The Imam's antipathy to knowledge is intended to promote Rushdie's image of Islam as a regressive, anti-modern entity. The Imam's suicidal campaign associates the Faith with aggression and violence. The campaign is also used to invoke and critique the Prophet's call, at the beginning of Islam, for Jihad (a religious war) against the unbelievers of Mecca. Rushdie uses postcolonial discourse of historiographic modality to replicate, judge and mock Islam, its Prophet and main historic events.

In addition to the two previous replications of the Prophet, character mirroring becomes a sustained pattern in the novel. Rushdie introduces a host of modern characters and suggests their resemblance with original historic figures. Besides the historic Bilal's reappearance as a contemporary speaker on the radio, a person called Muhammad and his wife Khadija are present at the journey of the contemporary prophetess Ayesha to Mecca (SV, p.235). The couple is Rushdie's echo of the Prophet and his wife because the woman, like the original namesake, dies before the journey is complete. (The Prophet's wife died prior to his migration to Medina.). This incident in the novel, echoing as it does the original historic event, intends to displace the Prophet's leading role by making him now a follower of the modern prophetess Ayesha. Another act of mirroring refers to Hind and her husband Abu-Sufyan, the earliest opponents of the Prophet who converted to Islam after his triumphant reentry campaign into Mecca. They are reincarnated into a couple of modern emigrants from India settling in a London suburb (SV, p.244). Rushdie's replication suggests a sense of displacement of the original figures upon their conversion to Islam. In short, no single historic figure or event is allowed to exalt in its own past truth. Each contemporary story becomes a deconstructive re-writing of and a speculative commentary on a past historic one.

In a postcolonial reading of Rushdie's earlier works, Anuradha Needham confirms the author's distaste for the "objective facts that characterize traditional historiography" (Needham, 2000, p.52). In such light, Rushdie's recreation of historical figures in *The Satanic Verses* is supposed to be a de-essentializing act of representation. The strategy is supposed to liberate individuals from traditional representation and to grant characters opportunities to reemerge in different cultural, now modern, contexts. The principle is elucidated in Paul Carter's spatial history discourse that critiques imperial history as a linear process that "pays attention to events unfolding in time alone" at the expense of "the intentional world of historical individuals, the world of active spatial choices" (Carter, 1987, p. xvi). Rushdie's act of replication, however, doubly abuses spatial history discourse. Rather than enriching historical records or broadening contemporary perception of history, the author negates the principle of heterogeneous modality and spatiality upon employing them to judge and evaluate, mock and subvert the original. Furthermore, he adopts a supercilious Eurocentric stance towards history.

Yet Rushdie's most conspicuous act of negation of spatiality and modality is exposed in the practice of naming and renaming historic figures and places. The novel is replete with such incidents though this article would focus on his naming of the prophet Muhammad, the city of Mecca and the holy mosque of Ka'ba.

In renaming the Prophet Muhammad, the writer imperialistically expounds his knowledge of the meaning the name holds in Arabic, highlights the distortion that Western medieval prejudice has introduced into it and then makes a choice. His narrator speculates on the Prophet's name: "Pronounced correctly, it means he-for-whom-thanks-should-be-given, but he won't answer to that here . . . has adopted, instead, the demon tag the farangis hung around his neck . . . is to be the medieval baby-frightener, the devil's synonym: Mahound" (SV, p.93). Carlyle, the nineteenth-century British philosopher, asserts that the "lies . . . heaped around this man [Muhammad] are disgraceful to ourselves only" (Carlyle, 1846, p.39), but Rushdie deliberately invokes and exploits Western medieval stereotypes to rename the Prophet of Islam in the novel.

The habit of corrupting and imposing on people's names extends to places. One significant example of such practice is the narrator's renaming of the Muslims' holy city of Mecca as "Jahilia." Etymologically speaking from the Arabic language perspective, Jahilia is not a place but a historical era of cultural ignorance. (Many enlightened Western critics searched and recognized the meaning.) This abstract derogatory name is given by Rushdie to the city not in condemnation of its people's ignorant reception of the Islamic faith. It is a name that persists throughout the entire novel, regardless of historic evolution. Statically, the author freezes the city in a frame of his own making. Its history of initial animosity to Muhammad's message is equally treated as its subsequent acquiescence to it. Rushdie uses the name to attach perpetual ignorance to the city and, perhaps by implication, to the faith born in that city.

