



Mother-Son Relationship and Identity Formation in The Moor's Last Sigh*

Mağriplinin Son İç Çekişi Romanında Ana-Oğul İlişkisi ve Kimlik Oluşumu

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Abstract

Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* revolves around the Moor who needs to record his genealogical history in order to survive at a madman's castle and restore his mother's reputation. While re-telling his family's story that originated in Granada, parallel to the history of post-independence India, the Moor makes use of his mother Aurora's magical realist paintings that combine official History with individual histories. Aurora, the oppressive mother figure, dominates the Moor's narrative through her paintings entitled "The Moor Cycle" and manipulates his story-telling and identity-formation process. In "The Moor Cycle" paintings, she extols the Moor's deformed body and associates him with the last Sultan Boabdil of Granada. Reshaping the flow of history, the mother-son relationship and its dynamics are as important as the historical backdrop of the narrative. This parallelism between individual histories and the history of India necessitates an allegorical reading, which gives the key role to 'Aurora the mother.' Rushdie's choice of Aurora as the main source of his postmodern narrative and her haunting influence on the Moor's identity-formation echo the Mother India myth promoted during the Indian nation-building process. The love-hate relationship between the Moor and Aurora, and its effects on the Moor's identity will be analyzed by referring to Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. Rushdie's association of magical realism with the maternal semiotic chora, his metaphorical use of the Moor's grotesque body and the abject figures' potential of breaking the world order based on the law of the father will also be highlighted within the framework of Kristeva's theory. Therefore, Aurora's paintings will be read as a feminine form of history-writing that challenges the paternal discourse that writes the official History.

Keywords: Semiotic Chora, Abjection, The Moor's Last Sigh, Mother India, Salman Rushdie.

Öz

Salman Rushdie'nin kaleme aldığı *Mağriplinin Son İç Çekişi* Mağripli karakterinin, deli bir ressamın İspanya'daki kalesinde son nefesini vermeye çalışırken yazdığı hayat öyküsünü anlatır. Mağripli, hayatta kalabilmek için ailesinin hikayesini kayıtlara geçmek zorundadır. Yıllar önce ihanet ettiği annesinin ressam tarafından yapılmış portresini geri almak ve annesini ölümsüz kılmak için Hindistan'ın bağımsızlık sonrası dönemiyle iç içe geçen aile tarihini tekrar yazarken, annesi Aurora'nın gerçek ve fantastik öğeleri birleştiren büyülü gerçekçi tarzında yapılmış tabloları anlatısının ana kaynağını oluşturur. Mağripli kaleme aldığı hayat öyküsüyle ihanet ettiği annesinden özür dilemesinin tek yoludur. Baskıcı bir anne portresi çizen Aurora'nın "Mağripli Serisi" tabloları oğlunun anlatısına egemen olurken, onun hem anlatı hem de kimlik oluşturma sürecini şekillendirir. Tarihin akışını değiştiren ve yeniden anlamlandıran anne-oğul ilişkisi ve bu ilişkinin dinamikleri de romanın tarihi arka planı kadar önemlidir. Hindistan'ın resmi tarihine paralel ilerleyen kişisel anlatılar, romanın alegorik okunmasını zorunlu kılar ve bu kapsamda baş rolü anne rolündeki Aurora'ya verir. Rushdie'nin Aurora'yı postmodern anlatısına ana kaynak yapması ve Aurora'nın Mağripli'nin kimlik oluşturma sürecindeki baskılayıcı etkisi Hindistan'ın ulus kurma sürecinde ön plana çıkarılan 'Hindistan Ana' mitini hatırlatır. Bu bağlamda, aşk-nefret düzleminde ilerleyen anne-oğul ilişkisi ve bu ilişkinin Mağripli'nin kimliği üzerindeki etkisi psikanalist Julia Kristeva'nın iğrençlik teorisiyle açıklanacaktır. Rushdie büyülü gerçekçi tabloları anne rahmiyle özdeşleştirilen semiyotik koraya atfederken, Mağripli'nin normalden iki kat hızlı yaşanan sıradışı vücudu ve Aurora gibi ötelenmiş figürlerin baba düzenini yıkma potansiyeli Kristeva'nın teorileri çerçevesinde incelenecektir. Bu nedenle, Aurora'nın büyülü gerçekçi tabloları, babaya ait sembolik düzenin içinde yazılan tarihe bir alternatif olarak okunacaktır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Semiyotik Kora, iğrenme, Mağriplinin Son İç Çekişi, Hindistan Ana, Salman Rushdie.

