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THE POLITICS OF A CHILDREN'S BOOK

Haroun and the Sea of Stories

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Abstract

Title: *The Politics of a Children's Book: Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

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Abstract: Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is a multifunctional tale, representing and arguing for, among other things, political expression, opposition to censorship and not least a movement for free speech. Disguised as a children's book, *Haroun* raises many issues central for Rushdie the author after he had been censored by a fatwa issued against him as a consequence of publishing the religious satire *The Satanic Verses*. The aim of this essay is to uncover political and autographical elements in the novel connected to the author's real-life experiences. The novel also contains postcolonial elements that I will firstly uncover and then examine from a theoretical point of view. I will discuss the theoretical aspects using various postcolonial critics that will help me shed light on the colonial issues portrayed in the novel. Haroun's fantastic journey to the imaginary world of Kahani will show him that everything is neither as self-evident nor logical as it might seem. The boundaries between fantasy and reality are in fact blurred.

Keywords: Salman Rushdie, politics, fatwa, post colonialism, totalitarianism, emancipation, censorship, Haroun, Khattam-Shud, Guppees, Chupwalas

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1. Introduction

As real-life problems often are too major to confront directly, literature serves as a filter for portraying these difficult issues. The tale of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) by Salman Rushdie is one such example. By publishing the religious satire *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Rushdie provoked large numbers of Muslim fundamentalists worldwide and thus became a target of a death warrant. A *fatwa* was issued against him by the supreme leader of Iran a year after the publication of the book (Morton 12). In the aftermath of the fatwa, Rushdie had to go into hiding in order to survive. During his time in hiding he managed to produce *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, which became an example of resistance against oppression, through the medium of a children's book.

Salman Rushdie was born in 1947 in India. He is a British author most famous for his postcolonial work, *Midnight's Children*, *The Satanic Verses*, *The Moor's Last Sigh* and his memoir *Joseph Anton.* Some of these works have proved to be extremely controversial since they deal with topics such as politics, religion, culture, and social problems in postcolonial societies (Morton 24, 30). He is an important figure for resistance in the literary world and has won multiple prizes for his work such as the Booker prize, the Whitbread prize and the European Union's Aristeion Prize for Literature. He has also been knighted by Queen Elizabeth II for his services to British literature.

The aim of this essay is, firstly, to look at autobiographical elements presented in the novel and show the allegorical features in *Haroun*. This is of paramount importance for this essay since allegorical aspects ground the postcolonial issues of the novel and allow them to be discussed in the context to the real-life situation of the Rushdie Affair. In other words, the author is of relevance to this project since events in his personal life are connected to the way this novel is written. *Haroun* presents *in a certain way* an analogy of Rushdie's experiences during the years of the Rushdie Affair in the disguise of a children's book. Thus, the author`s own experience with censorship becomes a major theme of the novel, as evident in its arguing for the importance of stories and free speech**.** By defending free speech, Rushdie is taking a political stance – in effect resisting totalitarianism – as I will discuss further on. Thirdly, I will discuss the presence of colonial issues as well as the role of post-colonial discourse presented in the novel as they shed light on social conditions in such

societies. As one of the ways of resisting dictatorship lies in defending free speech, I will argue that, the novel represents resistance to totalitarianism in light of the author's situation at the time of writing it. Through *Haroun*, Rushdie takes a stand by protecting the right of free speech, more specifically the value of storytelling.

The tale of *Haroun* introduces the famous storyteller Rashid Khalifa who loses his magical abilities of storytelling when his wife Soraya leaves him for the sniveling neighbor Mr. Sengupta, a despiser of imagination and stories. Adding to his misery, his son loses his temper demanding: "*What's the use of stories that aren't even true?"* (Haroun 22; original emphasis), which leaves Rashid completely mute and sets the wheels of the story in motion. This is a major setback for the storyteller since speaking is his livelihood; politicians pay Rashid to speak at their rallies, knowing that the voters believe his stories while their own speeches do not inspire the people's trust. The boy's sense of responsibility and quest to restore his father's Story Water supply brings him to the imaginary world of Kahani, where the dangerous mission of saving the poisoned Ocean of the Streams of Story begins. Khattam–Shud, 'the Arch-Enemy of all Stories, even Language itself' (Haroun 39), and the Chupwalas lie behind the poisoning of the Ocean, with plans to completely cleanse the world of stories in order to control it.

Fictional literature is depicted "through their roots in myth, history, and religion, reflect[ing] an all-encompassing worldview of their respective periods and nations" (Klarer 10). In terms of form, the novel is fictional but has many elements of historical context embedded. It has a linear structure with two worlds (the imaginary world Kahani and the real world/land of Alifbay) paralleling each other in their narrative and characters. *Haroun* is sometimes read as a simplistic allegory, but I believe that it is a children's book in its own right, while also dealing with complex issues which do not have simple black-and-white solutions.