In using an abstract concept to rename Mecca Rushdie must have had in mind the example of the city of Jerusalem in English, for his narrator speculates in the novel: "Jerusalem . . . it's a slippery word . . . it can be an idea as well as a place: a goal, an exaltation" (SV, p. 212). Jose` Rabasa notes how "global histories and geographies, despite their 'introduction' of other religions into the world scenario, always retain a Eurocentric perspective that defines the position and the value of the rest of the world" (Rabasa, 1999, p.362). Rushdie's stance is not much different here.

He imposes an alien theory of language that follows a Western linguistic pattern on Arabic. Such imposition reveals a Eurocentric stance.

Significantly, Rushdie's substitution of an etymologically odd name, "Jahilia," for Mecca fails to meet the dynamism of historical evolution that the original carries in Arabic. Contrary to the implication of a static state of perpetual ignorance, the name Mecca (that he drops) has its linguistic dynamism that Rushdie's text fails to comprehend, let alone benefit from. Among its multi-leveled meanings, the name implies a city of water shortage (Mecca). Such meaning would have been enriching to Rushdie's elaborate water symbolism in the novel and to his "Jahilia" as a city of sands. Unfortunately for him, he misses on this valuable point upon calling it "Jahilia" instead of Mecca. Other dynamic levels of the name that meet historic changes are: Mecca as the place where a large crowd of people would gather, where sins are forgiven, and where tyrant heads are brought down to earth (Mecca). Among such multiplicity, Rushdie's misnaming of the city is an essentialist act that denies the original its linguistic richness and the place its

historic dynamism. Vassilena Parashkevova argues that “cities in the text [of The Satanic Verses] unsettle the ideas of historical fixity” (Parashkevova, 2007, p.5). She claims that Muhammad’s “Message of monolithic singularity censures the multiplicity of the city” of Jahilia that Rushdie’s novel, presumably, manages to restore (Parashkevova, 2007, p.14). Parashkevova’s reading misses on how Rushdie’s resistance of Islam negates postcolonial discourse. His act of naming becomes a misnaming that denies the city its historic dynamism and linguistic diversity.

Postcolonial critics, indeed, alert to the high possibility of the activity of naming places during geographic exploration might turn to a project of colonization: “The dynamic of ‘naming’ becomes a primary colonizing process because it appropriates, defines, [and] captures the place in language” (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 391-92). The travelers’ venture of renaming a place “is a result of erasure: it also symbolizes the imperial project of permanent possession through dispossession” (Carter, 1987, p. xxiv). Rushdie’s act of renaming resembles that of the colonial traveler who explores new geographic locations and renames them after European models in complete disregard of their original indigenous names.

Rushdie’s activity of misnaming places has one more case worth highlighting. It is that of the Holy Mosque in the city of Mecca. Rushdie renames it “The House of the Black Stone” though he proves on the occasion of Ayesha’s pilgrimage his knowledge of its real name “Haram Shareef,” or the Sacred Mosque (SV, p.96, 235). His misnaming in this instance attaches a fetish epithet to the Muslims’ place of spiritual worship. Fetishism as a negative aspect in religious cults is commonly denounced by rational thinkers. Many Western writers have defended Islam against it. Edward Gibbon and Simon Okley commend Islam as a religion in which the “intellectual image of the Deity has never been degraded by any visible idol; the honor of the Prophet has never transgressed the measure of human virtues; and his living precepts restrained the gratitude within the bound of reason and religion” (Gibbon and Okley, 1870, p. 54). Alphonse de la Martine has something similar to say. He calls the Prophet Muhammad a “restorer of rational dogmas, of a cult without images” (de la Martine, 1854, p.276-77). Rushdie engages a Western argument of fetishism against Islam by calling the holy mosque the house of the black stone.

