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Gendered Shame and the Possibility of Healing in Nilima Ibrahim's *Ami Birangona Bolchi*

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Abstract: *The war heroines of Bangladesh, who were ostracized from the public view for nearly two decades following the inhumane atrocities of the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971, get an active voice in Nilima Ibrahim's seminal non-fiction Ami Birangona Bolchi (A War Heroine, I Speak), originally published in 1994. In the framework of testimonies of seven war heroines, she attempts to delineate the exclusion of these war heroines from family and society, their consequent struggle to survive, and the process of eventual healing through familial and communal bonds. Shame, as depicted in this text, becomes a pervasive essence in the lives of the war heroines which evokes profound social withdrawal. However, this paper will examine how this gendered shame surrounding war heroines may also lead to productive outcomes. Ergo, this paper intends to take resources from the recent developments in the field of shame theory which has gained new momentum in the last two decades because of the ambivalence associated with it. Especially, intermingling gendered shame and various productive forms of shame into the reading of Ibrahim's repeated emphasis on the relation between community and war heroines, this paper will inspect whether genuine human connection can be a productive mechanism for fostering shame resilience among the war heroines of Bangladesh.*

Keywords*: war heroines of Bangladesh, gendered shame, productive shame, human connection, healing*

Introduction

In the testimony of Meher Jan, one of the war heroines presented in *Ami Birangona Bolchi,* the readers discover a disquieting statement of hers*,* where she prefers going to a brothel in Pakistan, the enemy country, instead of living in her motherland being shamed by the members of her family and nation alike (Ibrahim, 1998, p. 44). Amidst all the excruciating narratives of the seven war heroines, Meher Jan's story perhaps evokes shock to the greatest extent, where one is willing to remain in a shameful position among unknown people who might be enemies instead of being humiliated by her loved ones. The connection between shame and love seems to play a crucial role in this narrative; it not only shows how shame instills social withdrawal within the psyche of the victim but also reflects how it specifically operates in connection with love and interest. This intertwined relation between love and shame gets another layer of complexity when gendered shame

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is incorporated, which can be observed through Meher Jan's wish to expatriate with her rapist. However, this intricate connection does not always result in social withdrawal; rather, sometimes, it might also generate resistance, inclusivity, and ethical transformation, as will be explored from the perusal of the testimonies of the war heroines depicted in *Ami Birangona Bolchi*. In light of the then socio-political scenario of post-conflict Bangladesh and recent accretions in the field of shame theory, this paper examines the significant role that shame in various forms plays in the lives of the war heroines, emerging as a recurrent motif in this non-fiction.

Bangladesh achieved its independence after a nine-month-long struggle and sacrifice in 1971. Nayanika Mookherjee (2015), in her influential work titled *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories, and the Bangladesh war of 1971,* mentions that the estimated number of deceased individuals is 3000000 to 3 million while the count of raped women varies between 100,000 and 400,000. Although these numbers are "contested" (Mookherjee, 2015, p. 8), there is no doubt that a large number of men and women contributed to the war in their own ways. However, despite the contributions of both men and women in this Liberation War, the treatment and social acceptance that they received varied in the post-war country depending on their gender. Nevertheless, to acknowledge the contributions of the raped women, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first prime minister of Bangladesh, publicly recognized the raped women as "Birangona" on the sixth day of victory, which Mookherjee (2015) considers a "bold" and "internationally unprecedented" move (p. xv). He also established rehabilitation programs in 1972, arranged marriages, and provided various job opportunities to ensure they feel included in society. Nevertheless, they somehow remained marginalized. The situation worsened further when all collaborators were either released from prison or invited to the country with full citizenship on December 31, 1975, as the "Collaborator's Act" (p. 37) was repealed. The consequent rise of collaborators to powerful positions and the gradual marginalization of the victims became a source of discontent among various groups of people. Eventually, in the 1990s, "a massively mobilized movement: the *Gono Adalot*" took place in Dhaka led by "well-known mothers of martyred liberation fighters, renowned poets, historians, writers, journalists, and lawyers" (p.39).