Many critics have argued that the novel is an allegory of Rushdie's circumstances brought about by the fatwa (Ellerby, Goonetileke, Morton, Bharat). Although the novel contains allegorical elements, in terms of mirroring events from personal experiences post *The Satanic Verses*, it is important to highlight that it is not straightforwardly allegorical. I agree to a certain extent that the novel has allegorical representations but will also argue against the fact that it *only* stands as an allegory. *Haroun* rather highlights bigger issues, such as the importance of free speech, tolerance for diversity, as well as colonial resistance. To

read the novel just as an allegory would be too simple. In this light I will put more focus on colonial issues, where the postcolonial characteristics of the novel will get more attention, as they tend to be overshadowed by an allegorical reading of the novel. I will focus on the role of the protagonist, arguing that he represents a post-colonial critic who is challenging colonial stereotypes, rewriting the history of colonization through his actions.

One set of critics, Goonetileke, Morton, Ellerby and Cundy have primarily focused on the allegorical aspects of the novel. Goonetileke, for example, traces the many political aspects and references made in the novel that are connected to real-life events: "The Land of Khattam – Shud represents what the Soviet Union and China meant to the West during the Cold War and, more recently what Iran under Khomeini meant, and, essentially, what dictatorial regimes throughout history have meant" (121). He also highlights the similarities between the novel's characters parallel to the main characters in Rushdie's own life and how they mirror events taking place in *Haroun*. Cundy proposes a similar argument, analysing *Haroun* as an "allegory of a personal crisis", where adult issues are projected through a children's book. König on the other hand, focuses more on the postcolonial issues, emphasizing that "the main aesthetic and political concern of Haroun is not a simple allegory about the freedom of speech but rather a further exploration of the postcolonial condition that is central to his work before as well as after *Haroun*" (54). I agree with her interpretation of the novel being beyond allegorical and will expand further on the postcolonial aspects that König has discussed.

In addition to critics which deal with *Haroun*, this essay will make the use of various theorists. In order to best analyse the novel, I will be placing it within the framework of post-colonialism as well as Bakhtin's dialogism theory. First, I will apply the concepts of postcolonial critics Loomba, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, who have made major theoretical contributions to post-colonial criticism. This essay will show that *Haroun* highlights many postcolonial aspects such as challenging the concept of universalism as well as questioning the concept of the Other. Furthermore, *Haroun* can be seen as rewriting the history of colonization through confrontation of the universalist picture and version of events presented to the protagonist. In addition, the importance of dialogue will be discussed. The role of dialogue in the novel will be highlighted with Bakhtin's dialogism theory in terms of understanding the different perspectives of communication between the chattery Guppees and silent Chupwalas.

In this essay I will show diverse aspects of the novel and how they are linked together through a children's book that is portraying adult issues. The paper will be divided into three sections containing allegorical, political and post-colonial elements, all being different perspectives that are nonetheless connected to each other. The allegorical part of the novel is going to be highlighted in the first section of this essay where I will draw parallels between the characters in the novel and real-life people that are central in Rushdie's life at the time of producing *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. The second section of this essay will focus on political arguments found in the primary text, such as freedom of expression and censorship (as well as the value of storytelling). The concept of dialogue plays a major role in the novel and will therefore be further discussed with the help of Bakthin's theory about dialogism. This aspect is especially relevant when discussing free speech and the value of stories. Finally, the third and last section of this essay is going to highlight the postcolonial aspects of the novel. All of these elements discussed in the three sections are interconnected and interdependent. In order to understand the full complexity of the novel one must look at it from different perspectives which all shed light on the extraordinary situation that Rushdie found himself in, his personal crisis, stretching from censorship, political values, to colonial resistance, all of which can be found in the novel.

2. Allegorical Reading: Between Reality and Fiction

Many parallels can be drawn between *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and Rushdie's predicament following the fatwa. Hence, many critics have argued that *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is an allegory of Rushdie's circumstances in the wake of the death sentence (Morton, Cundy, Ellerby). Bharat goes as far as claiming that Haroun represents a "self-analysis" (305), "demonstrating that his voice was intact" (306). Ellerby highlights the complex situation of the author emphasizing: "Rather than censoring himself, Rushdie gets to the heart of his specific situation, conceptualizing what the fatwa is really about in terms of narrative. For Rushdie, the battle, is in fact, about the ability of the storyteller to open up all stories (including the life story of Prophet Muhammad) to reinterpretation, to keep narratives unbound in time" (3). Many of Rushdie`s critics have pointed out that writing *Haroun* can be seen as an attempt to clear his name from accusations of being a "blasphemous writer" (*Joseph Anton* 116, 121, 156). With *Haroun*, Rushdie found a way to convey his message to the public in the guise of a children's book, creating a narrative from his self-imposed predicament.

As one unpacks the allegory of the novel and discover its application to the events taking place after the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, one begins to see the similarities between the text and Rushdie's personal and political struggles. This correspondence between the real and the fictional is especially interesting when analyzing the characters of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. Not surprisingly, many of the characters in the novel strongly resemble real-life people, people dear to Rushdie as well as the key actors of the Rushdie affair. Consequently, it is to the analysis of the characters and to their connection to non-fictional people that this essay now turns.