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Introduction

The Moor's Last Sigh (1995) is not only Salman Rushdie's attempt to rewrite the history of modern India in a magical realist mode but also his character Aurora's endeavor to embody her dream of multicultural India in her son the Moor's grotesque body. As a typical Rushdie fiction, there is an intended interplay of the official History and individual histories in *The Moor's Last Sigh* since the magical intertwines with the real, claiming equal dignity. Aurora, the oppressive mother figure, dominates the Moor's narrative through her paintings entitled "The Moor Cycle" and manipulates his story-telling and identity-formation process. Reshaping the flow of history, the mother-son relationship and its dynamics are as important as the historical backdrop of the narrative. This parallelism between individual histories and the history of India necessitates an allegorical reading, which gives the key role to 'Aurora the mother' during the post-independence nation-building period. In this context, the aim of the article is to analyze the Moor character and his relationship with his mother by referring to Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. His grotesque body symbolizing the failure of postcolonial India in the symbolic order and Rushdie's maternal representation of his dream India hosting different cultures in the colorful world of Aurora's art will be discussed psychoanalytically. Based on this allegorical interpretation, the reasons for the fall of multicultural India and the Moor's failure during his formation of the self will be associated with an infant's psychosexual development and his despair stemming from his abject status.

Main Body

The Moor, the last surviving member of the Da Gama-Zogoiby family, has to record his personal story in order to survive at his mother's lover the mad Vasco Miranda's castle. Referring to the discovery of hidden documents in addition to Aurora's painting cycle produced in the magical realist style, his retrospective narrative reveals that the history of the Da Gama-Zogoiby family starts with the fall of the Granada Emirate in the 15th century and covers the post-independence period of India. The roots of Christian Da Gammas date back to the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama while the Jews that were exiled from Spain after the fall of Granada in 1492 are the ancestors of the Jewish Zogoiby family. These two different families merge into each other thanks to the marriage of Aurora Da Gama and Abraham Zogoiby in the 1940s India that hosts different cultures. As the story proceeds, a hidden parchment arises a claim. Accordingly, Sultan Boabdil is an ancestor of the Zogoiby family because of his illegitimate affair with a Zogoiby woman. This historical link provides the Moor with self-esteem that is required for his identity formation, and Aurora who has an excessive maternal fondness for her son employs this ancestral lineage to excuse his son's deformed body which is ageing twice as fast as the usual. In her paintings, Aurora draws a constant parallel between the Moor and Sultan Boabdil to create an alternative world where the Moor, an abject figure rejected by society, can be the Sultan despite his deformed body. In this context, Aurora's paintings serve as a maternal womb for the Moor while her dream India ruled by the Moor is the product of maternal power, namely the Kristevan semiotic chora.

As a writer of historiographic metafiction, Rushdie aims to include marginalized characters into historical narratives to present different perspectives on History. In this context, women, one of the most marginalized groups of human history, loom large in his narratives. Spivak claims that women "seem powerful only as monsters" in Rushdie's fiction (1989, p. 83), which necessitates a clarification on Rushdie's understanding of femininity/motherhood. His dominant women characters like Sufiya in *Shame*, Boonyi in *Shalimar the Clown*, Qara Köz in *The Enchantress of Florence* are few of these "powerful monsters" that are depicted either in a grotesque or a magical way. Although these characters do not have a maternal role, they do not differ from Rushdie's portrayal of maternal characters. In other words, Rushdie does not make a distinction between motherhood and femininity in his novels that feature important matriarchs; instead, mothers in his fiction are as liberal and sexually-active as other women characters like Boonyi or Qara Köz. Drawing attention with their chaotic, powerful and witch-like nature, Rushdie's

women – regardless of their maternity – are marginal and far from fulfilling the conventional notion of motherhood. Through their marginalized identities, these women have the capacity to create an alternative discourse.