Nilima Ibrahim was perturbed by observing the socio-political situation of the 1990s. She felt that the then-current society was more "conservative" (Ibrahim, 1997, p.8) than it had been in 1972. Against this socio-political backdrop, Nilima Ibrahim published *Ami Birangona Bolchi* in 1994. Ibrahim, a reputed educator and social activist, was directly involved with the rehabilitation process of war heroines of Bangladesh as the president of "*Bangladesh Mahila Samity* (Women's Society of Bangladesh)" (Hasanat, 2022, p. 19). In the prefaces written in 1994 and 1997, Ibrahim herself talks about the process of publishing the complete edition. She volunteered at the Women's Rehabilitation Center, founded by the Government of

Bangladesh, where she collected information about the raped survivors through interviews and testimonies. From there, she assembled seven testimonies and published them in two separate volumes. However, later in 1998, she combined two volumes and published the complete edition (Ibrahim, 1998, pp.8-10).

In this non-fiction, the seven war heroines - Tara Neilson, Meher Jan, Rina, Shefali, Moyna, Fatema, and Mina, while narrating the brutal torture that they faced in the army camps, also describe the terrible treatment they received from their countrymen in post-war Bangladesh. The text begins with the testimony of Tara Neilson, a Hindu woman, who, after experiencing wartime sexual violence and being rejected and humiliated by her family and society, expatriates to Denmark. She becomes a nurse, marries a Danish journalist, and gets a lovely family there. Similarly, the second narrator, already introduced at the beginning of this paper, Meher Jan also leaves Bangladesh. As a fourteen-year-old girl, after being raped, pregnant, and experiencing abhorrence by her countrymen, she decides to marry her rapist and leaves with him for Pakistan. The third testimonial account is of Rina, a university student from an elite background. Like Meher Jan, she was ready to go to Pakistan. However, she returns to her family as they accept and support her wholeheartedly throughout her period of hardship. The other testimonies of Shefali, Moyna, Fatema, and Mina likewise reflect the harrowing atrocities of the Pakistani army, their social exclusion in post-conflict Bangladesh, and various ways to withstand this circumstance.

Despite being a pivotal text in the history of the liberation war of Bangladesh, *Ami Birangona Bolchi* has not been examined extensively from different theoretical backgrounds. Although wartime rape became the foreground of feminist historicist discourse on war since the 1990s, as Fayeza Hasanat (2022) posits, in Bangladesh, the academic interest in sexual violence during the Liberation War is a recent phenomenon that has brought this text back to light. Amidst the adverse socio-political situation, until Nilima Ibrahim published *Ami Biranogona Bolchi,* the memoirs or testimonies of the war heroines rarely appeared in the public sphere even though valorization of the freedom fighters was very common in Bangladeshi war literature. As a matter of fact, even after the publication of this book, it was pushed aside for a long period due to the country's political instability (pp. 3-4). Therefore, research work on war heroines of Bangladesh as well as this text remains inadequate. Hasanat, who translated this text into English, using social theory of trauma, further argues that this text depicts the war heroines as the active subjects of their narrative and trauma, which is suppressed by the absence of collective involvement to properly address the trauma and rehabilitation of the war heroines (p.18). Conversely, many scholars have challenged this postulation of viewing the war heroines as active subjects in the text. For instance, Chaity Das (2017) talks about the complex narrative of the raped women presented in *Ami Birangona Bolchi,* where their being the active subject is undercut by the fact that their agency comes from performing socially attributed roles of women:

The roles that these women imagine and hope to fulfill in testimony after testimony are that of lover, wife, or mother. At some level they become complicit in the same structures that excised their identity, but this collaboration is not one of equals. While some women struggle for it, some are saved by the generosity of those who recognize that it is, after all, not her fault, but a mere turn of fate and circumstance or the inability of men to protect their women since they went to war. (Das, 2017, p.104)