The first and arguably most important parallel that needs to be drawn is between Rushdie the author and Rashid the storyteller, the Shah of Blah, the Ocean of Notions. As Goonetilleke argues, the name Rashid alludes to the author's own name. Similarly, Cundy traces the connection between Rashid and Rushdie, especially in relation to their sons –

Haroun and Zafar. However, before the similarity of the two sons is explored, this essay will attempt to strengthen the critics' faint suggestion that Rashid represents Rushdie's counterpart in the text. Starting with *Joseph Anton*, Rushdie's quasi-autobiographical work, the writer hints at the close resemblance between himself and the storyteller in Haroun:

> While zafar was having a bath, his dad would take a mug and dip it into his son's bathwater and pretend to sip, and to find a story to tell, a story-stream flowing through the bath of stories. And now in Zafar's book [Haroun and the Sea of Stories] he would visit the ocean itself. There would be a storyteller in the story, who lost the Gift of the Gab […] (Joseph Anton 167).

Here Rushdie strongly suggests that the father in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Rashid Khalifa, is in fact Rushdie himself. This is most evident in the pronoun "he" referring to Rushdie visiting the "ocean itself" in the novel. Furthermore, the parallels of the ocean of stories and the bath of stories as well as the story-streams found in both create a stark impression that the storyteller of the novel and its author are in fact one and the same. What makes the connection between Rushdie and Rashid even stronger is the fact that this paragraph follows Rushdie's confession of having difficulty writing in light of the distorted and hostile reception of *The Satanic Verses*. He admits to having trouble writing even eight-hundred-word book reviews, comparing his attempts to "pulling teeth" (Joseph Anton 166). Thus, another similarity between Rashid and Rushdie can be found in the correspondence between losing "the Gift of the Gab" and "becoming not a writer" (Joseph Anton 166). "The words not coming easily" for Rushdie mirrors the predicament of the storyteller: "Rashid Khalifa, the legendary Ocean of Notions, the Fabled Shah of Blah, stood up in front of a huge audience, opened his mouth, and found that he had run out of stories to tell" (Haroun 22).

Thus, Rushdie has managed to construct a narrative out of spending "an awful lot of time thinking I would never write again" (Fenton). The idea of Rushdie losing his voice is inextricably tied to the events that followed the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. Not only was the author physically hidden from the public eye, literally losing his ability to address the public freely, Rushdie also saw his latest novel being burned and banned, his intentions misinterpreted, his words twisted, and his voice monopolized by both sides of the conflict. Additionally, censorship of the book was demanded and many bookshops, WH Smith serving as the best example, took every copy off their shelves (Joseph Anton 113, 130). Thus, it is not

hard to perceive why Rushdie might have felt like he was losing his voice, making his resemblance to Rashid even more straightforward. As a result, when Iff the Water Genie proclaims: "I regret to report, the gentleman […] has discontinued narrative activities" (Haroun 57), he could be referring to either the storyteller or Rushdie, both having in effect lost their voice.

Secondly, the start of the novel reveals Haroun to be Rashid's only son (Haroun 15), much like Zafar was Rushdie's only son at the time. This further supports the suggestion that Rashid represents Rushdie in the text; however, it also hints at a second correspondence between Haroun the character and Zafar. Some critics, Cundy serving as the best example, have argued for the similarity between the two sons. The parallel between them is further supported by the fact that the original title of the novel was Zafar and the Sea of Stories (Joseph Anton 168). While the name Haroun was chosen in the end for the reason of, as Rushdie puts it, "fictive distance between the boy in the book and the boy in the bath" (Joseph Anton 168), the connection between the two remains blatant, not least for the fact that Zafar's middle name is Haroun. Furthermore, Rushdie often emphasizes the central role Zafar played in encouraging him to write again. Rushdie promised he would write a book for his son (Joseph Anton 167), which was "*the* thing that brought [him] back to writing" (Fenton). One could say that it was Zafar who returned Rushdie's Gift of the Gab, his supply of "Story Water from the Great Story Sea" (Haroun 57). In this sense, there is an obvious correspondence between Zafar bringing Rushdie back to the typewriter and Haroun's crucial role of inspiring his dejected father in the narrative of the novel. The importance of the son as "the key to the father's re-awakened storytelling abilities" – in connection to both the novel and Rushdie the author – is also briefly mentioned by Cundy (341). Lastly, an interesting point can be developed from Goonetilleke's argument that "[f]rom a domestic tragedy, Haroun is now catapulted into a crisis involving a whole nation" (113). This can also be applied to Zafar's situation in the wake of the fatwa. Much like Haroun, Zafar was "catapulted" from a domestic tragedy – his parents' divorce – into a crisis on a global scale – the death threat and protests against his father. All in all, taking into account the central role in finding the father´s creative voice and the precarious position the sons find themselves in, one can perceive the strong similarity between Zafar and Haroun.

