The Novel: A Critical Study

Article · April 2018

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The Novel : A critical Study

The novel is a dominant genre in world literature. After sparse beginnings in seventeenth-century England, novels grew exponentially in production by the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century became the primary form of popular entertainment. The book renders a critical readings of the Victorian and modern novelists such as D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Charlotte Bronte, George Orwell, Ahdaf Soueif, Nawal El Saadawi, Liana Badr, Rajia Al Sanea Hanan al Shyakh, Alia Al-Aswany, Aravind Adiga, Mohsin Hamid and Benyamin Daniel. It spans the spectacular development of the English novel to the World novel where many crucial issues are discussed such as, globalization, identity politics, Western and Arab feminism, immigration, racism and the impact of 9/11 on the world literature.

Professor Dr. Isam Shihada received his doctorate in English Literature from Pune University, India, in 1999. Shihada teaches courses on the Victorian and modern novel. His books A Feminist Perspective: Thomas Hardy. God Loves Diversity and Justice were published respectively by Prestige, India 2001 and Lexigton, USA in 2013.
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Noor Publishing House
The Novel: A critical Study
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Noor Publishing House
Bahnhofstraße 28
66111 Saarbrücken
Germany, 2017
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About the Author
Representation of the _Other_’ in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*

This study aims at examining the representation of the _Other_’ as portrayed in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847). It attempts to inspect how the _Other_’ is viewed in nineteenth-century England and the cultural ideology behind such specific representation. It poses crucial questions as to why the _Other_’ is constantly represented negatively in mainstream western narrative, as in the case of Bertha Mason, who is portrayed as a madwoman and a voiceless monster who deserves a ten-year rigorous confinement in the Attic. I will attempt to focus on the cultural and historical context of Jane Eyre and its impact on the representation of the _Other_.’ I will also draw on Edward Said’s theorization related to race, representation, and resistance in my analysis.

1. Representation

I am going to explore the meaning of representation and its enormous power of construction of social reality, especially if it is allied with political and imperial conquests. For that reason, we have to put into our account the historical and theoretical relations between western economic-political domination and western intellectual production. A case that I will examine thoroughly is Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, with special reference to the character Bertha Mason. My objective is to show how the _Other_’ is represented negatively and how such representation usually involves unequal power-relations.

Representation and resistance are very broad arenas within which much of the drama of colonialist relations, postcolonial examination and subversion of those relations has taken place. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin argue that —in conquest and colonization, texts and textuality played a major part. European texts, anthropologies, histories, fiction, captured the non-European subject within European frameworks which read his or her alterity as terror or lack (1995:83). Meanings are constructed in and through systems of representation and they are mediated through dominant hegemonic discourses which can reproduce unequal social relations. Representation is a vital part of a process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It also produces cultural values and constructs identity. According to Stuart Hall,

Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the _real_ world of objects or imaginary world of fictional objects, people and events. The relation between _things_’ concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning in language. The process which links these three elements together is what we call —representation. (1997:19)

Representation produces and circulates cultural meanings, values and identities through the use of language. It is important to highlight that meaning is not static but is socially constructed and can change depending on the context in which people of a particular culture construct it. We construct the meaning through the ways in which we represent _things_.’ This in turn creates cultural codes, values and identity. Hall argues that —meanings regulate our conduct and practices as they help set up the rules and conventions by which social life is ordered. (1997:4)

However, the real concern is not how representation and language produce meanings but also the consequences of representation. Therefore, it is of great importance to focus on the ways in which meaning is produced and reproduced as the result of a particular discourse. According to Tam Donnelly, —Discourses are sets of experiences that are displayed through language, they are ways of referring to
or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice. (2002:57). One tends to see that representation is a form of discourse which involves social conventions and unequal power-relationships where some people have more power to speak than others. For instance, western scholars use Oriental images and ideologies to consolidate the intellectual awkwardness of the „Other.” These views of the Orient are attempts to portray the superiority and intellectuality of the western status. (Said 1979). Edward Said observes that the modern western view of the Orient as an outsider phenomenon, inferior to the West, is manifested in the academic sphere.

For Gayatri Spivak, representation is not only a matter of „speaking about,” but also — „speaking for and the role of literature in the production of cultural representation should not be ignored. (Spivak 1988). She adds that many western writings, for example Jane Eyre, have not adequately portrayed the reality of the colonized „Other” and tend to exclude the voices of the „Other.” She concludes that the colonized subaltern (women included, as in the case of Bertha Mason) cannot, or can scarcely, speak. Consequently, exclusion of the „Other” produces and reproduces unequal social relations. Representation of so-called third world women in a negative light is pervasive in western dominant discourse. Many western political and discursive representations of third world women are problematic because they present these women (like Bertha Mason) as a homogenized group very different from the women of the West (like Jane Eyre). These representations of third world women take many forms in the West that range from being sexually „hot’ to being submissive and willing slaves.

It is worth mentioning that in society, cultural practices as manifested in the work of publishing companies, television and the press are important dimensions of the social, political, and economic organizations. „It shouldn’t be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England’s social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English.” (Lewis and Mills 2003:306). These cultural practices represent society’s dominant ideologies which become a standard against which other forms of social relations and productions are interpreted and judged. For Edward Said, the question is not to represent cultures but how to represent other cultures. „Other” is the keyword, evoking not only the extremely complex category of alterity but the position from which this word „Other” is uttered. (Said 1978). Here, I find that Said tries to find an answer for a most important question, namely how we can represent a culture that is not „ours’ from within a culture that is „ours.” Said adds that in order to represent other cultures, one has to pass through a social space of interpretation on the grounds that the diverse cultures of the world are autonomous and self-contained conceptual entities that can be understood only from the inside. (Said 1994) The approach adopted by Said lies in the space of intercultural contact if we accept that differences are real among cultures, without, however, hypostasizing these differences into some principle of absolute difference. Said tries to show how the Orient is portrayed as an inferior and barbaric civilization by the West through a series of negative misrepresentations invoked to justify the mission of the West to redeem the Orient and bring enlightenment to its darkness by salvation through physical conquest. It seems that the Orient remains the object of the hypostasizing gaze of the West, which claims to define properly the field of representation promoted in the name of science. Said highlights the dangerous power of literature in imperial conquest as an active force in the social construction of reality and representation. Prendergast finds that — Said’s book Culture and Imperialism is an attempt to break this vicious circle of misrepresentation with a powerful plea for the possibilities of dynamic cultural encounters in the late 20th century as a way of negotiating the problematic of self and „Other,” where dialogue takes place on equal terms. (2000:97).
2. Jane Eyre and representation

However, a contrapuntal reading of Jane Eyre reveals that literary texts have complex engagements with the historical, political and social conditions of their times where colonialism is crucial and fundamental in the nineteenth and the twentieth century. Edward Said defines a contrapuntal reading as one which remains simultaneously aware —both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which the dominating discourse acts. Such approach encourages contrapuntal readings of literary texts (1994:59). It is important to discern that reading Jane Eyre contrapuntally not only involves spotting incidents where the colonies are represented but also producing an acknowledgment of the history of the Caribbean which the novel is not necessarily writing about, but which it ultimately depends upon. The history which helps shape Jane Eyre involves not only the social changes occurring in England in the early years of the nineteenth century, but also the history of colonization and resistance to it. Charlotte Brontë represses the recent and immediate history of British slaveholding by alluding to a safely remote history of Roman acts of enslavement. Jane cries out to John Reed in the opening chapter, —You are like a murderer—you are like a slave-driver—you are like the Roman emperors! (6)1. The importance of the contrapuntal approach illustrated by Edward Said lies in the continuing value of the literary text being studied. According to Said’s book Culture and Imperialism, Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park may have —affiliations with a sordid history of slavery. (Said 1978:114). Moreover, he emphasizes that there is no need to devalue that novel as a consequence, and asserts that Jane Austen’s brilliance is evidenced in the complex ways in which she configures the relations between Mansfield Park and Antigua.

In Jane Eyre, through the Masons, we are introduced to the plantation–owning community in Jamaica, while St John Rivers connects the novel with the British missionary work in India. These can be interpreted as overt references to the history of the British Empire and its colonies. The economic relationships among the novel’s characters are especially vital to the plot, since Edward Rochester’s first marriage to the Jamaican–born Bertha Mason gains him a fortune of thirty thousand pounds, which makes possible his affluent and lavish style at Thornfield. Within this context, Susan Meyer affirms that Jane’s inheritance of twenty thousand pounds has a colonial source:

It comes from her uncle in Madeira, who is an agent for a Jamaican wine manufacturer, Bertha’s brother. The location of Jane’s uncle John (Eyre) in Madeira, off Morocco, on the West African coast, where Richard Mason to stop on his way home from England, also indirectly suggests, through Mason’s itinerary, that John Eyre’s wealth is implicated in the slave trade.(1996:93)

It is clear that without the money accrued from colonialism, Rochester could not have and enjoy the luxuries of Thornfield Hall, nor could Jane be able to facilitate the respectable marriages of her cousins. Without such colonial wealth, Jane and her cousins were destined to live as humble governesses for wealthy families in England. Judie Newman construes this change of social status by saying that —Jane and Rochester settle down to a happy married life on the proceeds of Empire (1995: 14).

It seems that Jane Eyre is implicated seriously in colonialism not just in terms of economic wealth but at the level of representation too, as it is —littered with overt and covert references to ‘Other’ cultures and representations of civilized and savage ones (Childs 1999:145). The scene where Rochester takes
Jane to see Bertha just after the Wedding Ceremony is full of misrepresentation of the ‘Other,’ —a figure whether beast or human being, one couldn’t at first sight tell. (321). Rochester describes Bertha as a monster: —a fearful voyage I had with such a monster in the vessel (92). Bertha’s supposed bestial and violent nature is linked to her mixed Creole lineage and Jamaican birthplace. This tallies with the frequent assumptions in colonial discourses that those born of parents not from the same ‘race’ are degenerate beings and perhaps closer to animals (Mcleod 2000): —There it is not known what a sullied name you bear, nor what a filthy burden is bound to you. You may take the maniac with you to England; confine her with due attendance and precautions at Thornfield (91). Here, we find that Bertha Mason is robbed of human selfhood. She has no voice in the novel except abrupt demonic bursts of laughter and unintelligible murmurs throughout the night, as reported by the narrator Jane Eyre. This animalistic portrayal deprives her of her identity and selfhood. She never achieves her independent selfhood in the novel. Negative representation of the ‘Other’ continues when Rochester describes his night in Jamaica:

Being unable to sleep in bed, I got up and opened the window. The air was like Sulphur-streams—I couldn’t find no refreshment any where. Mosquitoes came buzzing and hummed sullenly round the room...I was physically influenced by the atmosphere and scene, and my ears were filled with the curses the maniac(Bertha) still shrieked out (90).

This passage seems to consolidate many colonial assumptions which tarnish the image of the ‘Other.’ Rochester depicts Jamaica as a satanic and hellish location. Phrases such as ‘sulphur-streams’ or ‘the ominous noise of the sea’ give the impression of Jamaica as hell on earth. We find that that Jamaica is linked and associated with inferiority, lunacy and demonic forces. Such negative representation is contrasted sharply with the positive representation of Europe, which symbolizes salvation for Rochester from the maddening atmosphere of Jamaica.

The sweet wind from Europe was still whispering in the refreshed leaves, and the Atlantic was thundering in glorious liberty, my heart dried up and scorched for a long time, swelled to the tone, and filled with living blood my being longed for renewal—my soul thirsted for a pure drought. I saw hope revive—and felt regeneration possible. (91).

The beauty of Europe, is contrasted sharply with the mosquito-infested environment of Jamaica. We can notice clearly that the relationship between Jamaica and Europe is both contrasting and unequal. If the West was considered the place of historical progress and scientific sophistication, then the Orient was considered remote from the influence of historical change. The Orient is represented as a timeless place, static and trapped in antiquity. According to Said’s argument in Orientalism, the westerner’s views of the Orient do not depend on what existed in the Orient but are dreams and fantasies of the West based on an institutional framework. A series of images concerning the exotic East are fabricated and become an object suitable for study in the academy (Said 1978 ). It is notable that the representation of ‘Others’ by Europe is a sign of its cultural and political dominance. These representations focus on North Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean and more significantly on the Third World in general.

For Frantz Fanon, to be —the ‘Other’ is to feel that one is always in a shaky position, to be always on guard, ready to be rejected and ...unconsciously doing everything needed to bring about exactly this catastrophe (1967:76). For example, Bertha Mason is represented as a degenerate and half-animal, a figure whose behaviour is affected by the fiery environs of Jamaica. It is crucial to recall here that Charlotte Brontë was writing Jane Eyre in the 1840s. Many of the slaves working on the plantations in
Jamaica were originally Africans who had been captured and sold to the plantation owners. During the 1830s, resistance by slaves to their horrible conditions was widespread everywhere. Fires functioned as beacons to let other slaves know that uprising had begun and the burning of the plantations was an important feature of the slaves’ resistance. This may account for Bertha Mason’s attempt to set fire to Rochester’s room while he is asleep and her eventual destruction of Thornfield Hall. Bertha’s revolt against her confines and setting fire to Thornfield cannot be seen as an act of suicide: it is a revolt against colonialism in all its negative manifestations and representation. Susan Meyer says in this regard that —the story of Bertha does make an indictment of British imperialism in West Indies and the stained Wealth that came from its oppressive rule (1996:71). Her death can be seen as a revolt of colonized against colonizer, seeking ultimate freedom through death. Bertha’s suicide does bear witness to resistance to the colonial role and its negative misrepresentation since the novel never allows her to tell her own story. We have her story narrated and represented by Rochester and Jane Eyre. Bertha’s unruly presence can be read contrapuntally as resistant to the role of those who deem her less than human. Throughout the novel, Bertha seems to resist the representation of the narrator Jane Eyre.

a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human, one couldn’t, at first sight tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours, it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal, but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face. (70)

Hiding her face and head can be seen as a purposeful act to resist representation and escape it metaphorically. Bertha’s unruly resistance is an evidence of colonialism’s failure to control those from whom it commanded utter subordination. Firdous Azim comments that —Bertha escapes the dominating and hegemonising imperialist and educational processes (1993: 183). Orientalists circulated negative assumptions about third world women as being sexually promiscuous. Frantz Fanon comments on that, —For the majority of white men, the Negro represents the sexual instinct in its raw state (1967:177). Hence, we will not find it surprising that Bertha is described as a sensual woman who attracts the fantasy of Rochester at the beginning of their courtship, —tall, dark and majestic (P.86). Edward Said says in this regard that third world women are represented by the West as —the creatures of a male power–fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing.(1978:207).