Here, Das emphasizes how their resistance and contentment depend on familial roles that they perform which eventually reaffirm their passivity. On a similar note, Mookherjee (2015), while talking about the ethical problem of representing the raped women, brings in this text and opines that during the late 1990s, albeit the text's holistic approach towards the war heroines' struggle and resistance, the stage enactments represented the war heroines through only their "social wounds" (p. 210). Both these works emphasize Ibrahim's depiction of the reparation of the situation of war heroines through familial acceptance; however, their passivity is also a focal point in the criticism. Howbeit, while focusing on their active/passive role and familial connection, one important perspective that has been overlooked in this discourse is the role that language of affect plays in such identity formation, social withdrawal, and resistance en masse. Especially, shame, which became an integral part in the lives of war heroines, needs to be catechized for a more nuanced understanding of their active and/or passive role, which, as this paper views, is inevitably connected with love and communal bond. In this paper, instead of incorporating Hasanat's translation, I translated the quotes myself, since despite her authentic translation, some extracts which are essential for my paper do not evoke the concept of shame as present in the original text by Ibrahim.

Gendered Shame and War Heroines

'Shame', as Schneider mentions, has an Indo-European root that means 'to cover' (Schneider quoted in Ahmed, 2004, p.103). This denotative meaning reflects the desire of a subject to hide. Ahmed (2004), while talking about shame, describes it as an "intense and painful sensation" which is perceived as "self-negation". The subject feels "being against itself" as a result of "its own failure" which is "experienced before another" (p.103). In other words, shame instills the feeling of self-disgust within oneself to such an extent that the person self-negates himself/herself. Hence, shame is considered as an intense emotion that ruptures the previous identity of a person. A sense of social withdrawal is evoked within that person to hide the new derogatory self from others.

Additionally, the other who sees the shameful act done by the subject needs to be connected to the subject through interest. Here, Ahmed (2004) intertwines both Tomkins' idea of shame which intrinsically operates because of "prior love or desire for other" and Freudian psychoanalytical concept of love which involves both identification and idealization - that is the desire to be like an other as well as

to be recognized by an other. Identification, which is the desire to be like an other, creates an ego ideal within oneself, the "ideal self" that a self would like to be, to be recognized by the other whom the person idolizes (pp. 105-106). Shame, hence, reveals as well as gets revealed because of the shared love and connection between human beings. Within a community, certain values are attributed to the subjects to become the ideal self. That is why, "If we feel shame, we feel shame because we have failed to approximate 'an ideal' that has been given to us through the practices of love" (p. 106).

Now, the values ascribed to the subjects vary in a world that operates through othering and exclusion. Because of the pervasive misogynous values, the very existence of women is considered to be formed through a sense of lack and inferiority which is why shame is attached more to females than their male counterparts. Shame is "gender-related" as Bartky (1990) notes:

> What patterns of mood or feeling, then, tend to characterize women more than men? Here are some candidates: shame; guilt; … the pervasive apprehension consequent upon physical vulnerability, especially the fear of rape or assault … women are more prone to experience the emotion in question and that the feeling itself has a different meaning in relation to their total psychic situation and general social location than has a similar emotion when experienced by men. Some of the commoner forms of shame in men, for example, may be intelligible only in light of the presupposition of male power, while in women shame may well be a mark and token of powerlessness. (Bartky, 1990, p.84)

Hence, shame is the dominant emotion in a woman's life because of the ubiquitous patriarchal values prevalent in society. In the case of rape and sexual violence, a woman loses a part of her ideal self that is already constructed according to her "psychic situation and general social location". While describing how rape destroys the subjectivity of a victim, Cahill defines subjectivity as a "project" that is "undertaken ... in the course of a variety of relationships" and she believes, "it is only in the context of others and a particular society that the self comes to be" (Cahill 2001, p. 104). She further states that rape creates an "assault on a woman's underlying conditions of being" (p. 132). In other words, the victim's sense of subjectivity, which is interconnected with society and various relationships, is violated. Losing her sense of being, the raped woman who did nothing shameful has to be ashamed of this violation. She feels ashamed as she fails to be the "ideal self" to be acknowledged and valued by her loved ones while the perpetrator remains unabashed. The testimonies of the seven war heroines explore this gendered shame they faced and tried to resist. This first section looks at the way shame is instilled within the war heroines, bringing a rupture within their identity and intersubjectivity, whilst the men who are responsible for such horrific conditions remain unbothered.