Aurora in *The Moor's Last Sigh* not only appears as a maternal figure but also as a femme fatale that commits adultery with many men and manipulates both her son and her lovers. She has a goddess-like influence over the male characters, which both fears and fascinates them. The main reason for Rushdie's use of an allegorical maternal figure in this novel is that the nineteenth-century Indian nationalist discourse revolves around the Bharat Mata or Mother India image associated with the Indian land. Bharat Mata comprises all Indian goddesses in her own body and becomes the symbol for the Indian independence movement against the British colonial rule. Starting as an icon of independence, Bharat Mata starts to be called "a purely Hindu goddess" and becomes a symbol for Hindu nationalism during the post-independence period (Shimkhada and Herman, 2008, p. x). Rushdie builds *The Moor's Last Sigh* on this mother image to reveal her inspiring role in the nation-building process. However, he deconstructs and reconstructs the image, frees her from the patriarchal patriotic discourse and interprets her "against the traditional nationalist perception of the nation as a mother or goddess" (Thiara, 2009, p. 5). Rushdie's alternative Bharat Mata embodied in the unconventional character of Aurora is neither a product of nineteenth-century Indian nationalism that promotes middle-class Indian women as the keeper of Indian traditions nor an icon for Hindu nationalism, but she is the new Mother India that envisions harmony in multiculturalism. Thus, Aurora serves as Rushdie's mouthpiece and stands as the supporter of multicultural India while criticizing the Hindu nationalism rising in the 1960s. Yet, the religious conflicts between the Hindus and the Muslims bring an end to her dream of multiculturalism, and the Moor's fall is given in parallel to the downfall of Aurora's dream India, strengthening the allegorical dimension of the mother-son relationship.

Like the conventional and ironically self-sacrificing Bharat Mata image that needs the sacrifice of her offsprings to survive under the colonial rule, Rushdie's matriarch Aurora is also janus-faced. In this respect, Rushdie employs the Jungian mother archetype "the paradoxical Kali" of India who is both destructive and creative (Jung, 1968, p. 82). While depicting Aurora's Mother India illustrated in her paintings, Rushdie explicitly explains his views on Indian motherhood that is based on Jungian archetypes:

And it was all set in a landscape that made Camoens tremble to see it, for it was Mother India herself, Mother India with her garishness and her inexhaustible motion, Mother India *who loved and betrayed and ate and destroyed and again loved* her children, and with whom the children's passionate conjoining and eternal quarrel stretched long beyond the grave [...]. (1995, p. 60-61) [emphasis added]

As can be inferred, the mother image in Rushdie's view is not a remote and passive figure but a fervent one who has huge influence on her children with her ability of love and hate at the same time. Based on the Mother India model, Aurora is also a reminiscent of the archaic mother whose breast is divided into a good and a bad one during the early phases of the Oedipus complex. At this juncture, Kristeva's theory of subjectivity, her use of the Lacanian legacy of linguistics in psychoanalysis and the significant role of the mother in a child's psychological development as different from the Freudian model must be explained.

In her work *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), Kristeva elaborates her psychoanalytical thesis on a linguistic basis and uses the division of the maternal and the paternal spheres, relating the semiotic realm to the mother and the symbolic realm to the father. Her theory of subjectivity draws attention by her emphasis on the mother figure that is cast out from the site of civilization and language by Freud and Lacan respectively. Reading the process of subjectivity in parallel to the process of language acquisition, she puts forth the concept of "semiotic chora" associated with the womb. Accordingly, the semiotic chora is a preparatory place for the linguistic order, because the mother regulates the infant's oral and anal drives from the very start, setting the rules and laying the foundation for civilization (p. 27). Therefore, the chora, namely the mother, is not outside the civilization but constitutes its corner stone. Kristeva also defines the chora as the place "of signs and [bodily] drives" where "the linguistic sign is not yet articulated" (p. 26-27). In other

words, the chora is not a place of fixed meaning, grammar and syntax, but it is a place with the capacity to subvert the fixed meanings created in the symbolic order by creating alternative meanings. Its deconstructivist nature makes the semiotic chora paradoxically a nurturing and a devouring place, and thus Kristeva describes it as “the place where the subject is both generated and negated” (p. 28). There is constant production in the semiotic chora, which reflects its kinetic nature that constructs and then, deconstructs to form new meanings. As a post-structuralist, Kristeva draws attention to the potential for creativity in this constant motion and relates it to the mother’s capacity to give birth, to produce. Still, without the symbolic, the chora entrapped in a perpetual construction and deconstruction cycle cannot produce the self, which means that both the semiotic and the symbolic are necessary for subjectivity in Kristeva’s theory. The significant point is that Rushdie also likes this chaotic and kinetic world of the maternal chora. His women have the capacity to establish new world orders with their generating power. In this respect, the Kristevan mother with her paradoxical role of creation and destruction is analogous to Rushdie’s Aurora. As exemplified in her character, women are like artists; they are like gods securing the right to create and to devastate, which makes Rushdie rely on women’s potential to shatter the center in a postmodern sense.