Misrepresentation persists when Rochester continues: —her family wished to secure me because I was of a good race (86). In the context of a colony, blacks outnumbered whites by twelve to one and it was a routinely accepted island practice for white planters to force female slaves to become their mistresses. Rochester’s phrase accrues significance beyond its immediate reference to lineage (Meyer 1996). It suggests cunningly that Bertha herself many not be of as good a race as he. This may conform with Said’s view that the West considers the East and people living there as degenerate, less than human, and unsophisticated. In another episode, Rochester exclaims that —she came of a mad family, idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a mad woman and a drunkard (69). By doing so, he links that lineage with two of the most common stereotypes (drunkenness and madness) associated with blacks in the nineteenth century. Bertha’s bestiality and blackness is made more explicit despite Rochester’s wish to convince Jane, and perhaps temporarily himself, that —the swelled black face and —exaggerated stature of the woman she has seen are —figments of imagination, results of nightmare (59). But when Jane sees Bertha’s face reflected in her mirror, she describes that face to Rochester:
Fearful and ghastly to me—Oh sir, I never saw a face like it! It was a discolored face—it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments .... Ghosts are usually pale, Jane.’ This sir, was purple! The lips were swelled and dark; the brows furrowed: the black eyebrows widely raised over bloodshot eyes. (57).

The emphasis on Bertha’s colouring in this passage—she is emphatically not —pale but _discolored, ‘ purple,’ _blackened‘—along with the references to rolling eyes and full, _swelled,’ _dark’ lips, all insistently and conventionally mark Bertha as black. Jane’s use of the word _savage_ underlines the negative representation of her description of Bertha’s features, and the redness that she sees in Bertha’s rolling eyes suggests stereotypical black drunkenness. Adrienne Rich refers to Bertha as a —dark sensual beauty (1973:99) while Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe her as —a Creole, swarthy, livid (1979:680). Sander Gilman associates the racial _Other_ with madness. (Gilman 1985). Resisting that, Spivak describes Bertha as a native—born white Jamaican woman. She argues that Jane Eyre gives the white Jane individuality at the expense of the _native_ Bertha. (Spivak 1985). Criticizing the western feminist attitude towards Bertha Mason, Black feminist theorists have argued that —white western feminist theory needs to confront its implicit racism and racial stereotyping (Lewis and Mills 2003:4-5). We see that Bertha has become black, though she is not, as she is misrepresented and constructed by the narrator Jane. In this regard, Fanon comments: —As color is the most obvious outward manifestation of race, it has been made the criterion by which men [sic] are judged, irrespective of their social and intellectual attainments. (1967:118)

However, Jane Eyre has provided the most powerful fictional misrepresentation of the _Other_ in terms of gender too. The character of Bertha has been reread by a feminist postcolonial discourse as the obliteration of the _Other_ woman. Bertha only comes into the novel after about a third of its action has taken place. There is a complete obliteration of the character of Bertha Mason compared to the glorifying depiction of Jane Eyre as the new emerging western white feminist as celebrated by many western feminist studies, such as those of Elaine Showalter, Adrienne Rich, or Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. To counter the western feminist prejudice meted out to Bertha Mason, Jean Rhys’s novel Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) retells the story of Jane Eyre from Bertha’s perspective. Rhys tries to give Bertha that voice which is completely silenced throughout Brontë’s novel. Gayatri Spivak adds that the _Other_ woman cannot be given the central role in a novel which remains a discourse of the Enlightenment subject (cited in Azim 1993:107). Firdous Azim situates Jane Eyre as part of the imperialist genre in which a central subject seeks to establish itself through the eradication of _Other_ subjects. (Azim 1993). Bertha functions in Jane Eyre as the denied and repressed _Other_ who is necessary for the emergence of the central female subject, Jane. We come to see that western feminism has ignored the sheer suffering of Bertha Mason as a woman and has bestowed all of its critical attention on the character of Jane and the stages of her development from which emerge finally as a symbol of the _new woman_ who resists the domination of tradition, religious institutions and patriarchal order.

3. Conclusion

To conclude, my argument is that representation plays a decisive role in constructing meanings and identities about others and that there is also a strong alliance between knowledge and power which has destructive consequences on the representation of the _Other_. We find that Bertha Mason, for example, is represented negatively in regard to her race and gender. One comes to find out that the real reason behind a continuous negative representation is the desire to rule and colonize others. It is seen
that literature, especially in its most popular form, the novel, has played a decisive role in misrepresenting those seen as the “Other.” It is evident that the representation of the “Other” is based on false stereotypical ideas and concepts—here, about those who live in Jamaica. One tends to think where there is representation, there is also misrepresentation, since we represent things and objects according to certain concepts in our mind influenced by gender, the ethnic group we belong to, religion, and other factors. We finally conclude that the most dangerous type of representation is the constructionist one, where we construct realities and then misrepresent them in order to serve our political agenda. This is evident in Jane Eyre, where we have a one-sided story told to us by the narrator Jane Eyre while the other story on the other side is completely ignored. Those living in Jamaica were misrepresented, and their identities were falsely constructed.

Note 1. All references will be henceforth taken from Brontë, Charlotte, Jane Eyre. London: Everyman’s Library, 1908.


A Feminist Perspective of Virginia Woolf’s Selected Novels: Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse.

Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine Virginia Woolf’s contribution to the feminist question in her selected novels: Mrs. Dalloway (1925) and To the Lighthouse (1927). The study shows how Mrs. Woolf employed her novels to show women the way to obtain meaning in life and realize their identities. Virginia Woolf established herself as a distinguished feminist woman writer in her treatment of women’s helpless situation. She unveiled the causes of women’s oppression and provided us with a comprehensive answer for the women’s question.

Virginia Woolf’s Personality: Virginia Woolf was born in 1882, the youngest daughter of the large and talented Stephen family. Her father, Leslie Stephen, was a distinguished critic, biographer, and philosopher. He was one of the most influential figures in the literary world of late Victorian England. Her mother, Julia Stephen, was a daughter of the novelist William Makepeace Thackery. She bore Leslie Stephen four children: Vanessa, Thoby, Virginia and Adrain. Virginia Woolf was destined to be a writer. Though Woolf was denied the formal education allowed to males, she was able to take advantage of her father’s abundant library. She used to meet great writers such as Thomas Hardy and William Thackery. The tranquility of Woolf’s family life was shattered by series of mental breakdowns attributable to many sad events. The first one was the death of her mother in 1895. Two years later, Stella Duckworth, her stepsister, died. After the death of her mother and step-sister, Woolf was subjected to her father’s endless demands for sympathy and attention from his daughters. At the same year of her half-sister’s death, she began her first diary. Over the next seven years, her decision to write began. Woolf suffered another mental breakdown combined with scarlet fever and attempted to commit suicide. When she recovered, she and her siblings moved to Bloomsbury. Virginia Woolf was a member of a group known as Bloomsbury Group that included her brother, Thoby, and a brilliant young group of Cambridge graduates. It included Lytton Starchy, Maynard Keynes, Clive Bell, E.M. Forester, and Roger Fry. This circle constantly expanded to include new friends such as T.S. Eliot, Katherine Mansfield, Elizabeth Bowen, Vita Sackville-West and her husband Sir Harold Nicholson. In this intellectual stimulating environment, Virginia Woolf pursued her literary interests, but her life was interrupted again by the sudden death of her brother, Thoby, who died of typhoid on a trip to Greece in 1905. Virginia Woolf got married to Leonard Woolf. He recognized his wife’s extra-ordinary talents from the beginning, and provided her with the encouragement and protection she needed to fulfil her literary promise. Leonard founded the Hograth Press in 1917, which was developed to be one of the most successful and innovative publishing houses of its time. Virginia Woolf suffered from gloom, depression and madness. Her work was interrupted by periods of physical and mental illness. She couldn’t tolerate the absurdity
of life. She was under the influence of the psychological stress caused by war. She feared that her
madness would return and she would not be able to continue writing. Woolf committed suicide by
drowning herself in a river in March 1941. Virginia Woolf’s novels show an intellectual commitment to
political, social and feminist principles. Woolf was one of the writers whose view of life was conditioned
by the forces of their age. She had acute awareness of the damage of the contemporary life, and her
writings condemned the British patriarchal culture. In her novels, Woolf intended to portray a satiric
picture and terrible indictment of the English social system. She found that the emotional strain of
modern life almost damaged the bonds of communication among people. She asserted that personal
relationships provide the order and meaning in life, but with the traditional values of life, loss of
meaning and social relevance, human relationships have suffered a serious blow. This state of confusion
is expressed in Woolf’s novels through her characters’ inability to communicate with each other. In Mrs.
Dalloway, (1925), Clarissa tries to discover a means of communication with others, but she fails to
overcome her sense of loneliness. In To the Lighthouse (1927), though the Ramsays and their guests live
together, each is an isolated soul. Woolf dedicated her novels to analyze the miseries and loneliness of
women’s lives that have been shaped by the moral, ideological and conventional means. Miss Kilman
and Rezia are outstanding examples of the cruelty of the blind social political doctrine of the English
society. She aimed at creating an androgynous world in which there is a balance between intellect and
emotion. Woolf introduced women characters who signify hope in this world such as Elizabeth in Mrs.
Dalloway and Lily in To The Lighthouse. Feminist Perspective: Feminism can be roughly defined as a
movement that seeks to enhance the quality of women’s lives by defying the norms of society based on
male dominance and subsequent female which implies the emancipation of women from the shackles,
restrictions, norms and customs of society. It demands that women should be treated as autonomous
subjects, and not as passive objects. It seeks to achieve equality between men and women in moral,
social, economic and political fields. The objective of that movement is the creation of a new identity for
women and making them aware of their rights. Before the mid of the 19th century, women were
considered weak intellectually and physically. Such concept was consolidated by social conventions.
According to that concept, society was divided into two worlds: private and public world. The private
world implied that women should stay at home. They were not allowed to work or learn. They were
educated only in a way that suited their claimed weak nature such as sewing, nursing and painting. The
sole vocation for women was marriage. According to that role, women couldn’t revolt because of fear,
shame and rejection by society. The public world implied that men are strong mentally and physically.
They were allowed to work, and were given proper education such as mathematics and science, etc. The
sole vocation of men was to work and build society. That formula of dividing the world into two worlds
was against human nature. Accordingly, it led to the emergence of several feminist groups which
attempted to provide solutions to women’s question. The feminist groups could be classified into liberal,
Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, social, existentialist and post-modernist. None of them has developed a
comprehensive answer to the feminist question. But such coordination and understanding among them
can make feminists achieve their goals, and help them eradicate women’s sufferings concretely.
According to the liberal feminists, the cause of women’s oppression lies deep in traditions and false
moral codes. They demand that women should be provided with proper education and economic
equality with men. Mary Wollstonecraft called for re-organizing society and educating women in order
to develop them morally and intellectually. J.S. Mill, argued that women are in need of the same civil
liberties and economic opportunities as men, and that men should work for liberating women and
changing the traditional way of their thinking. Marxist feminists stressed that capitalism is the primary
source of women's oppression. They demanded that the capitalist system must be replaced by a social one, in which means of production belong to all. The existentialist feminist Simone De Beauvoir, in her book, The Second Sex (1940), demanded that women should choose whether they become mothers or not. She called women to create a special world for themselves, and demanded that women should read books by great writers like Virginia Woolf and Catherine Mansfield. In her opinion, women should be independent financially and autonomously professionally. For radical feminists, the oppression of women is rooted in the patriarchal system. They demanded that society must be purged from legal, social, political and cultural principles of patriarchy. Psycho-analytic feminists found the source of women’s oppression is hidden deep in women's psyche. They called women to probe the depth of their psyche in order to evaluate their position as women. Post-modern feminist argued that the more feminist thought they have, the better. Helen Cixous argued that women write differently from men because of their biological differences. She believed that, by developing a feminine writing, women would change the way the world thinks of them and their place as well. Julia Kristeva differs from Cixous. She rejected Cixous’ identification of the masculine with biological men and the feminine with biological women. She thought that boys can be identified with their mothers, and girls can be identified with their fathers. Girls can write in a masculine mode, and boys can write in a feminine mode. Social feminists thought that psychology, patriarchy and capitalism determine women's destiny, so the oppression of women is rooted in social, economic, and psychological factors. It implies the need for self organization and change in gender identity. They developed two approaches to provide a comprehensive answer to the women’s question: dual and unified. The dual approach feminists believed in that was any change in the status of women should be accompanied by the defeat of capitalism and patriarchy. This can be achieved by changing patriarchy's economic aspects through material means and its social and ideological aspects by non- material means, psycho –analytic means. The unified approach took both defeat of capitalism and patriarchy in one direction. The unified approach feminists argued for that is if women were equated with men, regarding the same division of labour and the same fee, they would be equated with men regarding the same value and status. They argued that the division of labour analysis has the conceptual power to change Marxist –feminist theory which is powerful enough to accommodate the ideas of Marxist, radical and psycho-analytic feminists in a unitary framework. Social feminists unveiled the reasons and suggested a comprehensive answer for women’s oppression.

