

An Unromanticized Afghanistan in Saira Shah's *The Storyteller's Daughter*

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Abstract In this paper I examine Saira Shah's representation of Afghanistan and her conflicted position as a viewer and narrator whose "way of seeing" the East and West sometimes fluctuates between an Orientalist and a nationalist perspective. I argue though that her affiliation to the West and Orientalist views seem to dominate her perception of Afghani culture and its people far more than she had expected. Despite her attempts to renegotiate her hyphenated identity, as an Afghani-British, she finds herself unable to embrace the new torn-up Afghanistan that replaces the romanticized image she had of it in the past. In *The Storyteller's Daughter*, Shah tries to bring Afghanistan and its culture to light, but indirectly contributes to its invisibility and misrepresentation by the colonial discourse. She shares with her readers her experiences with the Taliban and the women she met in Afghanistan which she thought of as a mysterious land until she was disillusioned with its horrific state of war and political turmoil.

Key words: Identity, Saira Shah, Afghanistan, Orientalism, Third World

For it is often the way we look at other people that imprisons them within their own narrowest allegiances. And it is also the way we look at them that may set them free. (Maalouf, 2000, p. 22)

1. Introduction

Saira Shah grew up as a British citizen in an Afghani family that has been displaced from their ancestral home but its memories were kept alive through storytelling. The stories she hears from her father are so compelling that she cannot wait to visit this mysterious land to experience life there and reclaim her long lost Afghani identity. Shah eventually visits Afghanistan as a war correspondent during the Soviet occupation and returns to it in 2001 with the BBC to film her documentary *Beneath the Veil* which gained popularity after 9/11. Shah, in *The Storyteller's Daughter*, gives her readers a glimpse of Afghanistan's tumultuous history as she explores the country of her ancestry and tries to come to terms with the "unromanticized" version of Afghanistan that just hits her by surprise.

The essay examines Saira Shah's (2003) conflicted views and representation of Afghanistan, its culture, and history in *The Storyteller's Daughter*. It brings to the fore Shah's tendency to fluctuate between a Western and Orientalist perspective of her homeland, on the one hand, and a nationalist perspective of it on the other. The essay, while it highlights instances of Shah's nationalist and nativist perspective, reflects, more often than not, her colonialist and Orientalist views that largely inform her representation and perception of the East. The discussion also focuses on Shah's journey to Afghanistan in search of an identity she had longed for. It unravels her experiences at this homeland, her encounter with the Taliban and Afghani women.

2. Identity

Shah's (2003) narrative presents a dialectical opposition between East and West. Shah struggles with these two conflicting cultures, ideologies and sets of values. It is through her journey to Afghanistan that she becomes more aware of the two parts that are in war with each other and that make up her hyphenated

identity which she tries to reconcile as best she could.¹ She hopes for a new and coherent identity, hence her narrative is a renegotiation of her multiple identities. Towards the end of the narrative, Shah (2003) states that:

Despite myself, I felt a glow of pleasure that I had fallen on the Eastern side. I wondered why being an Afghan was still so important to me. To this day, I dreaded the question, "Where are you from?" Why did it matter to me that I could never answer in just one word? I had always longed to belong to a single place: why couldn't that place be the West? (p. 221)

She is torn between two cultures; her British and Western upbringing is often in conflict with her Afghani and Eastern origins. Therefore, she wishes to bring together her two opposing identities and believes her journey to Afghanistan will help bring about peace between them.

Shah recalls the magnificent stories about Afghanistan told by her father. As she is fascinated by these stories of a rich culture passed down from father to daughter, she becomes eager to visit the origins of her ancestors. Shah realizes she has unresolved issues with her identity and sense of belonging. Shah (2003) wonders, "How could my father expect us to be truly Afghan when we had grown up outside an Afghan community? When we went back home, wouldn't we children be strangers, foreigners in our own land?" (p. 6). Her father comments "I've given you stories to replace a community. They are your community" (Shah, 2003, p. 7). She recognizes the complexity of her situation as a foreigner in her own land. As an adult, she finally realizes that stories told by her father cannot replace an entire community or culture, nor can they truly preserve her connection to her cultural origin.