Thirdly, Rushdie's oppressor Khomeini also has a major role in the novel. In response to the author being sentenced to death by a man he has never met for writing a book, Rushdie

has taken upon himself to depict Khomeini's characteristics through two different villains in the novel. Khomeini´s characteristics are juxtaposed with the characters of Mr. Sengupta and the Cultmaster Khattam-Shud. Rushdie's technique to deliberately separate the man from the ayatollah is apparent in splitting him up into two characters that are actually the same person. The effect and importance of this double portrayal will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

On the one hand, Rushdie depicts Khomeini as Mr. Sengupta, a spiritless and vapid man that has no room for anything other than *facts* and sees "life [as] a serious business" (Haroun 22). Through the character of Mr. Sengupta, the author makes Khomeini seem little, unimportant and meaningless. Additionally, Rushdie portrays him as a man "who hated stories and storytellers" (Haroun 20). By constantly criticizing Rashid and his profession as a storyteller he mirrors Khomeini`s criticism of Rushdie as an author. In seducing Rashid`s wife, he also proves to be a man without morals encouraging Soraya to undermine her own husband. When Soraya has her head filled with his negativity, she is convinced it must be true and thereby loses faith in Rashid. She leaves her husband with a note confirming how much Mr. Sengupta has affected her thinking:

> You are only interested in pleasure, but a proper man would know that life is a serious business. Your brain is full of make-believe, so there is no room in it for facts. Mr. Sengupta has no imagination at all. This is okay by me (Haroun 22).

With this ironic and subtle criticism, Rushdie undermines Khomeini´s grandeur and illusory position of power without diminishing the significance of his pernicious actions. He shows him to be only a man, humanizing if not belittling the Iranian leader.

On the other hand, the Cultmaster Khattam-Shud, more closely associated with the persona of the ayatollah than Khomeini the man, is described as "the Arch-Enemy of all Stories, even of Language itself. He is the Prince of Silence and the Foe of Speech" (Haroun 39, 79). Just like the ayatollah, the "Cultmaster of Bezaban" (Haroun 155) represents oppression and censorship and shares many similarities with Rushdie's prosecutor Khomeini who had poisoned the minds of his society, drawing them into fundamentalist beliefs, by encouraging and justifying the death sentence of a man who had written a book not fitting with his biased worldview. The way Khattam – Shud planned to silence speech, by poisoning the Ocean of the Streams of Story, can therefore be compared to Khomeini's act of poisoning

an entire community against a writer he wanted to permanently silence. The fatwa against Rushdie is mirrored in the way Khattam-Shud attempts to silence the citizens of Kahani and poison the story waters. The connection between Khattam – Shud and Khomeini has also been noted by many critics (Goonetilleke, Morton, Cundy). However, even this larger-than-life, villainous depiction is undermined by Rushdie in *Haroun*. The Cultmaster is described as a "skinny, scrawny, measly, weaselly, snivelling clerical type, exactly like all the others" (Haroun 153). When Haroun first sees him he realizes that the supposedly "notorious and terrifying Cultmaster" (153) in fact is an "unimpressive creature" (153), immediately recognizing him as Mr. Sengupta. Haroun's realization that the Cultmaster Khattam-Shud is the doppelganger of Mr Sengupta confirms that the two characters in fact represent the same person, Rushdie's real – life prosecutor, Khomeini.

Lastly, to discover connections between Rushdie's experiences and the novel is vital as it gives the reader a starting point when analyzing the arguments and ideas of the book. The autobiographical aspect serves as an important foundation for the reader's understanding of the text. While the allegorical connections are a good starting point, the metaphors Rushdie uses are more complex and plural, requiring the reader to look at the political and postcolonial interpretations as well. This is important considering the fatwa and the fact that the writer was born into a postcolonial society of India, with major political tensions and social injustice taking place. In terms of legitimacy, Rushdie represents the insider who is depicting the postcolonial experience and political situation from a valid perspective. His point of view is in part a result of the damages that totalitarian power inflicted on his country as well as his life. Through the personal lens, one can make connections with further issues discussed in the novel. However, one would be amiss to stop one´s interpretation of the novel and its characters at the allegorical level. The reason for this is that no single character in *Haroun* just represents their real-life counterpart, they also represent ideas, voices and power. This multiplicity allows Rushdie to interweave the problems of Indian colonization with Iranian totalitarianism and censorship, as well as the personal drama following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. Thus, in order to tackle the political argument for free speech in the novel one needs to build on as well as move beyond allegory. On that note, this essay now moves to the discussion of Chup and Gup and the role of communication in each society.

3. The importance of free speech

"Totalitarian societies seek to replace the many truths of freedom by the one truth of power, be it secular or religious; to halt the motion of society, to snuff its spark" (Rushdie, 2002:233).

In Rushdie's words, the replacement of "the many truths of freedom" with the singular "truth of power" is what totalitarian societies aspire to achieve. One could say that totalitarian societies only function by muting the voices of freedom, in other words, by denying their citizens the right to free speech, the plurality of dialogic expression. It is for that reason that Rushdie has always stood as a stark defender of the right to free expression. Teverson emphasizes that "for Rushdie, the freedom to tell stories is connected to freedom of speech and personal liberty" (446). This can be seen in many of his works and it is also a major theme in *Haroun*. Despite all the imaginary flourishes and the children's book feel to the story, reading the novel from an adult perspective is a complex and dark affair. *Haroun* addresses not only the importance of free speech but also the injustices and difficult social conditions taking place in totalitarian societies. Both of these concerns are raised in the portrayal of the Guppees and the Chupwalas: "Gup is bright and Chup is dark. Gup is warm and Chup is freezing cold. Gup is all chattering and noise, whereas Chup is silent as a shadow. Guppees love Stories, and Speech; Chupwalas, it seems, hate these things just as strongly" (Haroun 125). Having established the allegorical connection between the real-world events and conditions and the fairytale of *Haroun*, this chapter is going to focus on the novel's political aspects where Rushdie is showing a totalitarian setting in an imaginary world and how extreme conditions affect the individuals that are part of this society. With extracts from the novel, I will discuss how Rushdie promotes the value of free speech and how a united people can achieve greater things than a divided people. This is connected to my argument about *Haroun* representing resistance to totalitarianism. The political argument lies in comparing two kinds of societies against each other, showing the reader a picture of how a free community lives compared to a closed one.