**Virginia Woolf: A feminist perspective:**

At Woolf’s time, people were affected by the collapse of the old concepts and values that influenced the entire conceptual world. Virginia Woolf had acute awareness of the ravage and demolition of the contemporary life. The human nature underwent a change in her writing after the shock of the First World War. She criticized the authoritarian power that made autocrats of husbands and fathers. Virginia Woolf was subjected to a depressive atmosphere and patriarchal rule in her family. She was affected by her father’s domination of his wife and daughters. In Marcus "New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf” Ellen Hawks comments on woolf’s view towards her mother. It was the woman, the human being whose sex made it her sacred duty to sacrifice herself to the father, whom Charlotte Bronte and Elizabeth Barrett had to kill. (Marcus, 1981: 45) After the death of her mother and half-sister, her father’s demands and needs for sympathy and attention from his daughters increased. She was also affected by the sexual expression of power and manipulation of her step-brothers. Her strong admiration for women was coupled with growing dislike for males’ domination, represented by her father and step-brothers especially by George and Gerald. She and Vanessa formed a league together
and united against the depressing atmosphere and patriarchal rule in their family. On the basis of this relationship, Woolf appreciated the need for women’s friendship and continued to insist on the importance of women’s friendship against patriarchal machinery. Being aware of the importance of the need for all women to rebel against the patriarchal system, Woolf examined the literary works and biographies of women writers such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Mary Wollstonecraft, Russell Mitford and others. She examined their lives and the way they translated their resentment of males’ dominance in literature. She discovered that killing the stereotyped feminine, “the angel of the house”, as Woolf called her, was a part of the occupation of women writers. These women writers maintained their integrity, and insisted upon their own identities against patriarchal society. She believed that the artist needs shared goals, tradition and continuity. Woolf comments in "A room of one’s own” Masterpieces are not single and solitary births, they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body, so that the experience of mass is behind the single voice. (Woolf, 1957: 68-9) Virginia Woolf found that women were excluded by men from being the makers of these masterpieces, so she created for women a female tradition in "A Room of One’s Own" (1929). In order to kill the angel and create an artist, women should create their own identity, talk about their own experiences and encourage women’s writing. Some of Woolf’s friends were central to her development of politics such as Margaret Davies, president of the National Women’s Co-operative Guild, and Janet Case. Woolf recognized that women might change society’s values and save it from self-destruction. Hawkus quoted the following part from a letter that Virginia Woolf sent to Margaret, in 1916, I become steadily more feminist... and wonder how this preposterous masculine fiction keeps going a day longer... without some vigorous young woman pulling us together and marching through it. (Marcus, 1981: 34) Virginia Woolf called for recognition of what she had seen in her friendship with women- the characteristics that would have protected them from emotional exploitation. She called for a world of sympathy. She called for a society of women as an alternative to authoritarian structures. In her call, she bids women to believe in themselves, maintain integrity of their values and exclude from society all masculine values of hierarchy, dominance and power. In her short story A Society (1920), she talked about a group of women who join together to investigate the masculine world. Hawkes comments on Woolf’s view in the story, Woolf stresses the most important lesson to be learned by women, not from men but from each. As the narrator, of the story tells one of the members of the society, ‘Once [your daughter] knows how to read there is only one thing you can teach her to believe in- and that is her self.’ And the friend replies, ‘Well, that would be a change. (Marcus, 1981: 14) Woolf worked for and was influenced by several feminist groups such as the Suffrage Movement, World Women Organization, National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies and Women Cooperative Guild. Social feminists believed in the distinctiveness of women’s values and capabilities. Virginia Woolf’s views can be considered identical to those of social feminists. She argued that women who give life are not so careless of it and women’s socialization would keep a government run by women from being imperialistic.

Virginia Woolf was, actively, an interested writer of the feminist question. In her writings, she calls women to express themselves in all professions open to humanity. Woolf says in "A room of one’s own", Literature is open to everybody. I refuse to allow you, Beadle though you are to run me off the grass. Lock up your liberties if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no blot that can set upon the freedom of my mind. (Woolf, 1957: 75-6) In "A room of one’s own", Woolf also called women not to allow men to talk about their experiences, but they should talk about themselves. For we think back through our mothers if we are women. It is useless to go to them for pleasure. Lamp, Browne, Thackery, Newman, Sterne, Dickens, De Quincey – however it may be - never helped a woman yet, though she
may have learnt a few tricks of them and adapted them to her use. (Woolf, 1957: 68-9) Virginia Woolf dedicated her major novels to analyze the patriarchal English society. She portrayed different types of women in various contexts. She opened women’s eyes on their inferior status and provided them with a female tradition to rely on. She strived to provide women with the proper clues for having a meaning in life. She believed that such meaning would lead to a purpose in life, and thus it would create a modern and normal life.

In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf tries to answer the question of why there have been so few female writers. She refers this to women’s minor status largely to socio-economic factors; especially their poverty and lack of privacy. Woolf also exposes gender-consciousness. She believed that it cripples both male and female writers. She posits that men historically belittle women as a means of asserting their own superiority. Men are threatened by the thought of losing their power, so they disparage women to glorify themselves. Consequently, women’s writing is marked by the feelings of anger and fear, and men’s writing is marked by aggression. In her feminist essay *Three Guineas* (1938), Woolf sets them a part from the patriarchal world and recommends that women must be in league together against patriarchy for the creation of a healthy and normal life.

Mrs. Dalloway: Woolf portrays the impact of the patriarchal society of England on women’s lives. She portrays the loneliness and frustration of women’s lives that have been shaped by the moral, ideological and conventional factors. The action of Mrs. Dalloway is confined to a single day in June. On this day, Clarissa gives a party in the evening. Peter Walsh comes unexpectedly and calls upon her. The party brings together several other friends from her young days: Sally Seton, Whitbread and others. Clarissa is a middle-aged woman, over fifty and the wife of Richard Dalloway, a conservative member in the parliament. They live in West-minister, a rich and fashionable locality of London. Clarissa holds the centre of the stage, and her experiences of love are part of every warp and woof of the novel. There is her love-story with Peter Walsh, Richard Dalloway and Sally Seton. The most important love-story of Clarissa’s life was that with Peter. Whenever she thinks of the past, of Bourton, the town where Clarissa lived with her parents before marriage, she thinks of Peter. She loved Peter when she was a young girl and still loves him. Memories of Peter keep coming to her mind throughout the novel. After she had refused Peter’s offer of marriage, he went to India, and married another woman, but that marriage didn’t turn out to be a happy one. At the age of fifty-two, he fell in love with a married woman. The relationship between Clarissa and Peter starts with love, but it has been marked with a sense of tension. Clarissa’s soul craves for love and to be loved, but also wants privacy and independence of her own. In her relationship with Peter, her soul underwent a constant tension between love and individual freedom. Clarissa wants to preserve her virginity. She equates virginity with freedom as a result of an aggressive social structure where women were snubbed and despised. Peter is portrayed as a male dictator who believes that he has the right to dictate to her how she should live and what she should do. Clarissa thought that if she had married Peter, he would have engulfed her and forced her soul. She gives reasons for rejecting him and marrying Richard. For in marriage a little licence, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him (where was he this morning, for instance? Some committee, she never asked what.) But with Peter everything had to be shared, everything gone into. (Mrs. Dalloway, P.10) Clarissa feared intimacy with Peter, and was unwilling to share him her feelings and thoughts. She was attracted and frightened at the same time. The reason behind not marrying Peter was her apprehension that he would not give her the kind of freedom that she thought essential for her happiness. On the
other hand, Peter thought that she was cold and lacked female sympathy. He couldn’t understand the
importance of her emotional need. Peter is unconventional and visionary in society. He can’t fit into the
conventional society of London. He is able to see the worldliness, hypocrisy and insecurity of his society.
In his youth, he aspired to be a brilliant poet. He was deeply interested in the affairs of the world. It was
the state of the world that interested him; Wagner, Pope’s poetry, people’s characters eternally, and the
defects of her own soul. (Mrs. Dalloway, P. 9) On the other hand, Clarissa possessed nothing except
giving parties. Not that she thought herself clever, or much out of the ordinary... She knew nothing; no
language, no history; she scarcely read a book now ... Her only gift was knowing people almost by
instinct, she thought, walking on. (Mrs. Dalloway, P. 11) Clarissa is not a visionary in society like Peter.
She gives parties and likes to bring people together. She regards her parties as an offering, though she
doesn’t know precisely to whom. She compensates her need of warmth by giving parties and seeking
the warmth that other people offer. Clarissa vacillates between her need of love and her need of
independence. She lacks depth of feelings and understanding, and can’t see the inward troubled soul of
society. She only sees the world’s glittering body, but she knows nothing about social problems. This
tendency in Clarissa seems to Peter to be excessive, and has made him say that she would prove to be
the perfect hostess. He thinks that she cared for rank and society. He sees through Clarissa the hypocrisy
and insecurity of the society of London. He always scolded her and said sarcastically that she would
marry a Prime Minister and stand at the top of a staircase. Clarissa felt such comments were pretty
hurtful and often wept. The perfect hostess he called her (she had cried over it in her bedroom), she had
the makings of the perfect hostess, he said. (Mrs. Dalloway, P. 10) Consequently, their relationship
ended in failure. Tell me the truth, tell me the truth,’ he kept on saying........ And when she said,’ It’s no
use. It’s no use. This is the end.’.......it was as if she had hit him in the face. (Mrs. Dalloway, PP. 71-2) In
"Mrs. Dalloway", Clarissa’s relationship with her husband hasn’t proved to be successful. Throughout
Virginia Woolf’s presentation of Clarissa-Richard marital relationship, she emphasizes that marriage is
not a guarantee of a happy relationship and mutual understanding between a husband and a wife in
patriarchal society, even while living under the same roof. Clarissa rejected Peter because his love was
too possessive and domineering while Richard’s is not. In her decision to marry Richard, she chose
privacy over passion. But whenever she thinks of Richard, she automatically thinks of Peter. Clarissa
tries to feel convinced that she acted wisely in rejecting Peter, but the virtues she attributes to Richard
as a husband are obviously representing a pathetic attempt to view her married life as a total success.
So she would still find herself arguing ...still making out that she had been right- and she had too- not to
marry him... ....she was convinced; though she had borne about her for years like an arrow sticking in her
heart the grief, the anguish. (Mrs.Dalloway, P. 10)

Clarissa lacks effusiveness and generosity. She can’t respond to male demands of sympathy and is
unable to provide her husband with the kind of romantic passion usually expected in heterosexual
relationships. She chooses an attic room as a refuge from the traditional female role. This kind of marital
relationship caused a state of loneliness and lack of intimacy in marriage. Loneliness without any sense
of partnership with the husband is suggested through the narrow bed. Clarissa has to mitigate her
loneliness through social life and idle gossip. She has come to accept that there is a gulf even between
husband and wife. The following conversation presents an evidence of the casual nature of Clarissa-
Richard relationship: Some committee?’ She asked, as he opened the door. ‘Armenians,’ he said; or
perhaps it was ‘Albanians. (Mrs. Dalloway, P. 132) This conversation shows also that Richard is so
preoccupied with politics more than his wife. In response to his loyalty to the social duties of upper
class, he leaves his wife for a meeting that he does not care about. Again we find Richard invited to Lady
Bruton’s party without his wife. This action fills Clarissa with a sense of emptiness Richard is excluded from Clarissa’s room and insists on her resting undisturbed because of a heart affliction. Clarissa mocks her husband’s attempt at taking a hot water bottle as a substitute for her warmth: And if she raised her head she could just hear the click of the handle released as gently as possible by Richard, who slipped upstairs in his socks and then, as often as not, dropped his hot-water bottle and swore! How she laughed! (Mrs. Dalloway, P. 37)

Naik cited in Aston (1998:114) explains Woolf’s view on this incident between Clarissa and Richard: Woolf interprets Richard’s withdrawal from his wife, Clarissa, as an attempt to impose strictures, on female desire under the garb of medical impositions by disinterested men of authority in medical profession. Virginia Woolf called for excluding all masculine values of hierarchy, competition and dominance. She called for the society of women as alternative to the authoritarian structures, and insisted on the importance of women’s friendship against these structures. Woolf found a refreshing freedom and mutual understanding in her relationship with women. She found it so secret and private compared with men. Virginia and Vita SackWest experienced astonishing revelations with each other and Woolf wrote about it truthfully in Mrs. Dalloway: It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which spilt its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores. Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. (Mrs. Dalloway, P. 37) In her youth, Clarissa, sought for the society of women. She couldn’t resist sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman, not a girl, of a woman confessing, as to her they often did, some scrape, some folly. And whether it was pity, or their beauty, or that she was older, or some accident- like a faint scent, or a violin next door (so strange is the power of sounds at certain moments), she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt. Only for a moment; but it was enough. (Mrs. Dalloway, P. 36) Clarissa’s love for Sally Seton was the most intense emotion she will ever experience. Woolf expresses this kind of relationship in the following words: The strange thing on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one’s feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up. It was protective, on her side, sprang from a sense of being in league together. (Mrs. Dalloway, PP. 38-9)