Shah suffers from a double-consciousness that can be analyzed through Lois Tyson's (1999) discussion of displacement and belonging. In *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, Tyson (1999) notes that:

This feeling of being caught between cultures, of belonging to neither rather than to both, of finding oneself arrested in a psychological limbo that results not merely from some individual psychological disorder but from the trauma of the cultural displacement within which one lives, is referred to ... as *unhomeliness*. (p. 368)²

Although Shah tries to reclaim her lost identity, she seems to be struggling more with her Afghan origins and roots rather than her Western identity. She does not complain about being mistreated or viewed as "the other" by the West, neither does she speak of any injustices she personally experiences due to her Afghan cultural origins. We do not feel Shah is traumatized by a cultural displacement, nor do we sense pain or psychological devastation due to her state of in-betweenness. Tyson rightly claims that "Being 'unhomed' is not the same as being homeless. To be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee" (p. 368). Shah's narrative does not reflect her unhomeliness or homelessness, neither do we get the sense that her cultural identity has made her a psychological refugee either. On the contrary, she seems to feel at home with her Western identity.

It is no surprise that Shah does not feel at home during her visit to Afghanistan. Her initial experience with the Afghan culture and first impression of its social and religious practices is negative. This is exemplified by Shah's first encounter with the "burqa" which she could never accept as part of the cultural norms in this society. She is only able to look at the "burqa" from a Western feminist lens. She makes no attempt to learn about its significance, or the rationale behind such a practice. She quickly decides that this culture is very oppressive of women, for they are forced to wear a burqa that makes them invisible. It is only natural for Shah, as a Western and British woman in particular, to reject this dress code, and feel that it constrains her, limits her freedom and strips her of her individuality. It is this unpleasant image of Afghan women that leads

¹ For more reading on hyphenated identities, see Sirin, S.R., & Imamoglu, S. (2009). Muslim-American hyphenated identity: Negotiating a positive path. In Phillips, R. (Ed.). *Muslims in West: Spaces of Hope*. (pp. 236-251). London: Zed Books

² For further reading on "unhomeliness" see Bhabha (1994) in *The Location of Culture*. London/New York: Routledge

her to develop a negative attitude toward the entire culture. She expresses her detestation of this cultural practice when she writes "I am merely a notation on the papers of my male escort. As a woman, I have ceased to exist. The burqa is my passport, my cloak of invisibility" (Shah, 2003, p. 14). She is forced into a disturbing state of invisibility through the burqa. Obviously, she is unhappy with her invisibility and the silence that comes along with it.

Shah is critical of the patriarchal system in Afghanistan that dominates women and deprives them of their rights. Ironically, she puts great emphasis on the Afghan male experience during war while she deals with the plight of Afghan women very briefly in her narrative. She is under the disguise of a man, and goes on with her journey accompanied by men from the Taliban. She distances herself from the Afghan women so as to avoid falling into that category of Third World women which would make her a member of "the other."

3. The "Us" and "Them" Binary

Chandra Mohanty (2003), a well-known postcolonial theorist, offers a critique of the discourse of Western feminists that tend to group all women of the Third World into a single coherent and homogeneous group that shares identical interests regardless of cultural differences, race, class or religion. She believes it is this process of homogenization of these women's oppression that results in producing the image of an "average Third World woman." Based on her feminine gender this average Third World woman is read as "sexually constrained, and her being "Third World" is read as "ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized... this... is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities and the freedom to make their own decisions" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 22). Shah is aware of these polarized binaries to a great extent. She fails to bring a new perspective or new way of seeing through which she can unsettle these oppressive binaries of West/ East, the oppressor/ the oppressed, modern/ traditional and First World/ Third World. She recognizes the complexity of such constructions that set "us" apart from "them," as Edward Said puts it in his seminal book *Orientalism* (1980). Due to her fear of being otherized, she sets herself apart from this image of Third World woman. Furthermore, she asserts herself as a Western woman who is by contrast educated and in control of her own life. She believes the best way to maintain this privileged status is by associating herself with Afghan men who are dominant, relatively free compared to the women, and in control of their lives.