The land of Chup with their dark Chupwalas are synonymous with the fundamentalist society of Iran that Rushdie is clearly criticizing, while the Guppees can be seen to portray the

democratic societies of the West. The approach here lies in portraying the functional society with no limits to free expression in contrast to a forced ideology and constant suspicion among people. The allegorical features are without any doubt present. Not only does the writer compare two societies, he illustrates the classic binary constructions of good and evil.

In addition, the novel describes a political power that wishes to silence the rest of civilization, attacking speech and stories not conducive to the goal of total rule and domination. This is portrayed in the story as the poisoning of the Ocean of Streams of Stories by the ruler of Chup, evil Cultmaster Khattam-Shud whose plan lies in killing all stories. The magical Sea of Stories can be seen as a metaphor for freedom of speech; as long as there are stories, people have their freedom of expression. The ability of storytelling is presented in the novel as a democratic act that is crucial for the functioning of a society. In Teverson's words "storytelling, when unfettered, becomes the antithesis of totalitarian thinking, because it resists the fascistic drive to control society by limiting potential definitions and controlling interpretations" (449), emphasizing the importance of challenging narratives.

Through the killing of all stories Khattam-Shud would have control over free speech and consequently the world which he would thus silence. Khattam-Shud, the "archenemy of all stories, even language itself" (Haroun 39) represents the ending of stories, dreams and human desires, life itself – *completely finished,* as the meaning of his name implies. His totalitarian ambitions can be seen as he remarks: "[t]he world is for Controlling. [I]nside every single story, inside every Stream in the Ocean, there lies a world, a story-world, that I cannot Rule at all" (Haroun 161). Teverson emphasizes that Khattam – Shud is "obsessed with the desire to establish a univocal interpretation of culture by policing who may and who may not speak, and the story sea, as living embodiment of heteroglossia and polyphony, is a fluid rebuttal of his politics of exclusion" (450). His inability to rule the world of stories, the domain of free speech, is an obstacle for his desire for totalitarian power. The tale's villain has the characteristics of a fundamentalist whose evil plan is to totally silence the world he governs. He tells Haroun: "You'd have done better to stick to Facts, but you were stuffed with *stories*… *Stories* make trouble. An Ocean of *Stories* is an Ocean of Trouble" (Haroun 155). Equating stories with trouble, Khattam-Shud reveals his frustration with pluralism and freedom of speech – the hallmarks of a totalitarian ruler. By poisoning the Ocean, which represents the biggest threat to the Cultmaster's existence, he would get control over the world he views as an object *for* control.

The second example of the attack on free speech can be found in the attempt of Khattam-Shud to silence his own people. As the novel explains: "[i]n the old days the Cultmaster, Khattam-Shud, preached hatred only towards stories and fancies and dreams; but now he has become more severe, and opposes Speech for any reason at all. In Chup City the schools and law-courts and theatres are all closed now, unable to operate because of the Silence Laws" (Haroun 101). Through this act he has taken upon himself to determine an entire society's living conditions, robbing them of the fundamental right of language and speech. Ashcroft et al. argue that "Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established" (7). In this case the hierarchical structure of power is rather maintained through literal silence. Khattam – Shud has understood that it is not enough to enforce a ban on stories through preaching, but has taken a more radical approach. Through imposition of Silence Laws, the issue of major censorship is represented in the novel.

The Chupwalas, inhabitants of the dark side of the moon, are subjects with sewn lips and no audible language, due to the hate towards speech of their master. Sewing a subject's lips refers to the lack of free speech or expression in a totalitarian society. Khattamn Shud's followers are portrayed as fanatics, sewing their lips in order to show absolute loyalty to their leader (Haroun 101). The Chupwalas are in this context synonymous with Khomeini's blind followers prepared to eliminate a writer whose work is considered a great threat. However, when Haroun and the water Genie Iff meet the Cultmaster of the dark side for the first time, Iff mocks the censoring fundamentalist:

> 'Isn't it typical, couldn't you have guessed it, wouldn't you have known: the Grand Panjandrum himself does exactly what he wants to forbid everyone else to do. His followers sew up their lips and he talks and talks like bily-o'. (Haroun 154)

Iff reveals the Cultmaster´s duplicity and double standards; he does exactly what he is forbidding others – speak. Ironically, this is the type of conduct that Rushdie chooses to associate with dictatorship, where the *rules* one imposes on their subjects do not apply to the rulers of these societies (Goonetileke 115).