Carlyle more directly addresses the issue of the ancient black stone than other writers. He draws a clear line of historic distinction between its past, pre-Islamic fetish position and its reduced importance in Islamic history. Carlyle writes: “To the idolatrous [pre-Islamic] Arabs one of the most ancient universal objects of worship was that Black Stone” (Carlyle, 1846, p.44). He also notes that the Stone is “still kept in the building called Caabah at Mecca” which is “[o]ne of the noblest centres in the habitation of Men” (Carlyle, 1846, p.45). Carlyle duly recognizes the stones as a residue in the Ka’ba building which stands at the center of the Sacred Mosque in Mecca. If Rushdie’s fetish game intends to extend its power of suggestiveness to the Ka’ba, then he needs to be reminded of the symbolic value of buildings worldwide: Big Ben, Eiffel tower, the Empire State. The list can go on. There is no point in condemning the building in Mecca as fetish unless some highly modernized parts of the world turn fetish too.

Rushdie's rewriting of the history of Islam is intended as a postcolonial act of negation of its ideology and its presumed colonization of the human mind. His act of resistance relies on a postcolonial discourse of historiographic modality and spatiality to deconstruct Islamic history. He employs acts of multiplying narratives, replicating historical figures and mirroring them into modern characters to subvert the history and ideology of the Faith. However, the author's anticolonial project against Islam proves to be an essentialist practice that negates the principles of postcolonial discourse. For one thing, he imposes modern science views of space travel and moonwalking to mock and evaluate Islam. For another, he revives archaic European arguments about the Faith and embraces their religious anxiety to negate the Prophet's claims to spirituality and to falsify the Revelation. Third, he invokes unauthentic historical records as furthered by Orientalist discourse and employs the satanic verses incident to contradict the monotheistic aspect of Islam and the authenticity of the Qur'anic text. Fourth, he shows subservience to Western epistemology and modern behavioral science and psychology and uses them to modernize the satanic verses report and to exploit the new version to further desecrate sacred events in Islam's history. Last and not least he renames iconic figures and places after European model in order to derogate them. Such multi-leveled immersion in imperial discourses and subservience to Western epistemology not only denies the Faith a fair chance of self-representation but also comes in complete disregard of the postcolonial call to free colonized minds from Eurocentric cultural colonization. Salman Rushdie employs modality and spatiality in historic documentation as acts of resistance of a presumed Islamic colonization of the human mind but ends up writing an imperialist narrative. This digression challenges the legitimacy of his project against Islam and compromises the sense of its fulfillment.

من أعمال الإنكار: الطريقة والمكان في الآيات الشيطانية لسلمان رشدي.

ابتسام علي صادق، جامعة الملك سعود، الرياض، المملكة العربية السعودية.

ملخص

تستقصي هذه الدراسة رواية سلمان رشدي آيات شيطانية من زاوية مابعد استعمارية وتطرح رؤية مفادها أن سلمان رشدي يعيد كتابة التاريخ الإسلامي من زاوية مابعد استعمارية ليقوض الأيديولوجية الإسلامية التي يعتبرها قوة استعمارية مناهضة لحرية الفكر. يوظف رشدي لهذا الغرض استراتيجيات نصية مشتقة من نظرية مابعد الاستعمار المناوئة للإمبريالية. ولكنه يكشف عن موقف شخصي إمبريالي ورؤية عنصرية تجاه الإسلام، الأمر الذي يناقض ادعائه الدفاع عن الحرية الإنسانية و يقوض مناديه للإسلام وزعمه أن الإسلام قوة استعمارية معادية للعلم والتقدم والحرية.