Shah is disguised in man's clothes through which she detaches herself from the female world, and her gender as woman in order to be heard. In other words, she makes the assumption that her appearance as woman in a patriarchal society as such may cripple the progress of her journey. Perhaps her positioning of herself, away from the margins and subaltern subjects, can be justified in the light of Gayatri Spivak's (1988) reply with an emphatic no to her own question "Can the subaltern speak?" Spivak (1988) strongly argues that "the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read" (p. 106). Shah clearly understands the politics of power, dominance, and invisibility, and thus, does not want to be subordinated through a subaltern position that only ignores her voice. In spite of the good intentions she may have, she herself is entrapped by the Western patriarchal mentality that marginalizes women, for she decides to unravel the complexities of the life of the male mujahideen barely touching upon issues concerning Afghan women. Ironically, she is critical of the invisibility of women in Afghanistan when she herself makes them invisible in her narrative, and does not make their voices heard. It is not surprising that she is entangled in Western stereotypes and misconceptions of the East, and the colonial discourse. Perhaps, Shah is unconsciously influenced by this colonial and patriarchal mentality that reinforces the centralization of males and the marginalization of females. By joining the men in the Taliban, she empowers them as a patriarchal force which is characteristic of colonial power and ideology. Simultaneously, she tries to help three little girls at the end of the narrative as a way to express her rejection of the injustices females experience during an era of colonization and war. Even this act of kindness on her behalf can be interpreted as reflective of typical Western colonialist behavior, that is, the colonizer usually takes on the role of savior who helps its colonized and inferior subjects especially women.

This act of kindness through which Eastern women are saved and liberated actually reinforces the colonizer's superiority and domination over colonized cultures. Shah (2003) represents Western stereotypes of the Islamic state that victimizes and suppresses its women. She perceives Afghan women as "ignorant, poor, uneducated" and subordinate. She sums up what she believes to be the premise on which women's status is based in the "Islamic" state. She supposes that "Women must be protected, and the best way to do that is to keep them indoors... Girls over nine are barred from school. Females are banned from almost all jobs" (Shah, 2003, p. 13).

Shah, however, does not completely give in to Western notions of the East, in her journey with the men, she puts aside the Orientalist and Western lens through which Afghan men are usually perceived, and gives them a chance to demonstrate who they truly are. In fact, she improves the image of Afghan men with whom she feels respected and safe. She subverts the distorted Western image of Third World men that constantly portrays them either as savage and uncivilized, or hypersexual beings that are driven by their sexual and animal instinct. When Karima, her Afghan hostess, asks her "Do you not have trouble traveling alone as a woman with so many men?" Shah narrates "I told her that the mujahidin were engaged in jihad, a holy struggle. I could imagine no other group of soldiers where I could travel in such perfect safety" (Shah, 2003, p. 93). Not only does she overcome her personal bias against these men who keep their women indoors, but also praises them for the security she has felt and experienced in her journey with them.

4. In- Between a Nationalist and Orientalist Discourse

Shah continues to fluctuate between her two identities on the one hand, and her varied representations of Afghanistan, on the other. She continuously shifts back and forth between two conflicting perspectives: the Western Orientalist as opposed to the nationalist or nativist perspective. In *Bananas Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, the postcolonial feminist Cynthia Enloe (1989) discusses how nationalism functions and develops among anti-colonialists. She believes that:

A nation is a collection of people who have come to believe that they have been shaped by a common past and are destined to share a common future. That belief is usually nurtured by a common language and a sense of otherness from groups around them. Nationalism is a commitment to fostering those beliefs and promoting policies which permit the nation to control its own destiny. Colonialism is especially fertile ground for nationalist ideas because it gives an otherwise divided people such a potent shared experience of foreign domination. (Enloe, 1989, p. 45)

In the light of this explanation of nationalism and the sense of otherness it involves, it hardly seems that Shah's representation of Afghanistan comes from a nationalist perspective. Although she has the cultural origin that connects her to the East, she does not consider herself one of the Afghan people who is destined to share a common future, nor has she been shaped by a common past with them either. In other words, she knows she would eventually return to England where her past was shaped and her future will come into existence. Her visit to Afghanistan is more of a journey into the past that has been wiped away, and replaced with the harsh reality of the present which to her is only temporary and unpleasant. She comments "I didn't need anyone to teach me how to see what I wanted to see. I didn't want this fractured war-torn place: I wanted the lost homeland I had been told about" (Shah, 2003, p. 111). Shah realizes that this journey will come to an end and that she will be gone, and thus, will not share a common future or destiny with its people. She is even glad to be leaving her "homeland" because staying there involves great sacrifices and struggles that she could no longer endure. She admits it and states, "I stepped on to the pontoon, guiltily glad to be leaving Afghanistan. A stretch of muddy brown water opened up between me and the shore" (Shah, 2003, p. 251).