The recurrent image in all the testimonies of the war heroines is of lowered gaze, lowered head, hidden face, and self-disgust. These are signs of their internal shame

which is evoked by the gaze of an other. Rina, one of the war heroines who along with thirty other women wanted to expatriate to Pakistan, says:

> Pakistanis did not force us; we were willingly going with them - because when a member of the Indian Army was rescuing me half naked and half dead, I had to lower my gaze forever seeing the disgust and abhorrence in the eyes of my countrymen. (Ibrahim, 1998, p.60)

Here, her lowering of the gaze expresses the shame that she felt because of her violated body being exposed and sneered at by the people of her beloved motherland. There is a sense of personal connection and affection when she mentions the people of the country as "my countrymen". Unfortunately, despite that connection, she cannot help but lower her gaze as she observes their revulsion. However, the same amount of condescension and disgust, if not less, was also expressed by the Pakistani soldiers in the rape camp. Why would she then still prefer going with the enemies leaving her motherland behind?

Meher Jan's convoluted encounter with love and shame might shed light on this matter more distinctly. As already mentioned in the introduction of the paper, Meher Jan's decision to expatriate to Pakistan creates shock among social activists and perhaps, even the readers when they read the testimony. Ibrahim and other social workers try to convince her to stay in Bangladesh. They even inform her that she might be sold to a brothel in Pakistan. Notwithstanding, she prefers going to a brothel in Pakistan to being humiliated by her loved ones in her motherland. Brothel, which arguably can be the most shameful place for a woman, does not seem to induce shame within her in this case. Moreover, she decides to marry her rapist, Layek Khan, to go back to Pakistan. However, the marriage proposal that she gives to Layek Khan is more like a survival strategy suited for both of them as she believes that she would never be accepted by her society. By marrying Layek Khan, she can simultaneously find a solution for her social withdrawal and save Layek Khan from the freedom fighters of Bangladesh. Hence, Layek Khan also agrees to this proposal. This sense of withdrawal becomes even more vivid when her father comes to take her back and she refuses to go with him, thinking that she is already dead and they should not suffer for her anymore (p. 43). She leaves because she cares about her loved ones and wants to save them as well as herself from shame and social death. This sense of shame and social death leads Rina, Meher Jan, and thirty other women to think of leaving Bangladesh and expatriate to Pakistan.

This sense of being dead did not just occur after being rescued and encountering their loved ones. Almost all the war heroines talk about their subjectivity being ruptured after facing the atrocities of the perpetrators during the war. Shefa and Fatema say their previous selves are dead (p.83, 130) while Rina considers herself a whore (p. 66) after being raped for the first time. At the same time, they showcase their desire to hide from their loved ones even before there was any certainty of victory

and their possible reunion with family. They know in the rape camps that they will not be accepted in the post-conflict Bangladesh. Their preconceived knowledge of feminine ways of being in the world evokes such social withdrawal. Almost all of the seven war heroines' narratives portray that they had this prereflexive notion of being a woman in society even before going to the rape camps. In the backdrop of a historically turbulent period, before the liberation war started, these women lived an active, energetic, lively life engaging in politics, playing, and studying even though they had to undergo social deficiencies where they must listen to other people rebuking and prohibiting them from being so much involved in such affairs since they are girls. Furthermore, Tara, in the very beginning of the testimony, says how women are taught to perform their roles as women, to bear everything, and to learn to be patient (p. 37). Therefore, after being raped, they know that they have miserably failed to inhabit the ideal self that society associates with their gender, through the practice of love.