Rushdie draws a mythical portrayal for Aurora and she haunts the Moor’s narrative either with her physical or emotional existence. In the end, she gets an allegorical importance as the mother of Rushdie’s dream India; she is not only a nationally-acclaimed painter, “the giant public figure” and “the great beauty at the heart of the nationalist movement” (1995, p. 116) but also the mother of whole nation. She is the weaver of multicultural India with her Portuguese roots and appreciated almost like an Indian goddess by the locals. Aurora’s influence over her son is also visible throughout the Moor’s narrative. While recording his retrospective tale, the Moor addresses his dead mother directly as if he were in a continuous conversation with her, which proves Aurora’s lingering influence on her son. He makes abrupt exclamations like “Yes mother. My love yes” (Rushdie, 1995, p. 52) and turns his story into a kind of confession, a plea for the absolution of his betrayal of Aurora. His contradictory feelings towards his mother become evident when he addresses her as “my immortal mother”, “my Nemesis” as well as “my foe beyond the grave,” all of which signal his mother’s haunting shadow over himself (p. 45). The Moor develops a love-hate relationship with his mother, sampling Kristeva’s theory of abjection. In this context, reading the allegorical relationship between Aurora and the Moor under the Kristevan lens also helps to understand the haunting influence of the mother figure in the Indian collective conscious.

In *Powers of Horror* (1982), Kristeva argues that the infant must leave the maternal body to form its own self in the symbolic and names this process of separation from the mother as “abjection.” Yet, this leave cannot assure the total expulsion of the mother from the symbolic realm. Kristeva claims,

[w]e may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it — on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. But also because abjection itself is a composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives. Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be [...]. (p. 9-10)

As can be understood, the level of abjection situated between the semiotic and the symbolic constitutes a gray area where the infant endeavors to form its subjectivity. Entrance into the symbolic is necessary to achieve a meaning even though the effects of the violent separation from the mother will haunt the infant throughout its life. Abjection proves the formation of the infant’s ego, but those who cannot manage to step into the symbolic by abjecting the mother end up as objects, themselves. Therefore, development of the self necessitates an experience of the semiotic chora, later the act of abjection and finally a creation of the self within the symbolic in Kristeva’s theory. Viefhues-Bailey summarizes the situation, stating that the child must “both lose the mother and [...] find her again in symbols – in language – thereby negating the original loss” (2007, p. 144). This act of losing and finding the mother creates the self in the symbolic, turning the psychosexual development process into an eternal commute between the semiotic and

the symbolic. Accordingly, the Moor who is craving for a separate self must abject Aurora to find her again in the symbolic realm. In order to overcome this losing and finding process, he must be accepted into the symbolic by his father, which is difficult when the Moor's deformed body is taken into consideration. Aurora's paintings, like the maternal womb, create a haven for her outcast son, but they are also destructive for his real self. The Moor illustrated in the paintings as Sultan Boabdil does not have a counterpart in the 1960s' India. Thus, he must step out of the maternal chora to form his self in the symbolic realm corresponding to India under the rule of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Aurora's artistic career and her paintings lay the background for the Kristevan reading of the novel since the semiotic is associated with arts, music and poetic language which are lack of syntax and grammar. The Moor depicts Aurora's dream India painted on the canvas as "the opposition and intermingling of land and water" (Rushdie, 1995, p. 226). In relation to the depiction, Gonzalez claims that dream India is a "reminiscent of some kind of semiotic flux, for it is fluid and open, as yet unformed" (2005, p. 125). The common employment of water imagery in Aurora's paintings symbolizes the maternal womb, namely the semiotic chora in Kristeva's terminology. The chora corresponds to the pre-lingual stage of an infant when s/he is not aware of boundaries of the self/the other and exists in a flux of drives, libidinal energies (Kristeva, 1984, p. 25-30). In the same way with the semiotic chora exempt from the linguistic signs, Aurora's paintings are composed of patterns, colors and figures, and incorporate the Moor into Aurora's realm, disregarding his possible subjectivity.

Aurora's career starts during her childhood when she paints her family history on the walls by illustrating the history of India in the background. According to the detailed depictions of Aurora's paintings, her style which mixes mythical stories and historical anecdotes with family stories can be defined as hybrid, carnivalesque, anarchic and highly intertextual:

[...] she had put history on the walls, King Gondophares inviting St. Thomas the Apostle to India; and from the North, Emperor Asoka with his Pillar of Law [...]. Modern history was there too, there were jails full of passionate men, Congress and Muslim League, Nehru Gandhi Jinnah Patel Bose Azad, and British soldiers whispering rumours of an approaching war; and beyond history were the creatures of her fancy, the hybrids, half-woman half-tiger, half-man half-snake

[...]. In an honoured place was Vasco da Gama himself, setting his first foot on Indian soil, sniffing the air, and seeking out whatever was spicy and hot and made money. (Rushdie, 1995, p. 59)

Aurora's paintings are more than a childish fantasy; they make a claim on history-writing by introducing an alternative text and discourse to re-write the history of India. As can be inferred from her rhizomatic paintings, Aurora's version of history is fragmented and digressive, and always opposes the center defined by the white man's discourse. Thus, the meaning is never fixed and always in process in her paintings, which paves the way for alternative interpretations on history. As the projection of the semiotic chora, Aurora's artistic style reflected in her paintings mirrors the heterogeneous nature of the pregnant body that incorporates the other in the same body by blurring the boundaries between the self and the other.