There are several occasions, on the other hand, during which she sees herself an Afghan, and separates herself from the West, and actually views it as a manipulative colonial force. She presents her view towards the West through the gaze of the colonized and speaks as an outsider of the Western culture. She writes:

I gazed at the Westerners under their safe canopy and I thought: However much they love us or hate us, and however much they want to believe the myths they have invented about us, they will never clip our beak and our crest and our cruel...talons and turn this hawk into a pigeon. (Shah, 2003, p. 125)

She resists the myths created by the West that dehumanize and belittle people of the East, mainly Arabs or Muslims. We sense defiance and compassionate resistance of the colonial rule in her tone which reinforces her Eastern and Afghan identity.

Shah (2003) suffers, relatively speaking, from an identity crisis. She is unable to commit herself to one identity or one culture, nor can she limit her representations of either culture to a single perspective. She also understands the nature of her dilemma and is aware that her Afghan identity is based on myths and legends and not reality. She declares "My own identity was shaped more by myths and legends than by my passport or birth certificate. Most of them enshrined lessons from history" (Shah, 2003, p. 15). The stories she grows up with do not build a solid foundation for her Afghan identity. Furthermore, the fact that her connection to the Afghan culture is merely based on stories and myth makes her loyalty to her ancestral origins questionable. She compares her situation with regard to her Afghan identity to the people of Afghanistan in general in an attempt to find peace with herself. Shah emphasizes that:

Four million Afghan refugees have been exiled from their homes for two decades. A whole generation has grown up outside Afghanistan. They have never lost their Afghan identity, because they have never been offered another in its place. (p. 26)

This comment illustrates the divide that exists between other Afghans and someone like her who has been offered a Western identity in replacement of her Afghan one which justifies the loss of her Afghan identity. Although we see her expressing her uneasiness with the state of in-betweenness she finds herself in at certain points in the narrative, she seems to struggle with her Afghan origin that is causing her distress rather than her Western upbringing through which she can easily define herself.

Shah wants to come to terms with her identity as long as it does not interfere with her identification of herself as a Westerner that functions as a shield through which she protects herself. If she had been placed in a position in which she had to choose between East and West, she seems to be more willing to sacrifice what links her to the East but not the West. She states:

"I hoped that the myth of the romantic Afghan resistance would stand up to the rigours of my journalistic enquiry. I hoped my family's map of tales might be my guide without my having to sacrifice Western method. And above all I hoped that, by resolving these contradictions, I could reconcile my incompatible worlds of East and West." (Shah, 2003, p. 79)

Shah is, evidently, influenced by the Orientalist and colonialist discourse that emphasizes myth, exoticism, and romanticization in its handling of any given colonized culture. In this quote, one notices that in her description of Afghanistan, the terms associated with it are "myth," "tale," and "romantic," however, terms such as "method" and "enquiry" are associated with the West. Obviously, her perception of the East is highly informed and shaped by the polarized binaries of East/ West read as ignorant/ knowledgeable and instinctive/ rational respectively. After examining her journey and experience in Afghanistan, we get the sense that the desired reconciliation between the East and the West is unlikely to happen.

Shah inevitably prefers to present herself to the reader as a Westerner with all the power, superiority, and dominance this identity entails. It is common for those who have multiple identities to choose one identity over the other based on the hierarchical structure of society. Anna Cieslik and Maykel Verkuyten (2006) discuss this issue of multiplicity and negotiation of identities. Cieslik and Verkuyten (2006) argue that "The various identities may interact according to a situational hierarchy where one position becomes the main distinction along which other sources of identity are ranked and periodically subsumed" (p. 79). Because Shah is subject to the hierarchical structures of Western society and identity, her Afghan identity is naturally subsumed and subordinated by the more dominant identity.