Moreover, when the war between Chupwalas and Guppees kicks off, the difference between a free society and a totalitarian society becomes apparent:

> Rashid saw, to his great surprise, that the Chupwalas were quite unable to resist the Guppees. The Pages of Gup, now that they had talked through everything so fully, fought hard, remained united, supported each other when required to do so, and in general looked like a force with a common purpose. All those arguments and debates, all that openness, had created powerful bonds of fellowship between them. The Chupwalas, on the other hand, turned out to be a disunited rabble…their vows of silence and their habits of secrecy had made them suspicious and distrustful of one another. They had no faith in their generals, either. (Haroun 184-185)

The Guppees are a cohesive military unit precisely because their freedom of speech allowed them to communicate and coordinate. The pages of the army in the story can be seen as alluding to the power of real-life books as mediums of speech, available for all people, regardless of social conditions. An army generally means power, and a library of books makes a strong political unit, displaying that books have an active role in the battle for free speech. Thus, literature becomes a platform for free expression, where individuals of different cultures have the ability to voice their imagination and creativity, as well as the conflicts they might have. The pages, volumes and chapters which make up the Gup army in the tale make a strong military unit devoted to freedom of expression.

In contrast, as can be seen in the quote above, the Chupwalas are anything but organized. This can be read as a metaphor for the importance of free speech for the successful operation of society as a whole. Thus, free speech is not only *a principle,* but is proved to be effective in combat in the story. On the other hand, a society without free speech is shown to be ineffectual and dysfunctional. All in all, one can see how central the simple act of open communication and expression is for the well-being of a military or indeed any social unit (Goonetilleke 118).

Further reference connected to freedom of speech is found in Haroun's emergency weapon, the Bite – a – lite, gifted to him by Iff the Water Genie. This weapon is a small "emergency something" (Haroun 149) that is to be kept under one's tongue. When they find themselves in danger on the dark ship of the Cultmaster Khattam – Shud, Haroun bites it,

releasing a huge amount of light: “The light that poured out from his mouth was bright as the sun! The Chupwalas all around him were blinded, and broke their vows of silence to shriek and utter curses as they clutched their eyes” (Haroun 165). This part is an allegorical representation of free speech as light is used to destroy darkness, where the mouth releasing light is a symbol of words, of speech (Goonetelleke 114). The mouth is a symbol of arguments and discussions, the most powerful weapon one has. With the light released, “the Union of the Zipped lips” (Haroun 166) become vulnerable, presenting a crack in their so-called unity, a crack meaning that speech had found its way to the most silent parts and was pushing forward. The light, representing speech, becomes a serious threat to the darkness and muteness.

In order to better discuss the role of communication in *Haroun*, one can apply Bakhtin`s theory of dialogism as a framework for understanding the text. Highlighting the concept of dialogue and its role in the novel, Bakhin’s dialogism theory offers another perspective on dialogue in relation to the societies of Chup and Gup. Discussing the theory in general, Vaupotič defines Bakthin’s idea of dialogue as different standpoints that engage with one another where “an utterance is a point of view… that doesn’t come out of nothing”. When one applies this concept to *Haroun*, the Guppees are the clearest example of a dialogic society. This can be seen in their describing the Parliament of Gup as Chatterbox “because debates there could run on for weeks or months even, occasionally, years, on account of the Guppee fondness for conversation” (Haroun 88). The variety of perspectives is debated within dialogic speech, indicating tolerance for different points of view in the land of Gup and therefore for freedom of speech, acknowledging the social perspective of dialogue and the role it plays in that context.

On the other hand, Vaupotič presents monologism as a singularity of an idea. He explains that “in a monologic horizon the idea is always one”. Thus, it is not difficult to apply the concept of monologism to a totalitarian society such as Chup, with their servile loyalty to their leader, the sewing of their lips, their silence and their opposition to stories. All of these social characteristics indicate the scarcity of dialogue where only one unchallengeable truth exists. However, analyzing the communication of Chup as simply monological may not be the most accurate interpretation. Despite the one truth of the totalitarian land of Chup, perhaps the more applicable concept of Bakhtin`s theory in relation to the Chupwalas is that of “zero” dialogic relationships defined by Vaupotič as “dialogue between mutes”, where “there is

actual dialogic contact, but there's no contact of meaning." The Chupwalas collective silence can be seen as a dialogue that lacks voice but is, nevertheless, clear. Thus, using Bakhtin`s theory, one can better understand that the contrast between Chup and Gup is not simply one between monologism and dialogism, between one idea and a plurality of ideas, but rather between meaningful and "zero" dialogic relationships.

In conclusion, this chapter has argued that *Haroun* includes many political aspects and stands to defend free speech and the value of storytelling. Among other political arguments that can be seen in the social conditions portrayed in the novel, the most important are the democratic role of free speech, the value of books, the double standard of totalitarianism, the functioning of open and closed societies and, finally, how they correspond to Bakhtin's theory of monologism and dialogism, as well as meaningful and "zero" dialogic relationships. The following chapter will continue the political analysis of the novel, but combine it with post-colonial theory.

4. Postcolonial Aspects

"When a tyrant falls, the world's shadows lighten." (Taneja 202)

In this section I will address the postcolonial features of the novel, showing the presence of colonial issues that echo throughout *Haroun*, as well as the role of colonial discourse in the depiction of characters. Another aspect I will highlight is that the protagonist acts by deconstructing binary oppositions, and how this opens a broader dialogue.