As underlined by Kristeva, the heterogeneous maternal body and women's potential to give birth are stigmatized in patriarchal societies and considered a threat against the system founded by the symbolic. In ancient patriarchal societies, women's menstrual blood was regarded as the ultimate filth and thus, the rituals of defilement which aimed to expunge filth from the site of civilization resulted with the "[f]ear of the archaic mother" and the abjection of women, in general (1982, p. 71-77). When the function of Aurora's heterogeneous paintings is studied in line with Kristeva's argument, her paintings stand for women's ability to create alternative world systems based on alternative interpretations. Claiming an equal place for the self and the other as well as the magic and the real, they challenge the basic woman/man dichotomy established by the symbolic. The paintings also fulfill the role of a womb for the Moor and shelter his magical body from the cruelty of patriarchal order, yet they cannot secure a position for the Moor in the symbolic.

Aurora dedicates “The Moor Cycle” to the Moor as she associates him with the historical character Sultan Boabdil and portrays him as the head of her multicultural India. For Rushdie, Boabdil, the ruler of the Moorish Spain, stands for the harmony of different cultures (Cantor, 2003, p. 122). That is why Aurora crowns the Moor as Boabdil in her paintings. Further, Aurora associates herself with Sultan Boabdil’s mother in her paintings and draws attention to the key role of the maternal figure both in the Moor’s development and in the development of a new multicultural India. Aurora’s physical body which gives birth to a hybrid child (as a result of her marriage with a Jew) stands for the heterogeneous Indian land. In the eyes of Aurora, the Moor’s grotesque body that transgresses the ontological, biological, and cultural boundaries is very appropriate for ruling a multicultural kingdom. In other words, the Moor’s extraordinary body that challenges the norms of the symbolic can build a new system which enables the harmonious union of different cultures in post-independence India. It is clear that Aurora interweaves a vision around the Moor figure; that is “a romantic myth of the plural, hybrid nation” (Rushdie, 1995, p. 227).

It is noteworthy that Aurora’s rise as an artist coincides with the independence of India in 1947. In this respect, her paintings are the embodiment of a hope for multicultural India that is in peace with its past as well as with different cultures. On the day of independence, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, said: “A moment comes rarely in history when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends and when the soul of a nation long suppressed finds utterance. It is fitting that, at this solemn moment, we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity” (qtd. in “Jawaharlal”, 1947). Nehru’s words herald a new Indian identity free from the colonial discourse as well as a transformation in society that supports democracy, modernization, secularism, peace and socialist economics (Tharoor, 2011, n.p.; Zachariah, 2004, p. 7-10). Moreover, his emphasis on “humanity” reveals his unifying supranational and suprareligious approach to Indian identity politics. Despite Nehru’s peaceful discourse based on Mahatma Gandhi’s legacy, the communal tension triggered by the RSS, terrorism and the India-Pakistani war ruined his projects of multiculturalism for India. It is evident that Aurora’s paintings reflect the Nehruvian enthusiasm of the first days of independence. However, Aurora cannot recover the Moor from his abject status in society in spite of her endeavor to extol his grotesque body in her paintings. As a result, the Moor’s hybrid identity and Aurora’s dream India are condemned to fall in parallel to Nehru’s India, and in the long run, none of them can find a place for themselves in the symbolic realm dominated by nationalist and religious violence.

First of all, the Moor is hybrid from birth; this hybridity comes not only from his extraordinary body but also from the fact that he is the child of Jewish Abraham and Catholic Aurora whose marriage becomes a scandal in the war-torn world of the 1940s. The Moor utters his abject position as follows: “I was both, and nothing: a jewholic-anonymous, a cathjew nut, a stewpot, a mongrel cur. I was - what’s the word these days? – atomized. Yessir: a real Bombay mix” (Rushdie, 1995, p. 104). The Moor defines his existence as the product of an illegitimate affair and associates himself with bodily excrement, which situates him outside the symbolic order in Kristeva’s terms. In other words, as an object of loathing, he cannot be accepted by the symbolic.