Sally was anti-patriarchal woman. She asserted herself as a woman and demanded equal rights for women Sally was Clarissa’s inspiration to think beyond the walls of Bourton, read and philosophize. There they sat, hour after hour..... talking about life, how they were to reform the world. They meant to found a society to abolish private property. (Mrs. Dalloway, P. 38) Woolf describes Clarissa-Sally relationship as a gift: She felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it- a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling! (Mrs. Dalloway, P. 40) Clarissa broke the authorial patriarchal voice as uniting with women results in equal relationship. This kind of relationships was a reaction against patriarchy and for the creation of a society for women. Though Clarissa was attracted to Sally, she was stifled by the traditions of society. Sally Seton represented the forbidden in patriarchal society, and her vision was not shared and accepted by the narrow-minded people of the world. People like Sally aren’t welcomed by society, and they are compelled to conform and resign. Her acceptance of the social roles and constraints of respectability
prevented her from following her union with Sally. Her defeat and acceptance of these roles are clear in her reaction to the thought of a woman becoming pregnant before marriage. Sally mentioned that the housemaid had married the neighbouring squire and had given birth before marriage. Peter considers Clarissa's reaction as the death of her will. He could see Clarissa now, turning bright pink; somehow contracting; and saying, 'Oh, I shall never be able to speak to her again!' Whereupon the whole party sitting round the tea- table seemed to wobble. It was very uncomfortable .......‘The death of her soul.’ He had said that instinctively, ticketing the moment as he used to do-the death of her soul. (Mrs. Dalloway, P. 66) Sally Seton was also compelled to yield and accept the patriarchal forces. She got married to a rich industrialist and resigned to be a conventional mother. Both Clarissa and Sally were defeated because the only accepted female identity was the one that was accepted by patriarchy. We are introduced to Miss Kilman who has a grudge against the world. She lost her job as a school-teacher when the war came because she was suspected of having German sympathies. She felt that she had been cheated, and wanted to have revenge against the whole world. The cruelty of life drove her to seek solace in the church. Religion for her is a choice of despair. She failed to get that solace because the church didn’t help her in mastering the raging passion of hatred. While religion teaches love, it could not fulfil its purpose of anchorage. She felt that she would have triumphed on this grim reality only by humiliating Clarissa. In humiliating Clarissa, she wants to humiliate the cruel world that knows nothing about her suffering and poverty. Under the pretext of religion, she is obsessed with the thought of possessing Elizabeth’s soul. Miss Kilman hates Clarissa because she views her as a product of the patriarchal society by which she was victimized. Miss Kilman's grudge against Clarissa is expressed effectively in the following words: If she could have helled her it would have eased her. But it was not the body, it was the soul and its mockery that she wished to subdue; make feel her mastery. If only she could make her weep, could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to knees crying. (Mrs. Dalloway, P. 138) This thought makes her repress her femininity by dressing like men, behaving with ruthlessness and adopting aggressive masculine values. An example of the unconventional woman is portrayed through the character of Elizabeth Dalloway. Elizabeth has ambitions to have a career and a professional life. She has planned to be a doctor, farmer, or to go into Parliament. The disintegration and lack of mutual understanding which mark her parents’ relationship have their impact on her own life. Her father fails to recognize her at the party. When he does, he accepts her as a decorative object- a part of the trivial feminine world. Her mother feels shocked, and helpless on finding her daughter under Miss Kilman’s influence all the time. Clarissa’s helplessness as a mother is expressed, With a sudden impulse, with a violent anguish, for this woman was taking her daughter from her, Clarissa leant over the banisters and cried out, ‘Remember the party! Remember our party to- night.’ But Elizabeth had already opened the front door; there was a van passing; she didn’t answer. (Mrs. Dalloway, P. 139) Elizabeth has to choose between participating in the trivial feminine society of her mother or taking part in the male dominated society. None of these choices is adequate example for the creation of a modern woman. But blending the emotional side of Clarissa with the ambitions of the professional life of Miss Kilman gives a promise for the birth of a new identity for women. Lady Burton is an aristocratic woman and a representative of patriarchy. She is proud of her ancient decent, social status and style of living. She has an ambition to solve social and political problems. Lady Bradshaw is a classical example of the upper class Victorian woman. She obeys her husband and responds fully to his effort to attain power and domination over her. She keeps herself busy in the trivial life of attending dinner-parties. In Mrs. Dalloway, the dark picture of patriarchal society is portrayed through Septimus-Rezia relationship. Septimus had gone to war with a sense of total dedication to the ideal of freedom which was seriously threatened by the
German hordes. The grim experience of war has given him a new vision of the truth. He is able to see the painful reality of English society and wouldn’t accept the world as different from what he actually sees it. This vision of Septimus makes him an insane person through his doctors and people’s eyes. He married Rezia without loving her because he couldn’t stay alone at night. Rezia suffers silently and alone. Her husband rejects to have a child because he rejects to join patriarchy by becoming a father himself. Rezia finds herself alone in a foreign country without a husband or a child. She was very lonely, she was very unhappy! She cried for the first time since they were married. Far away he heard her sobbing; he heard it accurately, he noticed it distinctively; he compared it to a piston thumping. But he felt nothing. His wife was crying, and he felt nothing; only each time she sobbed in this profound, this silent, this hopeless way, he descended another step into the pit. (Mrs. Dalloway, P. 100) Woolf compares Rezia to a flower attempting to protect her battered husband with her maternal petals: Sitting close, sitting besides him, he thought, as if all her petals were about her. She was a flowering tree; and through her branches looked out the face of a lawgiver, who had reached a sanctuary where she feared no one; not Holmes; not Bradshaw; a miracle, a triumph, the last and greatest. (Mrs. Dalloway, P. 163) Rezia tries to restore her marriage. She refuses anyone to separate her from her husband, but Dr. Holmes, the agent of death pushed his way up to Septimus, who jumps to death, and Rezia is driven to darkness and destruction. Septimus’s death is a moment of vision for Clarissa. She comes to understand that Septimus, in his madness, has denied society and its constructing conventions that have imprisoned her into a snobbish hostess. Woolf depicts Clarissa’s final apprehension of the truth of life:

A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew a part; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death. (Mrs. Dalloway, P. 202) Clarissa feels a shamed of her past and ignorance of the painful nature of life. Somehow it was her disaster-her disgrace. It was her punishment to see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness, and she forced to stand here in her evening dress. She had schemed; she had pilfered. She was never wholly admirable. Odd, incredible; she had never been so happy. Nothing could be slow enough; nothing lasts too long. (Mrs. Dalloway, P. 203)

**To the Lighthouse:**

*To the Lighthouse* (1927) is concerned with the Victorian arrangement of patriarchal society, and it questions the distinction between men and women’s social roles. Throughout the novel, we find that there are two distinctive worlds: the world of men, the masculine, and the world of women, the feminine. The masculine is marked by egotism, rigidity, and insistence on intellect over feeling. By contrast, the feminine is marked by imagination, intuition and compromise. The patriarchal society has discouraged mixing the characteristics of these two worlds, and thus prevented the creation of a modern society, in which there is balance between the masculine intellect and the feminine emotion .Mrs. Ramsay represents the conventional and the submissive female to patriarchal society. Her medium is emotion and her form is human relationships. Lily Briscoe is a representative of the unconventional and rebellious against gender boundaries. Her medium is intellect and her form is her painting. Through Woolf’s projection of Mrs. Ramsay’s life and her relationships to men characters, she affirms the female values of fertility, giving and creating harmony, which are associated with Mrs. Ramsay; but Woolf criticizes the way she has chosen to subject her positive femininity to masculine definitions. Woolf’s projection of Lily’s life and her relationships to Mrs. Ramsay and male characters is an attempt to teach
women to accept their femininity, cultivate their masculinity, and choose the role that they want to play as independent women. Examining the lives of these two female characters, we find Woolf seeking to integrate the masculine and feminine qualities into a balanced whole that would render men and women the capacity to achieve meaning in life. Ramsays’ marriage is a patriarchal marriage based on middle – class Victorian values. We find inadequacy in this marriage which doesn’t allow mature intellectual interchange. The character of Mr. Ramsay is based on Woolf’s father, Leslie Stephen. Marcus comments, according to Leslie, ‘It was a natural law that a wife should have no legal rights, no right of her own property or money, no training for any job, nor any hope for obtaining one. (Marcus, 1981:152) Mrs. Ramsay is subordinated to his needs and engulfed by his world. She has been badly crippled by her narrow education and trained to be intellectually inferior. Charles Tansley says that women can not write and paint Marcus (1981: 152) comments that being trained to be intellectually inferior has the desired effect on Mr. Ramsay. The stupider the wife appears to the husband, the more desirable she becomes. Yet Mrs. Ramsay is not as stupid as her husband thinks of her. She is frightened of her potential of intellectual achievement, but she never had time to read books. His wife’s stupidity makes him see her astonishingly beautiful. Yet Woolf expresses her view regarding this matter through Lily’s consciousness, Beauty was not every thing. Beauty had this penalty – it came too readily, came too completely. It stilled life –froze it. One forgot the little agitations; the flesh, the pallor, some sight or shadow, which made the face unrecognizable ... It was simpler to smooth that all out under the cover of beauty.  

(Hypocrisy is evident in Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay’s interaction. Mrs. Ramsay subdues herself to her husband because she suspects her husband’s intellectual abilities. Mr. Ramsay wants to reach the heights of genius, the letter Z, and to be like Shakespeare. He has no questions about the division of social roles which have shaped the relationship between husband and wife in a patriarchal society. Accordingly, his lack of the feminine qualities of creativity denies him an access to the forces of life. He wants to be assured that he lives in the heart of life. His need of sympathy renders him reliant on his wife’s femininity. He comes to her not only for sympathy but to feel that he is needed over the world. Mrs. Ramsay looking at the same time be animated and alive as if all her energies were being fused into force, burning and illuminating, and into this delicious fecundity, this foundation and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare. He wanted sympathy. He was a failure, he said. (To the Lighthouse, PP. 42-3) Mrs. Ramsay doubts her husbands’ intelligence, but she doesn’t let herself, even for a second, to feel finer than him. She doesn’t discuss her husbands’ intellectual problems, but she takes the role of fulfiller to his needs and makes him dependent on her femininity. But it was their relationship, and his coming to her like that, openly, so that anyone could see, that discomposed her, for then people said he depended on her.  

(Such hypocrisy between husband and wife raises an accusing finger at patriarchy which imprisons the intellectual maturity of their husbands. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are aware of the irremovable barrier which separates them They had nothing to say, but something seemed, nevertheless, to go from him to her. It was the life, it was the power of it. It was the tremendous humour, she knew, that made him slap his thighs. Don’t interrupt me, he seemed to be saying, don’t say anything; just sit there. And he went on reading. (To the Lighthouse, P.129) Woolf emphasizes the separation between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay: He turned and saw her.’ Ah! She was lovely, lovelier now than ever.’ he thought. But he couldn’t speak to her...He passed without a word, though it hurt him that she should look so distant, and he couldn’t reach her...again he would have passed her without a word had she not. (To the Lighthouse, P.172) Both
Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay accept the limits of their marriage. In their silence, they want certain barriers to be maintained. Mrs. Ramsay has a mania for arranging marriages. She insists that Minta must marry and she wishes to create something that lasts between Paul and Minta. She succeeds in getting them in marriage, but their marriage fails.

Paul had come in and gone to bed early. Minta was late. There was Minta, wreathed, tinted, garish on the stairs about three o’clock in the morning. Paul came out in his pyjamas carrying a poker in case of burglars... He spoke indignant, jealous words abusing her...she flamboyant, careless. For things had worked loose after the first year or so; the marriage had turned out rather badly. (To the Lighthouse, PP.187-8) Swarz (1999: 293) comments, Love need not be the prelude to marriage or even sexual intimacy. The putative marital happiness that Mrs. Ramsay had created for the Rayleys is belied by their actual lives. Mrs. Ramsay thinks of another marriage between Mr. Bankes and Lily. Yet Mrs. Ramsay doesn’t succeed in getting them married. She thinks that Lily is unwomanly. Mrs. Ramsay can’t understand that being womanly means no longer being defined by one’s relation to men or one’s reproductive system. Mrs. Ramsay pities Mr. Bankes for being unmarried. Mrs. Ramsay succeeds in bringing Mr. Bankes to her dinner party, but she fails to fulfill his need for intimacy and unity. Mr. Bankes is not satisfied with the emotional aspects of Mr. Ramsay’s life. He feels they have weakened Mr. Ramsay’s potential. For Mr. Bankes, family life is at odds with intellectual life. He finds that Mr. Ramsay’s life vacillates between his sterile thought and fertile wife. In Mrs. Ramsay’s party, her superficiality bore Mr. Bankes. This makes him not attracted to the domestic life of Mrs. Ramsay; since it is not satisfactory to his need of fulfilment. Mrs. Ramsay herself is stuck by the same questioning of Mr. Bankes in the party. At this moment, all affection for her husband is momentarily gone, and all what she wants to believe and create is gone. She comes to question her status as a woman. But what I have done with my life?...The room was very shabby...nothing seemed to have emerged. They all sat separate. (To the Lighthouse, PP.90-1) Mrs. Ramsay has sometimes the skill of making men feel good. That is because she makes them feel superior. She feels satisfied when they feel proud through her admiration of them. Ironically, men need women’s acknowledgment of their worth, and only through their admiration they can feel proud. At the dinner party, Tansley doesn’t enjoy Mrs. Ramsay’s effort and sees through her superficiality. His insecurity, regarding his feelings of his social inadequacy, prevents him from understanding how to socialize effectively. Mrs. Ramsay pities him and forces Lily to stop bothering him. The novel stresses the antagonism between the father, and his children, James, the youngest of Ramsays’ children looks forward to making a trip to the Lighthouse. Mrs. Ramsay promises him to go tomorrow if the weather were fine. Yet James’s hope is dashed to the ground by his father’s saying that the weather will not be fine. Then, Woolf describes James’s rage against his father: Had there an axe handy, a poker or any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father’s breast and killed him, there and then, James would have seized it. (To the Lighthouse, P.8)