Firstly, Rushdie portrays the stereotypical colonial relationship between "the bad side", the land of Chup as the colonizers and "the good side", the land of Gup as the colonized. Chup's ruler Khattam-Shud, and by extension Chupwalas, can be seen to represent the colonizer, monopolizing the Ocean of Stories and causing disruption on the other side of the moon. By claiming monopoly over the Ocean of Stories that belongs to all Kahani's inhabitants, Khattam-Shud suppresses free speech and embodies the role of a tyrant. The authority he claims over the Ocean and the right he takes upon himself to poison it, can be compared to the colonizers of Rushdie's homeland, who took the same right upon themselves to colonize vital resources belonging to the land they seized. This affects the Guppees severely, since the poisoning of the story water harms the production of stories, the main export of the Guppees. The act of poisoning can be seen as an example of the way that colonizers have affected the populations in their colonies. Whether one looks at pollution or the appropriation of natural resources, the relationship between Chupwalas and Guppees can be seen as one between colonizers and the colonized.

On the other hand, the line between Chup as the colonizers and Gup as the colonized is blurred by the representation of the two populations in the novel. To make the division between the two peoples as clear as possible, the author applies features of colonial discourse into the depiction of the Guppees and Chupwalas. The otherness versus the familiar is highlighted in the portrayal of the inhabitants of Kahani. Loomba describes the colonial discourse as "a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them')" (43). While the Guppees are portrayed as the light gentle folks with free speech and union, who serve as an example of how to act, the dark Chupwalas are deliberately depicted as mistrustful,

ignorant and savage. This can be traced to the colonial representations of the colonized that Edward Said demonstrates in *Orientalism*, where "colonial narratives have a long history of portraying African and Asian individuals in grotesque ways, reifying the Western fear of and repugnance for non – Westerners by ascribing inhuman, animalistic attributes to their physicality" (Rubinson 37). As the Chupwalas live in complete silence imposed by their leader, they do not have the means to challenge his rule. This can be seen as corresponding to the way people lived under colonial rule and did not have the means to challenge their colonizers in any way. Thus, when it comes to their representation, the Guppees can be seen as colonizers and the Chupwalas as the colonized.

Moreover, Rushdie subverts the usual colonial binary, not only with representation, but also by showing the land of Gup acting as the colonizer in the story. The second metaphorical colonial relationship that Rushdie is portraying through the imaginary lens, can be found in stopping the rotation of the moon and literally putting an entire society into darkness. This severe act is carried out by the Guppees, the supposedly "good side" of the story and can also be seen as a metaphor for colonizers taking natural resources from the colonized. The inverted role of colonizers and colonized shows another perspective of colonialization, in effect, rewriting and subverting its one-directional history. This aspect shows that there is another side to the story, showing the reader that "the good side" is not always to be trusted, as there are always two sides to a problem. Furthermore, the act of permanently stealing the sunlight from Chup in turn contributes to the emergence of fanatics. The consequences brought by all-time darkness in a society are major, not least destructive. The Chupwalas' condition as dark and cold creatures is brought upon by the lack of sunlight and warmth that the other side of the moon benefits from. The fact that they are a silent and depressed population who follow an extremist comes from the lack of any hope and happiness that sunlight represents. In this way, "the "good side" is implicated in the creation of the "evil side" (König 54). Thus, Rushdie deconstructs those binary oppositions and challenges postcolonial stereotypes such as the active, malevolent colonizer and the passive, blameless colonized. Loomba describes this as "neither colonizer nor colonized [being] independent of the other" (149). Hence, the metaphorical colonization in *Haroun* goes both ways, affecting both Chup and Gup. For instance, the poisoning of the Sea of Stories damages both the colonized and the colonizers, as well as the people on Earth. The harm done might damage one land more than the other, but regardless of which side is doing what, both of them are to some degree negatively

affected by the consequences of the colonial relationship. With this, Rushdie portrays a vicious cycle of mutual and reactive atrocities between the colonizers and the colonized. This perspective emphasizes that the Guppees are equally responsible for the Chupwalas´ suffering as well as the other way around, both committing the act of colonization upon the other. Loomba's fitting definition of colonization, within a historical context, is described as "[t]he process of 'forming a community' in the new land necessarily meant un-forming or re-forming the communities that existed there already" (8). This can be seen in the actions of the Guppees as the colonizers as they take upon themselves to decide a society's fate, no matter whether it is positive or negative.

From the Guppees' perspective, the act of stopping the moon, of deliberately developing a technique that stops the force of nature, is seen as something logical and justified by their supposed superiority. The justification aspect of the colonizer can be seen in the following quote: "Thanks to the genius of the Eggheads at P2C2E House…the rotation of Kahani has been brought under control. As a result the Land of Gup is bathed in Endless Sunshine, while over in Chup it's always the middle of the night" (Haroun 80), showing no regret or sense of responsibility for the suffering they have imposed on the Chupwalas. The aspect of "bringing the moon under control" signifies the major ignorance of the Guppees. The lack of any guilt or responsibility towards the ones affected also casts doubts on seeing them as the inherently good side in the novel as they are primarily portrayed. The blurred line between good and bad shows the subversion of the usual image shown in postcolonial literature, thus highlighting the aspect of deconstructing binary oppositions that Rushdie has managed to portray in *Haroun*. In this way the colonizer and the colonized are not strictly separate entities but are more complex and interdependent.