The Moor also records that during his birth, the midwife regards his deformed body as a tragedy while his father Abraham becomes miserable although he tries to conceal his disappointment. Aurora also feels revulsion in the face of the Moor’s deformed body, yet she expels the midwife from the room and starts to mythicize her son’s deformed body through a maternal instinct (p. 146). She says: “He is the most beautiful of our kids. And this, what is it? Nothing, na? Even a masterpiece can have a little smudge,” (p. 147). From that moment on, Aurora considers the Moor “an artist’s responsibility” and links his deformed body with the distorting nature of modern art (p. 147). However, Aurora’s tactic reduces the Moor into an object, into a mother’s artistic project which hinders his identity-formation and eventually kills his subjectivity.

Bastard: I like the sound of the word. Baas, a smell, a stinky-poo. Turd, no translation required. Ergo, Bastard, a smelly shit; like, for example, me. (Rushdie, 1995, p. 104)

Aware of his marginal status stemming from his ugliness and extraordinary body, the Moor can never abject his mother to form a separate identity and cannot step into the symbolic order. Thus, he becomes dependent on Aurora for his existence. At this juncture, Aurora’s paintings serve as a shelter for the Moor

that protects the son from the judging looks. The Moor expresses his dependence on Aurora's paintings clearly, writing: "I, too, was obliged to lead a relatively sheltered life; and it must be stressed that the two of us were thrown together more than most mothers and sons" (p. 179). The Moor's affection towards his mother is an Oedipal one, in other words, it suggests an incestuous desire for the mother, which is another reason dragging him to the edge of society and impedes his step into the paternal law. Because of the Moor's incestuous love, there appears a clear enmity between the father and the son as can be understood from his address to his father as "unforgivable" (p. 182).

The relationship between the mother and the son is a symbiotic one as each is dependent on the other in order to exist. Aurora models her multicultural India on the Moor's transgressive body that stands against the laws of the symbolic, and makes him the ruler of her dream India. Meanwhile, the Moor gets an acceptable identity only in Aurora's paintings, which makes his abjection of the mother impossible for a long time. Here, Rushdie draws an allegorical link between the Moor and the postcolonial India as the Moor's dilemma spotlights the haunting effect of Mother India myth on Indian people. The Moor explains the importance of motherhood for the Indians with the following words: "Motherness – excuse me if I underline the point – is a big idea in India, maybe our biggest: the land as mother, the mother as land, as the firm ground beneath our feet" (p. 137). The mother image is sacred for Indian people and has been associated with the land since the ancient times. Besides, she is unifying and provides the Indians with protection and national identity (Thiara, 2009, p. 122-157). As explicitly put forth by the Moor character, mother gives a secure feeling to the child; yet, abjection for a separate identity is required as well.

The Moor's desire to create a separate identity arises through Uma's appearance. Uma, a young nationalist painter standing for the rising fascism in India, is the Moor's first love. The mother-son relationship is disrupted by Uma whom the Moor meets during the time of Emergency under Indira Gandhi's rule. The Moor summarizes this historical period with these words: "Before the Emergency, we were Indians. After it, we were Christian Jews," (Rushdie, 1995, p. 235). In this context, the Moor's love affair with Uma also gets a metaphorical dimension. While Aurora represents Jawaharlal's multicultural India, Uma embodies the post-colonial India notorious for crime, racism, Hindu nationalism and bribery. Uma replaces Aurora, becoming the new star of Indian art and Aurora's dream India falls after her intervention. Uma who wants the Moor for herself necessitates his separation from the mother. She sets a trap for the Moor, triggers his narcissism and causes him to commit a blasphemy against Aurora, which angers Aurora. The Moor abjects his mother thanks to Uma, but he is also abjected by his mother, thus he is an outcast in society. Rushdie alters the process of identity-formation of the child, abjecting the child as well as the mother.

Betrayed by the Moor, Aurora starts to paint "the Dark Moors" cycle which is composed of the pictures of exile and terror. This cycle also includes the eponymous piece "The Moor's Last Sigh" illustrating the moment of Sultan Boabdil's expulsion from Granada; it symbolically stands for Aurora's banishment of the Moor from her dream India. In this unfinished painting, Aurora depicts the Moor with horror, loss and darkness, with "a face in condition of existential torment reminiscent of Edvard Munch" (p. 218). From that moment on, Aurora transforms into a revengeful mother figure. After dismissing the Moor from the protective world of her paintings, she begins to paint her rage against her son on her canvases. Thus, her late paintings lack Sultan Boabdil that was resurrected in the figure of the Moor in her earlier paintings. Now, the Moor is an orphan and condemned to suffer from an eternal loss of his mother's womb. Such an abrupt rejection confuses the Moor; as a result, he oscillates between the maternal and the paternal spheres, neither of which accepts him and he is stuck in the level of abjection.