Hence, this gendered form of shame becomes more vivid after being raped and encountering their community. When Rina is called a whore by a little boy (p. 65) or Shefali is shamed by a rickshaw puller (p. 88), the gendered condition of shaming is observed as the perpetrator remains unabashed and the victims are uncritically attacked by anyone from society - irrespective of class and age. This is more politically concerning when the increasing number of collaborators gain respected positions instead of facing shame and humiliation while the women are shunned away. Meher Jan also notices this hypocrisy:

> She is now impure only because of being a woman, whereas the collaborators are respected despite committing sins. (Ibrahim, 1998, p. 42)

On a positive note, this realization of discriminatory gendered shame is crucial. Once the war heroines start feeling that they are being unjustly shamed, a metamorphosis in the language of affect is inevitable.

Productive Forms of Shame

> Notably, when we are shamed for some aspect of ourselves that is a given characteristic or part of our identity rather than a moral choice, the inherent injustice and cruelty of this maneuver may easily result in anger rather than shame (or perhaps in shame that quickly turns to anger). (Keen, 2023, p. 58)

The recent developments in shame theory focus on the productive forces of shame that might be applicable not only to the victims but also to the perpetrators and others who do not have any firsthand experience of the shameful action. In this quotation, Keen (2023) talks about how shaming might sometimes produce anger among the victims. While exploring the factors that lead shaming to shame, he puts forward "type of shame" as a key determinant. Despite being fully aware of the limitations of categorizing, he divides shame into two types, namely, "moral shame" and "shame arising from given characteristics" (pp. 53-58). In the above

quotation, he argues that shaming people for their identity might generate direct anger or anger that channels through shame.

In the case of the raped victims, this affective transference is even more plausible. In such situations, women are judged not only for the loss of their essential feminine quality but also for an act they do not approve of, let alone doing it themselves. The victims might have this affective transference of shame to anger once they realize that they are being unfairly condemned for the loss of an essential feminine quality while the perpetrators remain shameless and unaffected. Probyn states that it is rather a mixture of "anger, rage and shame" that the victims feel. However, "given the structural/cultural milieu in which we live, that anger is not allowed voice as much as the shame. It has been so drummed into women that we can say we are ashamed but not that we are enraged" (Probyn, 2019, p. 329). Hence, even if they try to express their anger, that voice is not allowed in the dominant discourse; or, many a time, the victims themselves cannot express anything other than shame since it is so "drummed into" their psyche.

Apart from this affective transference among the victims, the productive forms of shame need to work within the community level as well. Bringing in the connection between shame and love, Probyn (2005) reflects on the moral and ethical transformation of human beings. Since we feel this intense burning sensation of shame because of the gaze of an ideal other, there is also the possibility for a positive change. One can feel accountable and refrain from a misdeed. Even if s/he commits the misdeed, s/he can feel ashamed and rectify in the future. In Probyn's words:

> shame compels an involuntary and immediate reassessment of ourselves: Why am I ashamed? Why did I say or do that? Can I rectify the actions that have either brought shame upon myself or caused someone else's shame? Shame in this way is positive in its self-evaluative role; it can even be self-transforming. (Probyn, 2005, p. xii)

Furthermore, Weiss's (2018) postulation of "second-hand shame" can also positively impact the reparation of a particular situation. This "second-hand shame," which is induced by the shameless behavior of the original agent, can help produce anger and an ethical sense among the people to stand against those shameless people. Weiss also depends on Tomkins' idea of shame as a boomerang emotion. Following him, Weiss argues that even the refusal of shame does not extinct shame altogether, rather finds a new medium, in which it stays, "namely in the heart of the witness to both the shameful conduct and shameless response" (p. 546). Shame, hence, he opines, is an "intersubjective experience with the potential to circulate far from its original source" (p. 547).