Mrs. Ramsay feels angry about her husband’s abnormal concern for his children’s feelings and she tries to comfort James compassionately. She is infuriated by her saying and calls it the folly of her mind. The reason for his anger is that he thinks that Mrs. Ramsay gives a false hope which was utterly out of the question. But in this way, Mr. Ramsay turns into a symbol of tyranny and despotism in his children’s eyes. Mrs. Ramsay tries to make her children more tolerant and more sympathetic. She regrets that her children will grow up in this atmosphere. She doesn’t want them to grow up in a terrible and hostile life. Lily Briscoe is a representative of unconventionality. Her rebellion against the given social roles is demonstrated in her pursuance of truth. Yet, under the expectations of the feminine role in patriarchal
society, Lily undergoes self-division. She is divided between her inspiration for the world of self-actualization and the limitations of the maternal world. Consequently, Lily's divided self imprisons her femininity and places restraints on her relationship with men. She finds feminine roles unfulfilling. She is afraid of her femininity and denies it. Lily feels guilty and insincere about being forced to relieve Tansley in the party. Lily fights these limitations through her art, but she can't achieve fulfilment. She is confused in regard to a romantic relationship with Mr. Bankes. She understands its beauty; but on the other hand, she fears its degradation. In the dinner party, she says to herself, She needn’t marry, thank Heaven, she needn’t undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution. (To the Lighthouse, P.111) Lily Briscoe likes and admires Mr. Bankes. She feels a shamed of her impulse towards him and, at the same time, wants to compliment him, but she doesn’t say anything. Unlike Mr. Bankes, Mr. Ramsay lacks the ability to understand and admire the feminine. Lily criticizes this in Mr. Ramsay in comparison with Mr. Bankes. After the death of Mrs. Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay demands Lily’s sympathy. Yet he expresses his need as a desire to give her. Instead of giving sympathy, Lily compliments his boots. Lily associates giving with femininity and she refuses and revolts against men’s need of sympathy. Yet Mr. Ramsay respects the compliment and smiles. Now Lily has made advance to Mr. Ramsay as an equal, not a woman to man, but as a man to man. He can see her now as a person interested in similar things. Mr. Ramsay acknowledges that she admires his traits rather than she fulfils his need for sympathy. At this moment, Lily’s role is about being an ungendered equal and Mr. Ramsay’s need for sympathy diminishes. Lily’s confusion drives her to assert her gender through her painting, and to find the truth inside herself. Yet, Lily is unable to define her femininity and yearns to the security of the ideal woman, Mrs. Ramsay. She wants to express Mrs. Ramsay’s idealization of her painting, but Lily knows that Mrs. Ramsay’s idealization is an illusion. Her inability to accept her femininity and Mrs. Ramsay’s idealization prevents her from establishing a vision of truth in art. Ten years after Mrs. Ramsay's death, she recalls Mrs. Ramsay's life and comes to cherish in herself powers different from those that motivated Mrs. Ramsay for imposing harmony and order in life. The memory of Mr. Ramsay is a catalyst for Lily’s growth. She realizes that her thoughts about Mrs. Ramsay’s life have imprisoned her and crippled her talents. She understands that time prevented Mrs. Ramsay from creating meaning and intimacy in life.

What is the meaning of life...Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent) this was the nature of a revelation. In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and following (she looked at the clouds, going and leaves shaking) was struck in to stability. Life stands still here. Mrs. Ramsay said 'Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!' She repeated. She owed this revelation to her. (To the Lighthouse, PP.175-6) Now Lily achieves a moment of community and a sense of unity. Finally, she is able to get rid of her confusions. She is able to achieve the emotional side of Mrs. Ramsay's life. Lily’s first inspiration about her painting comes when she thinks about the misguided pity that Mrs. Ramsay has for Mr. Bankes. She thinks that Mr. Bankes doesn’t need this pity because he is a whole and that he is fulfilled in his work. This reminds her that she, too, has her work. At this moment, she accepts her masculinity. The first revelation comes when she strays herself away from the given gender roles. She has her concept of the ideal femininity and acknowledges that her work is a pursuance of the truth and a rejection of the illusion of the maternaly enclosed world. Lily's acceptance of her work as a masculine and her final assertion of her femininity bring out her vision. She is able to express her mature vision that femininity and masculinity are separate, but equal and personal. Lily draws a line down the middle of her painting. There is a mass on the right which is Mrs. Ramsay and a mass on the left which is Mr. Ramsay. The line down the middle is a divider into equal halves. She looked at her canvass; it was blurred. With a sudden
intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision. (, P.226)

**Conclusion:**

Mrs. Woolf was one of the great writers whose works reflect her philosophy of life and identification of women. She grew up with an intense interest in the feminist question, and her novels hold the key to the meaning of life and the position of women. Naik cited in Aston (1998: 107) comments, In her writing, Woolf makes a shifting appraisal of women’s problem, their peculiar dilemmas and conditioning in the traditional Victorian society...Woolf was the most vociferous and vehement on feminist issues such as subjectivity, class, sexuality and culture. In her critiques, Woolf questions an aesthetic that disallows anger, unreason and passion as productive emotions. Before Woolf’s literary works, women’s writings were marked by feelings of anger and fear. Woolf bemoaned that women writers’ talents were crippled by the authoritarian forces which prevented women from expressing their feelings about the body and mind truthfully. Naik cited in Aston (1998: 107) remarks, Woolf felt that novels written by women were influenced by their resentment to the treatment meted on their sex and ended up pleading for their rights. Woolf felt that this weakened the cause of women struggling to carve a niche for themselves in the literary canon. Woolf believed that it is a part of the occupation of women writers to destroy the patriarchal structures. Woolf strived to give women female identity. In Woolf’s strive to set the woman away from the patriarchal society, she called women to re-write the history of women through female eyes and talk about themselves and their experiences truthfully. Woolf’s novels, especially Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse, are devoted to portray a picture of a patriarchal and imperialistic society, and to detail the factors that have limited women’s opportunities for a meaningful life. In both novels, women suffer alone, have no chances for education, lack warmth and are compelled to suppress their needs. Virginia Woolf aimed at communicating the message that such a blind social system must be eradicated from its roots. Woolf believed that the oppression of women is rooted in social, economic and psychological factors. Woolf’s solution implies the need for self-organization and change in gender identity-different masculinity and femininity. She strived for creating a new man and woman- life, in which both man and woman’s identities are realized. Woolf believed in the distinctiveness of women’s values. She argued that these values are compelling reasons for women’s participation in public life and necessary to improve the defective social system. She emphasized women’s capacity to educate and add a meaningful contribution to our life. It is significant that Woolf chose women characters, not men, to recognize the vision of truth as seen at the end of both novels. In Mrs. Dalloway, Clarissa is able to understand Septimus’s vision of reality. Woolf’s point is that war can be understood only with reference to the feelings which society considers appropriate only to women. To the Lighthouse ends also in a positive feminist note which is seen in Lily’s mature vision. By writing Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf meant to send an outcry against patriarchy and its representatives. Clarissa moves from one relation to another and every time she is frustrated, and loses the chance to have a happy life with each partner. Clarissa fails in love and marriage, and misses her chance with sally. Her conventionality, lack of understanding and lack of education are in sharp contrast with Peter’s patriarchal demands on woman and his inability to understand her needs. Clarissa rejected Peter’s offer of marriage because she prefers privacy to emotion. Entering a marital relationship with Richard, Clarissa is unable to provide him with the kind of relationship usually expected in heterosexual relationships. Clarissa’s need for privacy drove her to preserve her virginity, even after having got married to Richard. Richard is excluded from her room, and she gets along with her loneliness and the
triviality of her social life. Woolf always insisted on the importance of women's friendship, and called for a society for women against the oppressive male-dominated society. Clarissa, in her relationship with Sally Seton, sought a society for women. She sought for fulfilling relationship on equal terms. Woolf describes this relationship as 'a protective one'.

Clarissa, in her relationship with Sally, broke the authorial voice because bonding with a woman means relationship on equal terms. Yet both Clarissa and Sally were defeated. They were compelled to ignore their needs because the only accepted female identity was that accepted by patriarchy. Missing the chance with Sally darkens Clarissa's life and fills it with agony. Had she responded to her impulse with Sally Seton, she might have been psychologically fulfilled. In Mrs. Dalloway, the terrible influence of patriarchy is effectively portrayed through the presentation of Miss Kilman and Rezia's lives. Both are victims of the cruelty of the social and political doctrine of the English society and their only guilt is that they are merely women. What is really tragic about Rezia is not her husband’s death, but the unfriendly manner in which the world treats her. The cruelty of Miss Kilman's world and her inability to invade the male-dominated teaching profession drove her to deny her femininity and adopt aggressive masculine values. She turns to be a ruthless woman and her life turns to be full of darkness and bitterness. In To the Lighthouse, Woolf makes sharp critical examination of aspects of men-women relationships. Woolf projects the defects of private and public life, and proves that in none of them we can find an adequate model for modern life. The relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay proves that marriage is not a guarantee of mature and healthy relationship between husband and wife. On one hand, Woolf affirms the femininity of Mrs. Ramsay, but criticizes the way she has chosen to subject her positive feminine traits to male demands. Lily, unlike Mrs. Ramsay, revolts against masculine needs. She denies her femininity and gets along with self-division in the face of her relationships with men. On the other hand, Woolf discards Mr. Ramsay's masculinity by commenting sarcastically that he has a splendid mind. The tone of the description of his mind is sarcastic because his masculinity is not shown as a positive quality, neither in his relationship with his wife, nor with his children and his work. Mr. Ramsay fails to develop a mature relationship with his wife. He turns into a symbol of tyranny and despotism for his children. Positive masculinity is to choose methods of fulfillment when the male is able to use his work to be independent and unique, and when he admires and understands the feminine. Had Mr. Ramsay cultivated his femininity and had Mrs. Ramsay had some access to self-fulfilment outside the domestic sphere, they would have held the key for a mature marital relationship. By writing Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse, Mrs. Woolf aimed at setting up a new formula for personal development. She aspired always for the wholeness of personality - androgyny. Androgyny is the blending and balancing of intellect and emotion. It implies that the traditional gender identity, which restricts personal development, can be reformulated through the equal acquisition of the positive feminine and masculine traits. Woolf introduces women characters who symbolize hope in creating the androgynous world. Elizabeth Dalloway signifies the emergence of the new dawn of women. Thirty years before Elizabeth’s age, women couldn’t dare to imagine or think of professional life. Elizabeth admires the intelligence of Miss Kilman, and is influenced by her mother more than she realizes. Woolf suggests that Elizabeth becomes the new woman by uniting her tutor's cleverness and ambitions with her mother's humane sympathies. Henke cited in Marcus (1981: 138) says, In Three Guineas, Woolf expressed a hope for a generation of independent women united in profession solidarity. By allowing Elizabeth Dalloway a glimpse of that some vision, Woolf suggests that the adolescent girl may yet blossom into a new woman who unites the cleverness and ambition of Miss Kilman with the humane sympathies of some one such as Clarissa. We find Clarissa that has her own vision in Septimus's death which allows her to face her
own misery, step out of the social prison, and have a new vision of life. In comprehending Septimus's death, Clarissa discovers her own identity and becomes a whole. In To the Lighthouse, Woolf rationalizes her quest for the androgynous world through tracing the development of two lines and the coincidence of their triumph at the end of the novel. The completion of Lily's picture and the arrival of the Ramsays at the Lighthouse came due to the development of the characters' personalities regarding the truth of their gender. On one hand, Mr. Ramsay tries to fulfil his quest by paying his penance to the memory of his wife, and putting an end to the old enmity with his children. This can be seen as an improvement of his personality and refinement of his femininity. On the other hand, Lily has the first inspiration about her painting the moment she acknowledges that her work is masculine and also embodies pursuance of truth. At the end of the novel, Lily has a moment of personal wholeness when she accepts the femininity that she has always denied. The novel ends with Lily's vision that femininity and masculinity are separate but equal and personal. Mrs. Woolf ends Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse with two female visions of the truth of our life: Clarissa and Lily's visions. Woolf ends the two novels with a hope for the new woman. Woolf's point is that women shouldn't lose their femininity, and also shouldn't be limited to it, but the woman of the future embraces her femininity and masculinity and makes a choice of how to use that within herself to achieve fulfilment.