Dismissed from the maternal sphere, the Moor tries new identities in order to be accepted by society. He acts against his mother's liberal ideology and participates in the murder of Hindus during a racist attack and his crippled hand, which was once mythicized by Aurora, is nicknamed as "Hammer" by ultra-nationalist Raman Fielding. In parallel to the inner conflicts in post-independence India, Aurora's historical paintings now record fragments and violence, more a reminiscent of Picasso's "Guernica" (Rushdie, 1995, p. 302). As the Moor takes place in Fielding's bloody projects, he feels like a man. He says in his retrospective narrative: "So, mother: in that dreadful company, doing those dreadful deeds, without need of

magic slippers, I found my own way home,” (p. 305). As can be understood from his statement, he craves for a pass into the paternal sphere by creating a separate self. At this juncture, the Moor develops a different tactic in order to exist in a different sphere and adopts all the insult directed by Aurora as a ticket to the paternal sphere. In his address to Aurora, the Moor states that his expulsion from her mother’s world makes him happy since he sees it as a transition to “manhood.” The Moor no longer needs his mother’s mythical paintings in order to exist but relies on his hammer-like hand. Yet, he is accepted into the paternal sphere ‘ostensibly’ in return for his violent services, since Raman Fielding abuses his status as an abject and grants him an identity defined by violence.

Although the Moor follows Uma and leaves his mother’s artistic world for his rebirth, he still suffers from an insatiable desire stemming from the loss of his mother, which fills him with rage against Aurora. He claims that his personal motivation for his violent political acts is actually his revenge on Aurora. He reveals his resentment in the face of Aurora’s rejection as follows:

Where you have sent me, mother – into the darkness, out of your sight – there I elect to go. The names you have given me – outcast, outlaw, untouchable, disgusting, vile – I clasp to my bosom and make my own. The curse you have laid upon me will be my blessing and the hatred you have splashed across my face I will drink down like a potion of love. Disgraced, I will wear my shame and name it pride –will wear it, great Aurora, like a scarlet letter blazoned on my breast. Now I am plunging downwards from your hill, but I’m no angel, me. My tumble is not Lucifer’s but Adam’s. I fall into my manhood. I am happy so to fall. (Rushdie, 1995, p. 296)

As can be inferred from the Moor’s venomous address, he is now at the level of abjection. In the end, he abjects his mother and fulfills the precondition of narcissism. Yet, his attempts to enter into the paternal sphere by use of his “Hammer” fists are pseudo. Above all, a clean and complete body is a must for the symbolic. In the Western tradition, the ideal body is regarded as distant from the “excesses of female embodiment” because the female body “involves the containment of potential transgressions against order and the boundaries of the self” (Magennis, 2010, p. 92). However, the Moor with his incomplete body that still carries the grotesque traces of his birth is irrevocably outside the order. Therefore, his deformed appearance stands as an intact barrier against his creation of the self. Even Fielding makes use of his grotesque nature and turns him into a criminal rather than a proper citizen of the symbolic order.

Through Uma who implies that Aurora, as an immoral woman, has even seduced her own son, the Moor becomes aware of the incest taboo of the paternal law in a Freudian sense. Thus, he cuts the psychosexual link with his mother, and also initiates the development of his morality to step into the paternal sphere. Kristeva points out Judaism to state that the male child must be purified from his maternal defilement through circumcision which marks his separation from the mother (1982, p. 100). At this juncture, it can be argued that the Moor attributes a symbolic meaning for his shame, associates it with a mark of separation from his mother and blazons it on his skin. This mark of shame turns into a mark of pride in the eye of the Moor, symbolizing the start of his individuality. Now, he is seemingly giving birth to himself as a subject; posing like free and happy and experiencing jouissance out of narcissism, he creates a pseudo-self.