Now, Ibrahim's written document of these war heroines' voices depicts this mixture and transference of shame and anger. Meher Jan's frustration observing

the hypocrisy, as mentioned in the previous section, is a notable example of how shame gradually turns into anger. Besides, there are some victims who express direct anger as well. For instance, Fatema is seen immediately attacking the army officer as he abuses her in the rape camp. To punish her for her defiance, the officer hangs her with a ceiling fan and turns the switch on at full speed. She afterwards suffers from severe physical illness along with PTSD. Her anger does not find a proper channel to be acknowledged (p. 133). As Probyn says that shame is drummed into victims' existence, Fatema also finds it difficult to talk about her shameful, yet haunting experience. Even after years of suffering, she cannot share the incident with anyone from her family or acquaintances. Her rebellious zeal, which is vivid in the beginning days in the army camp, is dimmed once she comes back to her family. However, as already depicted through Meher Jan's frustration, there is also a gradual shift in this affective role of shame in other war heroines' narratives. They are no longer ashamed; rather, they are angry and ask for their due rights. This narrative is specifically found in the voices of the war heroines who are now speaking against the mistreatment after more than twenty years in their testimonies. Therefore, when Tara repeatedly confirms how she is not ashamed of herself, rather of the society (p.33), or Shefali wishes to spit on the face and whole body of the collaborators (p.82), shame takes different productive forces by the raped victims. Furthermore, strong anger towards the family members is also expressed when Mina speaks against the mistreatment of her husband who calls her a witch and asks her to leave the house and their daughter after she returns from the rape camp:

> You coward, don't you feel ashamed to talk to me like that? … Keeping your elderly mother, daughter, wife, and brother in danger, you spent ten months peacefully in hiding… We cannot even tell whether you became a collaborator in the meantime … (Ibrahim,1998, p. 149)

Here, shame is transferred from the victim to the "other" whose gaze does not hold the victim's idealization anymore. Now, she rather shames him for his cowardice and selfishness.

Mina's husband does not feel any remorse or shame even after her outburst. This, in turn, reflects his lack of ethical responsibility and love that bind people within a community. In fact, the ethical transformation of the original agent that Probyn contends is scant in this testimonial account. Nevertheless, there are a few instances. For example, Layek Khan, despite his extreme hatred towards the Bangladeshi people, at one point, admits to Meher Jan that he has ruined her life (p. 47). She eventually lives a life with respect and somewhat contentment because of their marriage. Furthermore, Harun's repeated apology to Moyna's brother and search for her whereabouts after his family brutally humiliated Moyna's family for the marriage proposal also reflect his shame. He cannot even face Moyna although he appears in front of her hostel now and then. Along with this, second-hand shame can be noticed too, which is evoked in others due to the shamelessness of

the collaborators and society's shaming of the innocent war heroines. In the text, the war heroines who get back on their feet find such people who have enough empathy and ethical sense not to shame the innocents, rather apologize on behalf of the whole nation's shameless behavior:

> Shame? For what? Those who could not protect the sisters of their country and gave them to the enemies should be ashamed. I apologize to you for such a crime, on behalf of everyone. (Ibrahim, 1998, p.77)

This is Nasir's statement while proposing marriage to Rina. Rina, who was introducing herself with a sense of pride unapologetically, receives the same amount of love and acclamation from her partner. There are other couples, such as Fatema-Taher and Mina-Shafiq, whose relationships are also built through this interwoven affective power of second-hand shame, love, and pride. Nevertheless, the concern that lingers is whether such productive forms of shame can lead towards the possibility of healing these wounded souls.

The Possibility of Healing

Sara Ahmed's (2004) main argument in her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, is how human emotions can create the surfaces of individual and collective bodies. While reflecting on this, she also shows how emotions can be performative. Especially in her chapter on shame, she discusses the close connection between pride and shame, and how speech acts of apology might be performative, leading to a shift from shame to pride, undoing "the shame of what we speak" (p. 119). Hence, unlike Probyn and Weiss, she remains quite skeptical regarding the productive forces of shame.

