

## **Abstract**

### **Passion for the Other and the Vicissitudes of Shame**

In the context of increased cross-border migration and the ever larger diasporisation of identities, often seen as a threat to collective identity and a common sense of destiny that consolidates cultural belonging, the significance of Levinas's understanding of "the other" as the foundation of all human relation is not only highly relevant but sorely needed. His radical reformulation of ethics as a genuine concern for the other and a relation where the other counts *more* than myself challenges some of the most entrenched notions in Western discourse based on freedom and autonomy of the subject. However, what provides a watershed for all the ethical concerns Levinas will come to develop in his more mature writing is his early phenomenology of shame.

Departing from Levinas, this paper will address the issue of shame in contemporary discourse in order to approach what could be considered an ethics of shame as a preliminary study that will determine its importance and its implications for our understanding of diasporic fiction. In the context of cross-cultural and displaced identities, the process of self-identification and access to meaning is often compromised or pulled apart by the gravitational forces of opposing cultural values where shame is not only felt as inadequacy in the face of the dominant cultural practice but also in the face of one's inability to maintain the historical and cultural heritage supposedly one's own. It is the familiar world that is just as alien and reflects back, with the same venom, one's own shame. But to what extent is it possible to re-orient the negative affect of shame, prominent in the experience of otherness, and to inquire into the possibility of ethical change it may elicit in the subject? Can the experience of shame generate new epistemologies and new social and political configurations of otherness? In the ethical and phenomenological considerations I will focus on, shame, in the end, will emerge as an affect of proximity whose basic structure of being exposed to others testifies to our originary relatedness and to the exigency of our passion for the other.

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