References:
Racism in George Orwell’s Burmese Days

This paper examines the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized and the disastrous impact of British colonialism on both of them in George Orwell’s Burmese Days. The paper focuses on how the British colonialism of Burma fostered racism, racial boundaries and ethnic divisions. It tries to show how racism was used as a tool by British colonialists to keep the colonizer’s identity, sense of superiority over the colonized, maintain racial boundaries and instill feelings of inferiority in order to control the colonized natives. It also highlights the role of the European Club in maintaining racial superiority of the colonizers and serving as a social and psychological refuge for the colonizers in the declining days of the British Empire. The study concludes that Orwell’s Burmese Days renders a sharp critique of the British colonialism, its tools of oppression, exploitation and racism and deconstructs the so-called civilizing mission by British colonialists in Burma by exposing its hypocrisy. Postcolonial theory forms the basis of this analysis. The change of the European societies from feudal to industrial in the 19th century is the driving force behind colonizing Asia, Middle East and Africa and the imperial policy of looking for raw materials, opportunities and new markets. The European colonial campaign (For more information on colonialism, see, Loomba (1998), Sardar (1999), Césaire (2001), Macqueen (2007) and Reinhard (2011)) of expansion has been launched in the guise of a civilizing mission, science, progress and developing projects in underdeveloped nations (For more information on colonialism and civilizing mission in British India, see, Fischer-Tiné and Mann (2004)). Orientalism1 as an institution has fed the colonial campaign by fabricated and falsified information about the Orient and its inhabitants in order to justify the civilizing mission of the West to redeem and save the Orient. Orientalism can be defined as a western style for “dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient” (Said, 1978, p. 3). It is a western invention which constructs the East as the ‘Other’ (For more information on the representation of the ‘Other’, see, Hall (1997) and Childs and Fowler (2006)). For example, the Self is represented by the Orientalists as “the familiar Europe, the West, ‘us’ and the Other is constructed as
1 It is a term used by art historians and literary and cultural studies scholars for the depiction of aspects of Middle Eastern and East Asian cultures by writers, designers and artists from the West.

“strange, the Orient, the east, ‘them’” (Said, 1978, p. 43). Within this context, Loomba sees the Self as “the colonialist and the Other is the colonized” (Loomba, 1998, p. 144). In other words, the ‘Other’ is everything that lies outside of the Self. One may say that the outcome of Orientalism is the building of a binary opposition between Occident and Orient. The Orient is constructed as “everything that the West is not, exotic, alien, dangerous, unreliable, to be tamed, exhibited, a threat to the West” (Moosavinia et al., 2011). Said (1978) shows how the Orient is represented by the West as an inferior, dark and barbaric civilization through a series of negative misrepresentations meant to justify the civilizing mission of the West to redeem and enlighten the Orient through colonization. For Edward Said, it is important to know how colonials use culture to dominate people and control colonies overseas. Said (1994) highlights the dangerous power of literature, used in colonialism, as an active force in representing and constructing reality. He criticizes the way the West views the Orient by its own biased culture and without historicizing. Said also wonders how we can represent a culture that is not ‘ours’ from within a culture that is ‘ours’ since the diverse cultures of the world are autonomous and can only be understood from inside. Therefore, knowledge “is not innocent but profoundly connected with the operations of power” (Loomba, 1998, p. 43). For instance, the 19th century British novels are arguably littered with the misrepresentation of the Orient and the ‘Other’. Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park, Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre and Rudyard Kipling’s Kim serve as examples of misrepresentation of the ‘Other’ and the impact of literature on colonialism. With regard to the role of literature and colonialism, Ashcroft et al. (1995) argues that texts and textuality played a major part in colonization, “European texts, anthropologies, histories, fiction and captured the non-European subject within European frameworks which read his or her alterity as terror or lack.” Consequently, it is not possible to read the 19th century British literature without taking into account that colonialism, seen as England’s civilizing mission, was “a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English” (Lewis and Mills, 2003, p. 306). Colonialism armed with Orientalism and its cultural and literary tools has paved the way for colonizing the Orient, Othering its own people and fostering racism. This may demonstrate why the colonizers consider themselves as
the “embodiment of ‘proper self’ while they see the colonized as ‘savages’ (Moosavinia et al., 2011). By the process of Othering, the colonizers dehumanize the colonized natives by treating and labeling them as savages or beastly creatures. In Orwell’s Burmese Days, I will examine the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized and the disastrous impact of British colonialism on both of them. I will focus on how the British colonialism of Burma fosters racism, racial boundaries and ethnic divisions. I will tackle how racism has been used as a tool by British colonialists to keep the colonizer’s identity, sense of superiority over the colonized, maintain racial boundaries and instill feelings of inferiority in order to control the colonized natives. The study also highlights the role of the European Club in maintaining


the racial superiority of the colonizers and serving as a refuge for the colonizers in the declining days of the British Empire. In George Orwell’s Burmese Days, my argument is that British colonialists have brought fierce racism, arrogance and brutal force in order to keep the natives in Burma under control. They have even played on racial, religious and ethnic divisions among the Burmese to keep their firm rule and quell any attempt at national self-determination and independence. This can be seen through the brutal massacre committed against the Indians in Amritsar (The massacre was a major turning point for the Indian freedom struggle. For more information, see, Dalrymple, 2013) in 1919 where almost one thousand Indians lost their lives, which shocked India, resulting in exposing the true intentions of the colonial Britain.

Racism and Representation Racism is a term often used to “describe the hostile or negative feelings of one ethnic group or ‘people’ toward another and the actions resulting from such attitudes” (Fredrickson, 2002, p. 1). For Newman (2012), racism is “the belief that humans are subdivided into distinct groups that are different in their social behavior and innate capacities and that can be ranked as superior or inferior.” Racism is also understood as ‘prejudice plus power’ (Eberhardt and Fiske, 1998, pp. 49-50) because without the support of economic and political power, prejudice would not be able to manifest itself as a pervasive, dominant, cultural, institutional and social phenomenon. Put differently, prejudice means literally to ‘prejudge’ based on superficial information such as the color of the person’s skin without having sufficient knowledge of the person’s character. Hence, it keeps people racially segregated and isolated. Within this context, Paul Kivel argues that prejudice is one result of racism as it “fuels further acts of violence toward people of color” (Kivel, 2011, p. 2). To elaborate further, racism is domination and subordination. It operates along three levels. First, it is characterized by misrepresentation, negative stereotyping, racial hatred and violence. Second, it propagates feelings of superiority. Third, it denies, negates and even erases the culture, history, language and religion of the
targeted groups (For more details on how racism operates, see, Fredman (2001)). This may be the power of representation in circulating negative stereotypes and sweeping generalizations about the ‘Other’ which, in turn, consolidates racism and prejudice. When it comes to representation, it is a form of discourse, which involves unequal power-relationships, where some people have more power to speak than others. Within this context, Stuart Hall argues that “meanings regulate our conduct and practices as they help set up the rules and conventions by which social life is ordered” (Hall, 1997). For Hall, meanings are socially constructed through the ways in which we represent things taking into account that meanings are not static but can change. This change

3 George Orwell’s Burmese Days and E M Forster’s A Passage to India are considered as enormously influential colonial fictions published in the final decades of the British Empire in India.

depends on the context in which people of a specific culture construct it which, in turn, creates values, identity and cultural codes. For example, Orientalists use ideologies and Oriental images to essentialize the Orient and consolidate the backwardness and intellectual awkwardness of the ‘Other.’ For Edward Said, representation of the Orient as an inferior to the West is only an attempt to show the intellectual and superiority of the West (Said, 1978). Through fabricating a view of the Oriental culture that can be depicted, studied and reproduced, the Western society will implicitly emerge as “developed, rational, flexible, and superior” (Mamdani, 2004, p. 32). This may lend an explanation to the feelings of superiority of the European colonials over the colonized native people and seem to give them permission to treat them in a racist and humiliating way.

Racism in George Orwell’s Burmese Days In Burmese Days, George Orwell tackles the issue of the superiority of the White British colonizers over the non-white native colonized Burmese and Indians. The British colonizers are represented as extremely self-centered and racist in their attitudes towards the Burmese, while natives are negatively represented as servants, peasants or as Ellis calls them, ‘swines’ or as Elizabeth refers to them as ‘beastly’. For Rahman (2002), Burmese Days is “a powerful satire against white master’s colonial exploitation and the trampling of the Orientals,” where Orwell shares his critical views on colonialism, racism and the English colonial life in Burma. The events of Burmese Days take place in a town in upper Burma called, Kyauktada. Kyauktada is described by the narrator as a hot, sultry, small town where the overwhelming majority of inhabitants are Burmese with only seven Europeans. The population was about four thousand, including a couple of hundred Indians; a few score Chinese and seven Europeans. There were also two Eurasians named Francis and Samuel, the sons of an American Baptist missionary and a Roman Catholic missionary respectively.6 Orwell reflects on the life of the English in Kyauktada. Though they have jobs to perform, much of their time is wasted by entertaining themselves in the Club, escaping from the simmering heat, besides hunting or playing tennis. Their two main incessant complaints revolve around the heat and the possible acceptance of natives into their European Club which is only exclusive to them. Regarding heat, Westfield complains to
Flory about the heat in Kyauktada, “Yes, dammit. Couple of months of this coming. Last year we didn’t have a spot of rain till June. Look at that bloody sky, not a cloud in it. Like one of those damned great blue enamel saucepans. God! What’d you give to be in Piccadilly now, eh?” Westfield’s words may consolidate many Oriental assumptions about

5 Ibid., p. 94.
7 Ibid., p. 19.

Burma. Westfield depicts Kyauktada as a hellish location using phrases such as ‘blood sky’ or ‘not a cloud in it’, giving the impression of Kyauktada as hell on earth, wishing to be now in Picaddilly, England, which symbolizes a salvation for him from the burning heat of Burma. Concerning the possible acceptance of natives into the exclusive European Club, the study sheds light on new realities created by the British colonization of Burma. It is worthy to mention that the British colonization of Burma has created racial boundaries meant to ensure that the British colonizers have the upper hand and superiority over the colonized natives, a policy which is meant to consolidate their colonial rule in Burma. In Burmese Days, we will find that the social class system is divided into upper class which constitutes the British colonialists, civil officials and merchants and lower class which consists of colonized natives who are poor, downtrodden and exploited. To elaborate further, racial boundaries divide people and make them struggle hard to prove their own worth and value and that is seen through the desperate struggles of Dr. Veraswami and U Po Kyin to join the European Club as native members. Orwell describes the European Club in Kyauktada as the spiritual citadel, the real seat of the British power, the Nirvana for which native officials and millionaires pine in vain. It was doubly so in this case, for it was the proud boast of Kyauktada Club that, almost alone of Clubs in Burma, it had never admitted an Oriental to membership. The European Club is the main focus of the social life on military and civil stations where “every evening its members would gather for games and gossip” (MacMillan, 1996, p. 52). One expects to find the Club equipped with various facilities as a library, a billiards room, and tennis courts. The European Club is seen as “the most important site which daily reinforced collective identity” (Collingham, 2001, p. 162). It is the place where British newcomers are introduced to the social code and those who “stray from the narrow Anglo-Indian social path were chastised in a friendly manner for letting
standards slip”(Crane, 2011). For example, Flory’s friendship with the native Dr. Veraswami and Verral’s failure to appear at the Club on the evening of his arrival in Kyauktada, are harshly criticized and seen as a violation of the social code of the European club. Those who are eligible to join are expected to abide by the social code of the Club and those who fail to join are considered outcasts. In any town in Burma, the European club is seen as the place where everyone wishes to be part of. However, the exclusive European Club has never admitted a native because the British members feel that they are superior to the natives who are represented as uncivilized, savages and untrustworthy. Within this context, Albert Memmi writes that the colonized cannot rise above his social status and be permitted to assimilate since “all efforts of the colonialist are directed towards maintaining the social immobility, and racism

8 Ibid., p. 17.

is the surest weapon for this aim”(Memmi, 1974, p. 74). Hence, we find Veraswami, a Burmese native, see the European Club as ‘a fortress impregnable’.9 which requires a real help from his British friend, Flory, to get him join the Club. For Dr. Veraswami and U Po Kyin, a membership of the Club may confer the status of the white man and promise “a sense of superiority, of a better, more ‘elevated’ life lived among ‘higher’ things”.10 For them, it is a matter of prestige which makes them feared and respected by their own people. Joining the Club and mixing with British colonizers will give them power and authority which they can use against their own people in various ways. In other words, the prestige of the European Club is so enormous in Kyauktada that being a member, especially, for a non-white means a ticket to the top of the social class. Racism, ingrained in every colonial institution, establishes “the sub humanity of the colonized, and fosters poor self-concepts in the colonized as well”(Dorcas, 2013). In his investigation of the inferiority of the colonized and his extreme alienation, Frantz Fanon attributes such inferiority to the Orientalist theories of colonization which are racist and practiced daily by the colonizers. This alienation finally splits the colonized and fragments him with an inferiority complex (For more information on the impact of colonization on the colonized, see, Fanon, 1967 and 1968). Therefore, we will find the colonized trying to imitate the colonizer or in the words of Fanon “Turn white or disappear”(Fanon, 1968, p. 100). This may explain the desperate attempts of both Veraswami and U Po Kyin to join the European Club and the prestige it symbolizes for them to rub shoulders with British white colonizers. This can be seen in Veraswami’s words to Flory, “But it is this: if only I were a member of your European Club! If only! How different would my position be!”11 or merely seen with them as seen in the reaction of Veraswami to Flory’s home visit. “The mere fact that you are known to be my friend benefits me more than you can imagine. Prestige, Mr. Flory, is like a barometer. Every time you are seen to enter my house the mercury rises half a degree.”12 The British colonization of Burma and their racist attitudes towards the natives arguably foster among them racial divisions, cheating, plotting and lying just to try and get past the racial barrier. For example, U Po Kyin, does everything in his power to obtain a membership in the Club by plotting to destroy the reputation of Veraswami. “We are going
to make a concerted attack on Dr. Veraswami, who is the Civil Surgeon and Superintendent of the jail. We are going to slander him, destroy his reputation and finally ruin him forever.”13 U Po Kyin understands the mentality of the colonialists well and uses such understanding in destroying the reputation of Veraswami,