References

- Abu-Al-Futuh, Sayyed Hafez. 1989. *Qalu 'an al-Islam: Rasa'il ila Salman Rushdie [They Said about Islam: Letters to Salman Rushdie]*. Cairo: Madbouli Bookshop.
- Ahsan, M. M. and A. R. Kidwai, eds. 1991. *Sacrilege versus Civility: Muslim Perspectives on The Satanic Verses' Affair*. Rep. 1993. Leicester: The Islamic Foundation.
- Al-Fasi, Shams Al-Din. 1989. *Ayat Samawiyah fi al-Radd 'ala Kitab Ayat Shytaniyah [Heavenly Verses Counter The Satanic Verses Book]*. Cairo: Dar Mayo al-Wataneya.
- Al-Mudarrisi, Hadi. 1989. *Radd 'ala Kitab "al-'ayat al-Shaytaniya [Counterstatement to The Satanic Verses]*. Buriyet: Dar al-ilm Lilmalayin.
- Al-Samman, Nabeel. 1989. *Hamazat Shytaniya Wa Salman Rushdie [Satanic Insinuations and Salman Rushdie]*. Cairo: Dar al-Isra'.
- Aschcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds. 1995. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*.
Rep. 1999. London and New York: Routledge.
- Ayyub, Sa'id. 1989. *Shytan al-Gharb: Salman Rushdie, al-Rajul al-Mariq [The Devil of the West: Salman Rushdie, the Blasphemous Man]*. Cairo: Dar al-i'tisam.
- Carlyle, Thomas. 1846. *The Hero as Prophet. Mahomet: Islam*. In *On Heroes, Hero-worship and the Heroic in History*. New York: Wiley and Putnam.
- Carter, Paul. 1987. *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History*. London: Faber.
- Clark, Roger Y. 2001. *Stranger Gods: Salman Rushdie's Other Worlds*. London: McGill's-Queen's UP.
- de La Martine, Alphonse. 1854. *Histoire de La Turquie*. Vol.2. Paris: N.P.
- Easterman, Daniel. 1993. *A Sense of Proportion*. In Ahsan and Kidwai (eds), *Sacrilege versus Civility: Muslim Perspective on the Satanic Verses' Affair*. Leicester: The Islamic Foundation.
- Faruqi, M. H. 1993. *Publishing Sacrilege is Not Acceptable*. In Ahsan and Kidwai (eds), *Sacrilege versus Civility: Muslim Perspective on the Satanic Verses' Affair*. Leicester: The Islamic Foundation.

- Jussawalla, Feroza. 1996. Rushdie's Dastan-E-Dilruba: The Satanic Verses as Rushdie's Love Letter to Islam. *Diacritic*, (Spring): 50-73.
- Kuortti, Joel. 2007. The Satanic Verses: 'To Be Born Again, First You Have to Die'. In Abdulrazak Gurnah (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- La Porte, Victoria. 1999. *An Attempt to Understand the Muslim Reaction to The Satanic Verses*. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Gibbon, Edward and Simon Ockley. 1870. *History of the Saracen Empires*. London and New York: Frederick Waren and Company.
- Mecca. <http://ejabat.google.com>. (29 March 2012).
- Mufti, Aamir. 1999. Reading the Rushdie Affair: 'Islam,' Cultural Politics, Form. In Keith Booker (ed), *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie*. New York: G. K. Hall & Company.
- Needham, Anuradha Dingwaney. 2000. *Using the Master's Tools: Resistance and Literature of the African and South Asian Diaspora*. London: Macmillan.
- Parashkevova, Vassilena. 2007. Turn Your Watch Upside Down in Bombay and You See the Time in London': Catoptric Urban Configurations in Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (42.3): 5-24.
- Rabasa, Jose'. 1999. Allegories of Atlas. In Aschcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, (Eds.), *The PostColonial Studies Reader*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Rushdie, Salman. 1988. *The Satanic Verses*. Rep. 1998. United Kingdom: Vintage.
- Sanga, Jaina C. 2001. *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial Metaphors: Migration, Translation, Hybridity, Blasphemy and Globalization*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Spencer, Robert. 2010. Salman Rushdie and the 'War on Terror'. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 46 (3-4): 251-265.
- Stone, Norman. 1993. Limits of tolerance. In Ahsan and Kidwai (eds), *Sacrilege versus Civility: Muslim Perspective on the Satanic Verses' Affair*. Leicester: The Islamic Foundation.
- Suleri, Sara. 1989. Contraband Histories: Salman Rushdie and the Embodiment of Blasphemy. *The Yale Review* 78 (4): 604-624.
- Webster, Richard. 1990. *A Brief History of Blasphemy: Liberalism, Censorship and The Satanic Verses*. Southwold, Suffolk: The Orwell Press.

Weller, Paul. 2009. *A Mirror for Our Times: 'The Rushdie Affair' and the Future of Multiculturalism*. London & New York: Continuum.