Lastly, a final colonial aspect I wish to bring up is the issue of silencing, power and the postcolonial voice in the novel. By banning every aspect in the society that is connected to language, Khattam – Shud ensures his power over the society of Chup (as discussed in the previous section). "Such power is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice" (Ashcroft et al. 7), which Rushdie's protagonist Haroun is personifying. In the novel Haroun's character clearly represents a post-colonial critic, challenging colonial stereotypes with his independent thinking and impartial acting. As discussed above, things are not as black and white as they are portrayed at first, and the fact that Haroun can see beyond that, by not succumbing to the universalist picture presented, opens a broader dialogue. Colonial critic

Loomba describes the challenge to colonialism in the following quote: “the work of individual thinkers and critics is located within larger debates such as those about ideology or representation, gender or agency” (5), which corresponds with Haroun’s independent stance in the story.

Haroun’s wish to reestablish Kahani to its old state, having both daylight and night, shows his consideration for both sides rather than favoring one side over the other. He proves that the sunlight, which can be seen as a metaphor for resources in general, should be allocated equally between societies. His deference towards both sides is what makes him the protagonist, bringing a happy ending to all, instead of destroying one side completely as is traditional in fairy tales. König points out that “Haroun becomes a leader who makes decisions independently…enabl[ing] him to identify the true cause of the conflict and find a solution that eliminates the root of the problem, namely polarization itself on the moon” (König 54). He sees that even the self-proclaimed good has its flaws which can be seen as he claims: “silence had its own grace and beauty (just as speech could be graceless and ugly) … and that creatures of darkness could be as lovely as the children of the light” (Haroun 125). This shows that Haroun represents the voice of a post-colonial critic which is further proven by his impartial wish for equality as Haroun restores balance and decolonizes the moon Kahani. In this light, his character is rewriting the history of colonization, shedding light on deeper understanding of social conditions that are presented.

5. Conclusion

Through a children's book, which serves as a safe platform for expression, Rushdie has shown the value of stories, in an extraordinary situation. Through the portrayal of the character Rashid and his abilities of storytelling, Rushdie argues that art cannot be imprisoned, demonstrating against his own situation of censorship. Rushdie is not only showing resistance against his oppressors but against totalitarian regimes as well as fundamentalist powers throughout history. The aim of this essay has been to, first, uncover the autobiographical and political aspects of the novel, highlight their allegorical interconnectedness, and, second, analyze the novel from a postcolonial perspective and show Haroun as a post-colonial voice.

The first section focused on the allegorical parts of the novel drawing parallels between real-life characters and the characters from the story. I have, with evidence, concluded that each character in the story has a direct connection to real-life figures both dear to Rushdie and those directly responsible for his predicament following the fatwa.

In the second section, the political aspects of the story were the main focus, specifically free speech and censorship when two different societies confront each other, likely representing Eastern and Western societies. I have attempted to show that the major focus of the tale lies in the poisoning of the Sea of Stories, and the consequences it brings for each society. The dark ruler Khattam –Shud is responsible for the poisoning of the Sea, with the ambition to cleanse the world of speech and stories. This is another allegorical example which can be directly connected to Rushdie's own censor. I have argued that the importance of protecting the Sea of Stories parallels Rushdie's fight for the survival of creativity and imagination and thus democracy. Another important aspect that has been highlighted in this section is the preparation for war between the Guppees and Chupwalas, showing the importance of speech. While the Guppees have the ability to talk through their tactics, the Chupwalas remain disunited and mistrustful towards each other, as a consequence of the Silence Laws imposed on them.

Finally, looking beyond the allegorical meaning of the novel brought me to address the many colonial echoes and postcolonial aspects depicted in *Haroun*. They have major significance for the plot and also shed light on larger social issues. The major focus lies on

Haroun being portrayed as a critical voice against totalitarianism. On the surface, the novel portrays a war between democracy and dictatorship, between speech and silence, in order to emphasize that both sides are equally responsible for the causes of the conflict, both committing the act of colonization upon the other. The twist of the story lies in the protagonist's independent mind, bringing him to the realization that neither side is as innocent as one may think at first, and acting impartially when confronting the root of the problem. Haroun's actions clearly deconstruct binary oppositions, leading to the elimination of the true cause of the problem, rather than destroying the dark side as is usually the case in fairy tales. Through *Haroun*, Rushdie has managed to place the storyline in a historical context highlighting post-colonial issues as well as foregrounding hybridity and multiculturalism, disarming the homogenous picture painted by oppressors.

Reading the novel from a postcolonial perspective, *Haroun* should be seen as an important and oft-understudied text in the postcolonial canon, as well as in Rushdie's body of work. The book's complexity invites further studies which may employ postmodernism in addition to post-colonialism to debate the deconstructive merit of the children's book. While a postmodern analysis of the novel can be similarly rewarding, I have chosen, in this essay, to show the importance of the contribution that *Haroun* can have to postcolonial studies.

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