10 Ibid., p. 146.
12 Ibid., p. 48.
13 Ibid., p. 10.

must be disloyalty—nationalism, seditious propaganda. We must persuade the Europeans that the doctor holds disloyal, anti-British opinions. That is far worse than bribery; they expect a native official to take bribes. But let them suspect his loyalty even for a moment, and he is ruined.14 This statement shows that the British colonialists will not bear any thought of nationalism and disloyalty from the natives. When Ba Sein discusses with U Po Kyin the difficulty of convincing the British of the disloyalty of Dr. Veraswami since he is very loyal to the Europeans and even grows angry when anything is said against them, U Po Kyin dismisses Ba Sein’s thoughts by calling them absurd and how little Ba Sein understands the European mind. “‘Nonsense, nonsense,’ said U Po Kyin comfortably, ‘No European cares anything about proofs. When a man has a black face, suspicion IS proof. A few anonymous letters will work wonders.’”15 U Po Kyin’s words show that the colonized is always suspected and untrustworthy since “no European has any faith in a man with a black face”,16 or feelings of loyalty towards the natives. However, in Burmese Days, we will find that boundaries are not only racial but also social ones. Within this context, Crane (2011, p. 19) says that the Club as a potent signifier of Empire “operates as a site where the enormity of colonialism is revealed and ultimately Repudiated.” For example, the exclusivity of the European Club signifies a social system set up to emphasize the racial dominance of the British colonizers and simultaneously isolate them from the colonized natives. Natives are not allowed to join the Club and any attempt made to join is met by a fierce racist rejection as seen through the reaction of Ellis, a manager at the timber company in Kyauktada, who is the most outspoken racist character in Burmese Days. Ellis does not hesitate to show his racist hatred of the natives at every given opportunity. He is very resentful of Flory for his social interaction with the Burmese and friendship with Veraswami. It is noteworthy that due to the changing political conditions in Burma, especially after the Government of India Act in 1919,17 the European Club is ordered to admit at least one non-white native. The rules that allow racial segregation to continue have been contended by Macgregor, the Deputy Commissioner, and a secretary of the club. This change cannot be tolerated by
the timber merchants, especially Ellis, who is outraged at the prospect of accepting natives. “I don’t like niggers, to put it in one word.” 18 When they come to know that there is a proposal to elect one native, Veraswami, to join the Club, Ellis says,

14 Ibid., p. 11.
15 Ibid., p. 12.
16 Ibid.
17 It is an act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. It was passed to expand participation of Indians in the Government of India. The Act embodied the reforms recommended in the report of the Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, and the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford. 18 Orwell (1974), op. cit., p. 30.

He’s asking us to break all our rules and take a dear little nigger-boy into this Club. Dear Dr. Veraswami, for instance, Dr. Very-slimy, I call him. That would be a treat, wouldn’t it? Little pot-bellied niggers breathing garlic in your face over the bridge-table. Christ, to think of it! We’ve got to hang together and put our foot down on this at once. What do you say, Westfield? Flory? 19 Here, Ellis repeatedly refers degradingly to the natives as ‘potbellied niggers’, ‘breathing garlic’ and exhorts his colleagues to stand united against allowing any native to be among them. The Club is also seen as “an all-white island amidst a sea of black natives” (Crane, 2011, p. 24). For Westfield, he will “die in the ditch before I’ll see a nigger in here,” 20 since it is “the last Club in Burma to hold out against ‘em,” 21 after allowing natives to get into all the Clubs nowadays, even in the Pegu Club. 22 The racist reactions of both Ellis and Westfield deconstruct the myth of “The White Man’s Burden” 23 which is widely used to justify the colonial policy as a noble enterprise and civilizing mission. Ellis exposes the real reason behind the British colonial presence in Burma, Good God, what are we supposed to be doing in this country? If we aren’t going to rule, why the devil don’t we clear out? Here we are, supposed to be governing a set of damn black swine who’ve been slaves since the beginning of history, and instead of ruling them in the only way they understand, we go and treat them as equals. And you silly b — s take it for granted. 24 For Ellis, it is outrageous to treat the natives who are represented as ‘black swine’, ‘slaves’ as equals rather than ruling them like masters in the only way they really understand. Hence, we find him scold and berate angrily Flory, Maxwell, and Westfield for their relationships with natives. “You all seem to like the dirty black brutes. Christ, I don’t know what’s come over us all. I really don’t.” 25 Ellis goes on emphasizing the racist rules of the European Club which shouldn’t be violated under any cost, Do what you like outside the Club. But, by God, it’s a different matter when you talk of bringing niggers in here. I suppose you’d like little Veraswami for a Club member, eh? Chipping into our conversation and pawing everyone with his sweaty hands and breathing his filthy garlic breath in our faces. By God, he’d
19 Ibid., p. 22.


21 Ibid., p. 23.

22 The Pegu Club was a Victorian-style Gentlemen’s club in Rangoon, Burma. It was built in the 1880s and completed in 1882 to serve the British army officers and civilian administrators after the annexation of Upper Burma in 1885.

23 “The White Man’s Burden” is a poem by the English poet Rudyard Kipling. It is interpreted that white people have an obligation to rule over, and encourage the cultural development of people from other cultural backgrounds until they can take their place in the world economically and socially. 24 George Orwell (1974), Op. Cit., p.

24. 25 Ibid., p. 25

go out with my boot behind him if ever I saw his black snout inside that door. Greasy, potbellied little — !26 With regard to the Club rules, one may understand that the Club members are doubly isolated. The Club is cut off from the natives and from the English metropolitan culture to which its members cling dearly. They feel threatened that the racial boundaries will be crossed. Ellis feels that if the natives are allowed to join the European Club, then they will be seen as equals to British citizens, something which will disrupt the imposed boundaries between the colonized and the colonizer. Ellis’s psyche can be summed up in the words of Kipling “A sahib is a sahib, and no amount of friendship or camaraderie can change the rudiments of racial difference”(Moosavinia et al., 2011, p. 50). In a critique of Ellis as a man who does ‘hate Orientals’,27 Orwell describes him as “one of those Englishmen—common, unfortunately—who should never be allowed to set foot in the East.”28 Any slight hint of friendly feeling towards an Oriental seems to Ellis as a horrible perversity. This can be seen through his conversation with Flory, who is accused of supporting his friend Veraswami to get elected to the Club, Oh, didn’t you? We all know bloody well you’d like to, though. Why else do you go to that oily little babu’s house every morning, then? Sitting down at table with him as though he was a white man, and drinking out of glasses his filthy black lips have slobbered over—it makes me spew to think of it.29 Ellis wonders how Flory sits and eats with a filthy native at the same table as if he were a white man and equal! Within this context, Fanon (1968) says, for the white man, the Black man is not a man and this contributes consequently to the inferiority complex of the Blackman. Not only does a Black man feel that the white man is superior to him, but also the white man does not consider him as an equal who belongs to the same species of man. On the other hand, Macgregor feels stiffened at the word ‘nigger’, which is disapproved in India. “Is it quite playing the game”, he said stiffly, “to call these people niggers—a term they very naturally resent—when they are obviously nothing of the kind? The Burmese are Mongolians, the Indians are Aryans or Dravidians, and all of them are quite distinct.”30 Macgregor feels no prejudice against the natives as long as they are not given freedom which will disrupt the status quo. In fact, he
thinks of the natives as “the most charming people alive. It always pained him to see them want only insulted.” 31 But Macgregor’s words make Ellis adamant about not admitting natives to the Club.

26 Ibid., p. 24.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
31 Ibid.

It’s all very well, but I stick to what I said. No natives in this Club! It’s by constantly giving way over small things like that that we’ve ruined the Empire. The country’s only rotten with sedition because we’ve been too soft with them. The only possible policy is to treat ‘em like the dirt they are.32 Through Ellis’s words, we can see that it is an Empire which is based on superiority and racism and even taking small measures like allowing natives to join the Club will ruin the British Empire. Thus, the only right way for Ellis is to treat natives like dirty slaves. For Ellis, maintaining the prestige and superiority of the British Empire will save it from seditions and national movements calling for revolt, independence and freedom (For more information on the nationalist movements in Burma, see, Smith, 1991). This is a critical moment, and we want every bit of prestige we can get. We’ve got to hang together and say, ‘we are the masters, and you beggars—”Ellis pressed his small thumb down as though flattening a grub—” you beggars keep your place.33 Here, we find that members of the British colonial club are frustrated and aggressive during the interwar period feeling that they are on the verge of quitting India and Burma. The rise of national movements challenging the British Imperial power and calls for reform and more autonomy for Burma within the administration of India make Westfield think it is ‘Quite hopeless’35 to save the Empire if you do not use enough force to put the natives down. According to Westfield, “nothing saves a full-sized rebellion, and the consequent reign of martial law, could save the Empire from decay.”36 But for Ellis, British colonizers can fix things right in a month if they choose, “Look at Amritsar. Look how they caved in after that. Dyer knew the stuff to give them. Poor old Dyer! That was a dirty job. Those cowards in England have got something to answer for.”37 Ellis refers to General Reginald Dyer who quelled riots in Amritsar killing thousands of Indians in 1919. For him, Generals like Dyer are urgently needed in Burma to put things in order. In this regard, Memmi (1974, p. 74), says “by using terror to quell any reactionary uprising, the colonizers reinforce fear and submission.” It is only through fear and terror that the British Empire can continue and any threat or defiance will make its
collapse inevitable. To elaborate more, the claim by the colonizers that they have a mission of “bringing light to the colonized’s ignominious darkness” legitimates for them the colonization and enslavement of other people. Yet, they feel frustrated that the colonized are ungrateful.

32 Ibid., p. 31.
33 Ibid.
34 It refers to the period between the end of World War I and the beginning of World War II.
35 Orwell (1974), op. cit., p. 32.
36 Ibid.

and reject their so-called sacrifices. Feelings of superiority mixed with frustration make Lackersteen adopt the ‘paternalistic’ role of the colonizers. She thinks that the Burmese cannot do anything without the British rule and “once we leave, they will come to us begging to stay where we will flatly refuse.” She mentions what Burra Sahib always says at Mandalay that In the end, we shall simply leave India. Young men will not come out here any longer to work all their lives for insults and ingratitude. We shall just GO. When the natives come to us begging us to stay, we shall say, “No, you have had your chance, you wouldn’t take it. Very well, we shall leave you to govern yourselves.” And then, what a lesson that will teach them! Lackersteen words may consolidate the Oriental representation of the West as a place of scientific sophistication and progress while the Orient is portrayed as a static and trapped in antiquity. For her, the natives will not be able to manage their affairs on their own and they will regret our absence. Lackersteen sees the natives as lazy, lethargic and barbaric people who have nothing to do with progress and civilization. “Really I think the laziness of these servants is getting too shocking.” However, when it comes to Flory, a timber merchant, we find him critical of the British colonial rule of Burma that he is continually pressurized and suffocated by its racist code of conduct which prevents colonizers from mixing with the natives. He is unable to bear hearing the constant racist conversation going on in the Club. Dull boozing witless porkers! Was it possible that they could go on
week after week, year after year, repeating word for word the same evil-minded drivel, like a parody of a fifth-rate story in Blackwood’s? Would none of them EVER think of anything new to say? Oh, what a place, what people! What a civilization is this of ours—this godless civilization founded on whisky, Blackwood’s and the ‘Bonz’ pictures! God have mercy on us, for all of us are part of it.42 Flory wonders what kind of civilization we have and boast of, a civilization which is based on drinking and degrading the natives humilitatingly. He criticizes the moral pretensions of the British in the colonies who seem to be solely interested in “boozing and womanizing, in stark contrast to their claims to be a highly civilized people setting an example to backward nations” (Mann, 2004, p.2). Flory can be seen as Orwell’s mouthpiece in his critique of the British colonial presence and its tool of racism in Burma. It is noteworthy that George Orwell has served as a police officer in the Indian Imperial Police force in Burma (now Myanmar) from 1922 to

39 A policy of governing people in a fatherly manner, especially by providing for their needs without giving those rights or responsibilities.