Shah holds on to her Western identity due to the fact that it empowers her and the knowledge she provides her readers with as a writer and journalist. Mohanty (2003) agrees with Vandana Shiva's analysis of Eurocentrism and the Western view of "the other", and their knowledge which assumes that "the knowledge of the Third World and the knowledge of people of color is not knowledge. When that knowledge is taken by white men who have capital, suddenly creativity begins... Patents are a replay of colonialism, which is now called globalization and free trade" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 233). In her memoir, Shah (2003) detaches herself from the Afghan culture, and sees it from a Western lens for the most part. She resists blending in perhaps to make sure that the knowledge she produces and the information she includes in her narrative will not be considered that of the Third World, and so be rejected or devalued by the West. Therefore, she clings to her Western origin that will guarantee her a far better future than what Afghanistan can offer her. Taking on a new identity as an Afghan to Shah would involve great struggles, suffering, and many battles to fight within herself, within the Afghan society, and the outside world which may not be worth the trouble. Mohanty (2003) recognizes the importance of Third World women's narratives, particularly, the way they are "read, understood, and located institutionally."³ She stresses that the point is not just "to record one's history of struggle, or consciousness, but how they are recorded; the way we read, receive, and disseminate such imaginative records is immensely significant" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 78). Shah does not realize the extent to which her narrative can be taken seriously since she is Western with connections to the East. Her readers are likely to consider her narrative a reliable source on Afghan, Islamic and Middle Eastern issues which is a huge responsibility. Her voice is also heard because her knowledge represents knowledge of the West superior to that of the East. Her views are highly respected in Afghanistan too. This can be illustrated through the question Halima's husband asks her "Tell us, what are ordinary people in the West saying about our lives?" (Shah, 2003, p. 36). As she is faced with this question, she cannot help but sympathize with these people who think the West would be concerned with what they experience every day during war. After reflecting upon it, she reports that "They wait for me to make my point, because they already assume people in the West believe oppression anywhere in the world concerns us all. But they are wrong: they have been abandoned. Sitting here in the darkness, they are quite alone" (Shah, 2003, p. 37). Shah realizes that these Afghans have been failed by the West and its promise to bring upon justice.

Shah, following her journey, destroys the myth of the beautiful and inspiring Afghanistan and, unfortunately, depicts it as a nation in absolute chaos and ruin. Shah seems to be doing what Ania Loomba (1998) warns us against which is viewing the Third World as "a world defined entirely by its relation to colonialism. Its histories are then flattened, and colonialism becomes their defining feature" (p. 18). Shah resists romanticizing the East so it is not represented as the "exotic," however, her extremely grim and horrific representation of Afghanistan is somewhat problematic. Her representation of Afghanistan does not do it justice. She does not provide an account of its historical or cultural past prior to colonization, nor does she contrast current Afghanistan with former Afghanistan in the pre-war and pre-colonial period. In fact, it is unusual not to have much mentioning of the past in the discussion of a culture that strongly reveres an individual's past. Yvonne Ridley (2003) points out in her review of *The Storyteller's Daughter* that she was envious of Shah because of her rich family history, stretching back almost 2,000 years, and emphasizes that "For an Afghan, a person's past is just as important as their future." It is only reasonable to conclude that if a person's past is important in such a culture, then the nation's past, history, and culture must be of great significance to its people, especially that Afghans take pride in their past victories. It is ironic that within this context of Afghan culture the narrative lacks a historical background of the nation's achievements and successful past that truly reflects Afghanistan.

³ For further information on identity and Third World Feminism see Narayan (1997). *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism*. New York: Routledge

Shah (2003) makes the common mistake referred to by Loomba (1998) which is dealing with postcolonial societies, Afghanistan in this case, as if "colonialism is the only history of these societies." Loomba (1998) raises crucial questions we ought to pay attention to regarding this issue like "What came before colonial rule? What indigenous ideologies, practices and hierarchies existed alongside colonialism and interacted with it?" (p. 17). Shah fails to address these questions in her narrative that are quite essential for her representation of Afghanistan and its history. Her representation, apart from the myth, gives the impression that colonialism is the only history of Afghanistan. She exposes the tragedies and destruction caused by the colonial and imperial power, but does not place enough emphasis on the Afghan cultural heritage, religious and social values that are subject to loss and distortion. As a journalist, she, perhaps, does this to maintain a sense of objectivity in her representations of the current Afghanistan in an era of war. Nevertheless, the question that raises itself is "how can she portray a different picture of an Afghanistan she is not familiar with?" Her knowledge of it seems to be limited to its state of war and conflict, and not peace and prosperity that she can speak of. Therefore, it can be said that while her representation of Afghanistan may be justified to some, it is not to others. In her description of Kabul, she writes "...beloved Kabul- lies like a jewel at my feet. I know by now that its beauty is an illusion: close up, the city is in ruins, as shattered and broken as this garden. I have missed the golden age. I have come too late" (Shah, 2003, p. 44).