Allegorically, the Moor’s abjection of his mother causes the fall of dream India. Aurora with her interracial marriage, her crippled son posing as Sultan Boabdil and with her feminine form of history-writing on canvases would embody the possibility for a carnivalesque world which blended differences in harmony as offering an alternative order. Yet, the Moor’s rejection of Aurora; metaphorically, the rise of Hindu nationalism brings about Aurora’s death, namely the death of Nehruvian India. Rushdie explicitly underlines the metaphorical importance of the mother-son relationship, stating that “[a]nd the Moor-figure: alone now, motherless, he sank into immorality, and was shown as a creature of shadows, degraded in tableaux of debauchery and crime” (1995, p. 303). These lines show the importance of the mother figure in Rushdie’s postcolonial world. Without the mother, this huge multicultural land is dragged into chaos. Suffering from the loss of the Mother India figure, the country falls into the hands of corruption and violence as symbolized

by the Moor's crime-boss father. Aurora's death signals the start of the intercommunal violence in the novel; the Hindu militants' attack and the 1993 Bombay Bombings, during which Aurora's paintings were destroyed. The destruction of Aurora's magical realist paintings hints the crush of the maternal sphere by the corrupted world of the paternal.

After her death, Aurora reappears in the novel as a ghost haunting the Moor's father Abraham; in this way, Aurora physically transgresses the borders and threatens the physical tangible world. She consolidates her status as the abject through her dead body. At the end of the novel, Abraham thinks that Aurora is restless in her grave and charges the Moor with reclaiming her portrayal from her old lover Vasco Miranda that is now settled in Spain. Fostering nostalgia, the Moor wants to perform his last duty to her and sets off for his last journey. As a result, the Zogoiby family's story ends where it starts, in Sultan Boabdil's Spain.

Re-writing her story in parallel to Indian history, the Moor tries to perpetuate the memory of Aurora in the paternal sphere. Here, the Moor's act of recording his and his mother's story can be linked to Kristeva's interpretation of the act of writing. Associating the abject with death, Kristeva argues that writing is the only way of resurrection for the abject (1982, p. 26). The paternal law makes the female "the other" by writing her into an abject. Thus, rewriting the abject mother and the abject self appears as the sole antidote for resurrection. In this context, the Moor who is about to give his last breath not only makes amends to his mother through an inclusion of her avant-garde paintings into his own narrative but also writes her and himself into immortality. In this way, he tries to restore both Aurora's and his object status. Drawing a parallel between her mythical world and the official History, he inserts the products of Aurora's semiotic sphere into the symbolic one and shatters the dichotomies. The love-hate relationship and the equal status of Aurora and the Moor as abjects in Indian society can best be summarized by the Moor's own words: "First I worshipped my mother, then I hated her. Now, at the end of all our stories, I look back and can feel – at least in bursts – a measure of compassion. Which is a kind of healing, for her son as well as her own, restless shade" (Rushdie, 1995, p. 223).

Weaving his abject mother's story into the official History, the Moor resurrects Aurora and unleashes the world of myriad meanings hidden within the artistic and chaotic world of the semiotic. In other words, the Moor manages to create a postmodern world where there is no hierarchy, binary opposition or border. With her belief in multiculturalism and pluralism, Aurora embodying a new Mother India becomes a feminist re-sketch of the 19th century Mother India figure. However, from the very start, Rushdie knows that the Moor and Aurora's dream India are condemned to fail, since the world order shaped by the discourse of the symbolic realm requires the son to abject the generating power of the mother for the sake of maintaining the status quo and hierarchy. Still, lost mothers continue to haunt the humankind as seen in the Moor's and Abraham's situation, dragging them into an endless search for the primal loss; the abject mother.

Conclusion

The Moor's Last Sigh tells an extraordinary young man's struggle to claim a place in patriarchal Indian society under the guidance of his mother Aurora. The novel uses the mother-son relationship as an allegory for the Indian post-independence identity formation process. Aurora's magical realist paintings serve as the Kristevan semiotic chora for the Moor and impose the identity of Sultan Boabdil on him. In her carnivalesque paintings, the Moor's deformed body is redeemed and celebrated for its difference. Yet, Aurora's maternal instinct for protection blocks her son's identity formation and self-realization, condemning him to a continuous negation process in the chora. To achieve a separate self in the symbolic, the Moor abjects his mother and tries on new identities, all of which prepare his downfall. The Moor's impromptu abjection of his mother under Uma's false influence and his failure to form his real identity go in parallel to the failure of democracy in the post-colonial India, which interrupts Aurora's dream for multiculturalism. Although the end of the novel hints the death of the Moor, wiping out any possibility for a peaceful nation-building process, it has still an optimistic tone. While giving his last breath, the Moor hopes to awaken into a better time — maybe into the magical time of Aurora's paintings. This means that the possibility for multiculturalism does not end. Associating the artistic and multicultural world with the

semiotic chora, Rushdie revolutionizes the Mother India image and highlights the key role of the mother figure in the nation-building process. In so doing, he simultaneously sketches his dream for a liberal and multicultural world order in the post-colonial India.

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