Ibrahim does not contest this possibility of aporia in *Ami Birangona Bolchi*. One good example is the slippage of the title *Birangona* bestowed upon the raped victims as the pride of the nation, which eventually turns into *Barangona* bearing the connotative meaning of prostitution. Three war heroines mention this slippage, where this title remains just a speech act to boast, while society condemns them to hide with even more humiliation. In fact, they are also suspicious of the social workers sometimes. One activist, while talking to Meher Jan, asks her to stay with her at her place since she does not want to go back with her father and decides to go to Pakistan. Meher Jan becomes agitated:

> Do you want me to stay with you? Every day, visitors will gather in front of your house to see us as if we were animals kept in a zoo for exhibition. You will be proud to show me off, but what will happen to my future? (Ibrahim, 1998, p.42)

The possibility of such performative act remains a concern throughout their lives, which does not seem invalid since there are many examples where people take advantage of their condition. Chapa's husband marries her for property (p. 141), Shefali's husband Imam, at the end despite the initial goodwill, ends up condescending her for being a raped victim (p.98) and Tara's family members, as

Tara suspects, might have taken money as compensation from the Government just like many others in the society although they did not give her a place to stay (p.23).

Moreover, it has already been mentioned that there is this recurrent narrative of the somewhat contented war heroines finding their happiness through playing the socially normative roles of mother, daughter, sister, or wife. Besides, the previous section also shows that there is this transference of shame from the raped women to the men of the house who failed to protect the women, which in turn reiterates the notion that women always need protection from men by other men. The fact that Meher Jan has to depend on her rapist for her survival is even more crucial to understanding the politics of gendered shame and the futility of its productive forces. Besides, the positive forms of shame that the earlier section addressed, are hardly present in any of the collaborators or the perpetrators. Only Layek Khan seems to express remorse to some extent. Thus, it remains a question - to what extent such productive forms of shame, which depend much on the ethical transformation of the original agent of the deed, can become fruitful in the long run despite the collective form of second-hand shame or the victims' resistance against unfair gendered shame?

Even though Ahmed is skeptical regarding the performative role of emotions, she does not repudiate the importance of feeling better as she says, "[f]eeling better does still matter, as it is about learning to live with the injuries that threaten to make life impossible…We cannot know in advance what makes others (or even ourselves) feel better about the injustices that have shaped lives and worlds." (Ahmed, 2004, p.201). Following her postulation, this paper views Ibrahim's rhetoric in a positive light. There might have been various ways for war heroines to heal in post-war Bangladesh; however, Ibrahim's recurrent emphasis on familial and communal bonds can be considered as one of such ways for their reparation. Especially, in the case of raped women, who already feel excluded from society because of shaming, a genuine connection through different productive forms of shame, which not only produces war heroines as active agents of reformation but also requires the perpetrators and masses alike to feel collective shame and amend, can pave the way to inclusivity. *Ami Biranogona Bolchi* seems to present such an appeal of collectivity while keeping in mind the possible challenges that always appear simultaneously.

Conclusion

In the preface of *Ami Birangona Bolchi*, Ibrahim explains why she did not publish the third volume of this text. She mentions two reasons: one is her deteriorating health, and the other is the humiliation of the war heroines that followed after the publication of their testimonies (Ibrahim, 1997, p.8). This second reason reflects how much gendered shame prevailed in the then society despite the war heroines' attempts to resist it. This also shows, resistance from only the victims cannot eradicate such shaming unless or until the original agent as well as people in

general do not realize the consequences and feel ashamed of the shameful actions committed in the Liberation War of 1971. The readers, while reading the testimonies written during the nineties, can feel how it is so relevant in today's context, as the scanty presence of war heroines prevails in the public domain even more than fifty years later in Bangladesh. This paper, thus, reads *Ami Birangona Bolchi* as a moral calling for feeling ashamed of the injustice done to the war heroines during war and post-war Bangladesh, realizing how the affective language of shame and love might silence as well as give voice to the shamed ones.

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