Shah's stress on the dreary conditions of the people in Afghanistan can be viewed as an attempt to offer a critique and contestation of the Western colonial and imperialistic power exerted against the "other". In addition, in her search of the myth, she finally comes to realize that nothing is left of it. She acknowledges the harsh fact that "War had changed Afghanistan...-nearly eight percent of the population- had been killed. Four million more were banished... A generation of children had been left uneducated, their future as good as destroyed. Agriculture was bombed to shreds..." (Shah, 2003, p. 188). Her eschewal of the myth can be interpreted as a means to force people to open their eyes to see reality as it really is in order to provoke active and assertive resistance to colonialism. Her portrayal of the obliteration of the nation and chaos in Afghanistan comes as a warning against underestimating the tragic and horrific consequences of war, imperialism, and victimization of the colonized by the colonial rule. She highlights the way such an oppressive power can erase and wipe out the entire history of a nation not leaving any trace of civilization, or cultural heritage for that matter. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (1993) speaks of the severe and threatening cultural and historical damage nations under colonial rule undergo. He agrees with Fanon that "Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (p. 237). In the narrative, Afghanistan has been destroyed and its culture distorted. Colonialism left no trace of its past.

It is painful and disappointing for Shah to lose hope of a recovering and a healed Afghanistan, for it will take years and years to repair the enormous damage inflicted on this nation and its people. At the same time, Shah herself and her identity are torn by the colonial power. That is, her perception of her double identity is influenced by the Oriental and Western discourse, and notions of the East that she is unable to overcome. She only perceives her multiple identities as incompatible and in war with each other. She declares, "Two people live inside me. Like a couple who rarely speak, they are not compatible. My Western side is a sensitive, liberal, middle-class pacifist. My Afghan side I can only describe as a rapacious robber baron. It revels in bloodshed, glories in risk and will not be afraid" (Shah, 2003, p. 14). She is convinced that the two halves within her, Western and Eastern, cannot reconcile. She realizes that her journey to Afghanistan did not repair the relations between the "two people [living] inside [her]."

5. Conclusion

At the end of the narrative, Shah finally accepts her failure to bridge the two worlds within her and is ready to return to the West. Unfortunately, she views her multiple allegiances as a shortcoming. She does not embrace the diversity and multiculturalism her double identity introduces to her. She is unaware of the crucial

role she can play due to her multiple allegiances suggested by the Middle Eastern novelist Amin Maalouf (2000). In his discussion of identity, Maalouf provides examples of the roles that can be played by people who have allegiances to two nations who are in conflict with one another. As Maalouf (2000) puts it so eloquently:

They live in a sort of frontier zone crisscrossed by ethnic, religious and other fault lines. But by virtue of this situation ... they have a special role to play in forging links, eliminating misunderstandings, making some parties more reasonable and others less belligerent, smoothing out difficulties, seeking compromise. Their role is to act as bridges, go-betweens, mediators between the various communities and cultures. And that is precisely why their dilemma is so significant: if they themselves cannot sustain their multiple allegiances, if they are continually being pressed to take sides or ordered to stay within their own tribe, then all of us have reason to be uneasy about the way the world is going." (p. 5)

Shah tries through her journey to take on the responsibility as that "bridge" and "mediator" between the Western and Eastern culture, but does not succeed. She is not able to succeed in such an endeavor as she continues to be controlled by an engrained colonialist mentality that compels her to hold on to her Western half at the expense of her inferior half. She herself cannot "sustain [her] multiple allegiances." Her Orientalist representations of Afghanistan do not necessarily reflect the truth, and so demand an intelligent reader to challenge them and put them to test.

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