40 Orwell (1974), op. cit., p. 32.

41 Ibid., p. 29.

42 Ibid., p. 33.

1927 (For more information on the life of George Orwell in Burma, see, Hitchens (2002)). It has been an eye opening experience for Orwell concerning the real nature of the British Empire and its tools of racism and oppression. In this context, Orwell (1950) says “I had already made up my mind that imperialism was an evil thing and the sooner I chucked up my job and got out of it the better. Theoretically—and secretly, of course— I was all for the Burmeses and all against their oppressors, the British.”43 It has been a suffocating and depressing experience for Orwell which makes him leave his job as a police officer. In the same way, we find Flory feel a great relief to be out of the European Club and that is seen through his visit to Veraswami. For Flory, the visit is an escape from the suffocating racist atmosphere of the Club, “what a joy to be here after that bloody Club. When I come to your house I feel like a Nonconformist minister dodging up to town and going home with a tart.”44 Flory continues exposing the myth of the European Club, a symbol of the British colonial Empire, directing his heel towards the Club, “from my beloved fellow Empire-builders. British prestige, the white man’s burden, the pukka sahib sans peuret sans reproche—you know. Such a relief to be out of the stink of it for a little while.”45 Flory deconstructs the symbols of the British Empire: ‘Empire Building’, ‘British prestige’ and ‘white man’s burden’ used to deceive the natives. He continues exposing the real motives behind the British colonization which is profit, privilege, and usurpation through his conversation with Veraswami. “All I object to is the slimy white man’s burden humbug. The Pukka Sahib pose. It’s so boring. Even those bloody fools at the Club might be better company if we weren’t all of us living a lie the whole time. “But, my dear friend, what lie are you living?”46 What bothers Flory more than anything else is a lie, “slimy white man’s burden humbug”, the Pukka Sahib pose. Flory knows that this lie corrupts not only the natives, but also the Whites themselves. We find Flory live in despair and “demoralization because he
has seen through the deception of the imperialists” (Rodden, 2007, p. 61) and grasped the truth about the English and their Empire, which is “a despotism with theft as its final object.” 47 Flory elaborates on the lie the colonizers live in Burma: to educate, civilize, better the conditions of poor natives. But these are false excuses to rob, exploit the raw resources of the country, make money and send it back home to keep the British Empire going. Flory adds that we are mere agents of the Empire who make living and are only united by the political necessity. The lie that we’re here to uplift our poor black brothers instead of to rob them. I suppose it’s a natural enough lie. But it corrupts us; it corrupts us in ways you can’t imagine. There’s an everlasting sense of being a sneak and a liar that

43 Orwell (1950), p. 3.
46 Ibid., p. 39.
47 Ibid., p. 68.

torments us and drives us to justify ourselves night and day. It’s at the bottom of half our beastliness to the natives. We Anglo-Indians could be almost bearable if we’d only admit that we’re thieves and go on thieving without any humbug. 48 Flory’s critical comments of the British Empire shock Veraswami who suffers from inferiority complex and thinks of the English colonizers as superior people to him and his people. He is an example of educated native serving as a ‘conduit’ for the British. Veraswami, apparently “internalized the attitudes and aims of the British civilizing mission” (Mann, 2004, p. 2), is appalled by Flory’s defeatist utterances. He goes on to defend the British colonizers, “But truly, truly, Flory, you must not speak so! Why is it that always you are abusing the pukka sahibs, as you call them? They are the salt of the earth. Consider the great things they have done—consider the great administrators who have made British India what it is.” 49 He adds that the weakness of Flory’s argument that, “you are not thieves.” 50 Veraswami’s passionate admiration of the British colonizers makes Flory detail the inhuman deeds of the British colonizers, It’s so simple. The official holds the Burman down while the businessman goes through his pockets. Do you suppose my firm, for instance, could get its timber contracts if the country weren’t in the hands of the British? Or the other timber firms, or the oil companies, or the miners and planters and traders? How could the Rice Ring go on skimming the unfortunate peasant if it hadn’t the Government behind it? The British Empire is simply a device for giving trade monopolies to the English. 51 Flory deconstructs the mechanism of the British Empire whose sole purpose is to steal and exploit Burma’s rich resources like timber 52 and rice. In this context, Larkin (2009) says “When Orwell arrived in the Delta to begin his career as an imperial policeman, in January 1924, the Delta was leading Burma’s exports of over 3 million tons of rice—half the world’s supply.” Such exploitation will not happen without ruling Burma by force and oppressing its own people. But for Veraswami, the British colonial presence is very important since the Burmese are helpless, cannot trade, make machinery, ships
and build roads. He goes on to say that “while your businessmen develop the resources of our country, your officials are civilizing us, elevating us to their level, from pure public spirit. It is a magnificent record of self-sacrifice.” Flory goes on to expose the hypocrisy of British colonization rendering a counter narrative to what is falsely claimed by Veraswami. The British colonizers have destroyed the Burmese national culture, industry and any attempt to make it on their own. Flory

48 Ibid., p. 39.
49 Ibid., p. 38.
50 Ibid., p. 39.
51 Ibid., p. 40.
52 Burma produced 75% of the world’s teak from up-country forests.

admits that “We are here to “rub our dirt on them, and “wreck the whole Burmese national culture.” Flory reflects on the usual methods of the colonizers who try to falsify history and rewrite laws. The colonizer “would extinguish memories, anything to succeed in transforming his usurpation into legitimacy” (Memmi, 1974), p. 52). Therefore, for Flory, the British colonizers have never taught “a single useful manual trade to the Indians” frightened of the competition in industry. Hence, after being for more than a hundred and fifty years in India, Burmese are not able to “build a seaworthy fishing boat”, or make “a brass cartridge-case in the whole continent.” We find Flory conclude his argument that, “only Eastern races that have developed at all quickly are the independent ones. I won’t instance Japan, but take the case of Siam.” For Flory, the colonizers build prisons and call it progress and the progress for them is equal to destroying forests, villages, and pagodas. One may understand that British colonizers have wrought destruction, built huge prisons, fostered racism, and ethnic rivalry in order to rule, exploit and keep the Burmese as poor servants to serve the British Empire in Burma. It is only through freedom and independence that nations can build and progress as seen in the case of Siam. Flory’s words may reflect Orwell’s views that India and Burma should be granted their independence and the British rule is not only corrupting and demoralizing the British but the natives too (Hitchens, 2002). In spite of Flory’s harsh critique of the British Empire and its oppressive and racist tools, he is unable to confront his colleagues at the European Club concerning the question of admitting his friend, Veraswami into the Club. It always makes Flory ashamed when it “has to be admitted between them that the doctor, because of his black skin, could not be received in the club.” Flory has been honest with Veraswami that they might elect you in the Club but they will do it under protest since “They’ve made a perfect fetish of keeping this Club all-white, as they call it.60 Flory’s voice may represent the rising voices inside the British Raj for withdrawal from the colonies during the interwar
period while Veraswami is an example of the colonized who accepts “their oppressor’s hegemonic claims” (Mann, 2004, p. 4). However, Ellis’ racist actions get culminated when he assaults a young Burmese school child, who sneered at him, with his cane blinding the child. Ellis is not only ashamed of his violence, but also urges his friends to fight labeling the Burmese as “sneaking, mangy little rats and ‘the incestuous children of pigs.” 62 Yet, it is Ellis who surprisingly

54 Ibid., p. 42.
55 Ibid., p. 41.
56 Ibid. 57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., p. 47.
60 Ibid., p. 48.
61 The British Raj is the British rule in the Indian subcontinent between 1858 and 1947.

claims that he has been assaulted asking Macgregor to retaliate. Consequently, the natives have revolted against such injustice calling for Ellis to pay, “We know that there is no justice for us in your country, so we must punish Ellis ourselves.” 63 It seems that Ellis’ racism, abuse of authority and arrogance allow him to act and cause an innocent native child to become blind knowing that his actions will go unpunished. Ellis is aware of the fact that he is a British colonizer who has the authority and power to do whatever he likes without any respect for the lives of the natives since they are not treated as human beings. We also see that human rights and privileges are only reserved for the British colonizers and not for the Burmese natives who are seen as lesser persons and savages without a dignified life of their own. Ellis’s blatant racism is tremendously exacerbated when he comes to know about Maxwell’s death by natives: “the rage was stewing in his body like a bitter juice.” 64 Ellis cannot simply accept that a native has killed “a white man” 65 and condemns the “kidglove laws” 66 that forbid him to “raid their villages, kill their cattle, burn their crops, decimate them, blow them from the guns…. as good old Germans...Shoot them, ride them down, horses’ hooves trample their guts out, whips cut their faces in slices!” 67 Orwell depicts the pathetic quality of Ellis and every white man’s life in the East which is a constant struggle not to be sneered, jeered and laughed at. Ellis’s fears of sneering and mockery denote the latent fear of the British colonialists of losing control and their willingness to do anything to keep their self-image intact. Furthermore, when it comes to Elizabeth Lackersteen, her overt
But when Flory remarks that Burmese are charming people with splendid bodies, she questions the validity of his remarks revealing her Oriental mindset prejudice and racism. But they have such hideous-shaped heads! Their skulls kind of slope up behind like a tom-cat’s. And then the way their foreheads slant back—it makes them look so wicked. I remember reading something in a magazine about the shape of people’s heads; it said that a person with a sloping forehead is a criminal type. Flory reacts vehemently at the disgusting way Elizabeth views the natives. “Oh, come, that’s a bit sweeping! Round about half the people in the world have that kind of forehead.” For Elizabeth, beauty, civility and decency are only associated with the white man. On another occasion, when Elizabeth and Flory visit the bazaar, we see her shocked to notice how they have blocked the road for their performance. Her reaction makes Flory explain to her that “there are no traffic regulations here.” She feels insecure to be close among “that smelly native crowd” and she watches the dance with a mixture of amazement and horror. It’s grotesque, it’s even ugly, with a sort of willful ugliness. And there’s something sinister in it too. There’s a touch of the diabolical in all Mongols. And yet when you look closely, what art, what centuries of culture you can see behind it! ...Whenever you look closely at the art of these Eastern peoples you can see that—a civilization stretching back and back, practically the same, into times when we were dressed in woad. (p. 62) It is interesting to note that Elizabeth has come from England to Burma with negative preconceived notions about the ‘Other’ without even really knowing or contacting them. She is conditioned through the English culture that she is White racially superior to the Burmese
(For more information on race and racism, see, Back and Solomos, 2009). She uses offensive terms for the natives as ‘Mongols’. Elizabeth’s words and attitude reflect the western representation of the East as static, undeveloped and people without history, culture and civilization. This is seen through referring to the Eastern people and their civilization which was and is still the same without change. This may conform with Edward Said’s view that the West considers the East and people living there as less than human, degenerate and unsophisticated people. Furthermore, we find her reproach herself for coming close to “this horde of natives ‘with’ garlic and sweat smell” and coarse-looking; like some kind of animal.”76 Elizabeth has felt insecure and asks herself why Flory brings her to watch the natives and their disgusting habits.

71 Ibid., pp. 118-119.
72 Ibid., p. 119.
73 Ibid., p. 102.
74 Ibid., p. 103.
75 Ibid., p. 105.
76 Ibid., p. 119.

For the first time she remembered that Flory was a total stranger and that it had been unwise to come out with him alone. She looked round her, at the sea of dark faces and the lurid glare of the lamps; the strangeness of the scene almost frightened her. What was she doing in this place? Surely it was not right to be sitting among the black people like this, almost touching them, in the scent of their garlic and their sweat? Why was she not back at the Club with the other white people? Why had he brought her here, among this horde of natives, to watch this.77 She feels suffocated and stifled in the bazaar unable to tolerate the disgusting people and went out. Hence, Flory tries to calm her down that one should not expect all the people behave in the same manner and cultures are diverse. But for Elizabeth, what she needs now is to be at the Club with the white people. For her the Club is not only a social place but a psychological refuge from the natives who are described as hordes of black animals. She wants to be with her own people where only she feels safe and secure. But Flory’s romance with Elizabeth is doomed from the start. Whenever Flory shows his interest in Burmese culture, critical views of Empire and disdain for the Anglo-Indians at the Club, Elizabeth withdraws. She deserts Flory and gets attached
to the newly arrived soldier, Verrall. Elizabeth has felt mortified when Verrall leaves without notice and she, in turn, goes back to Flory hoping he will marry her. But the conclusive break happens when Elizabeth discovers at the church that Flory had a Burmese mistress, Ma Hla Ma, something she is unable to bear at all in spite of Flory’s pleadings which end in vain and lead finally to his suicide. “The thought that he had been the lover of that grey-faced, maniacal creature made her shudder in her bones.”78 Elizabeth’s racist revulsion at the thought of Flory being in love with a native woman almost makes her sick and appalled.” His face appalled her, it was so ghastly, rigid and old. It was like a skull. Only the birthmark seemed alive in it. She hated him now for his birthmark. She had never known till this moment how dishonoring, how unforgivable a thing it was.”79 Finally, after the death of Flory, we find Elizabeth eventually marry Macgregor, the Deputy Commissioner and live happily in contempt of the natives, fulfilling her destiny of becoming a ‘burra memsahib’.80 Veraswami is consequently demoted and sent to a different district. U Po Kyin is elected to the Club, plans to redeem his life and cleanse his sins by financing pagodas but he dies of apoplexy before he can even fulfill his wish.

77 Ibid., pp. 105-106.
78 Ibid., p. 274.
79 Ibid.
80 A respectful term which given to white European women.

Conclusion

To conclude, in Burmese Days, George Orwell provides the basis for the critique of the British Empire. He exposes the deception of the British colonialists and the lie of the White Man’s burden and its moral hypocrisy. The disastrous impact of colonialism on both the colonizer and the colonized is exposed through Orwell’s characters Ellis, Westfield, Elizabeth, Veraswami and U Po Kyin. Orwell also highlights the role of the European Club in maintaining racial superiority of the colonizers, fostering racial divisions and serving as a social and psychological refuge for the British colonizers in the declining days of the British Empire. And how colonialism allied with Orientalism fosters racism which is used as a tool by British colonialists like Ellis ,Westfield and Elizabeth to keep the colonizer’s identity and sense of superiority over the colonized, maintain racial boundaries and instill feelings of inferiority in order to control the colonized natives and keep them down. Through his stringent realism and his character, Flory; Orwell exposes the brutality of the British colonialism and its tools of racism and oppression. It is an Empire which is based on deception and moral pretensions. Finally, one concludes that Orwell offers
a sharp critique of the British colonialism, its tools of opposition, exploitation and racism and deconstructs the so-called civilizing mission by British colonialists in Burma by exposing its hypocrisy, the real objective of which is “a despotism with theft as its final object.”

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**Historicizing Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness: A Critique of King Leopold II’s Colonial Rule**

**Abstract**

This study examines how Conrad’s Heart of Darkness has played an important role in exposing the brutal reality of Belgian colonialism in the Congo Free State under the pretense of a civilizing mission. The study focuses on how Conrad’s Heart of Darkness has been instrumental in revealing the atrocities committed by King Leopold II’s agents in their desperate scramble for the rich resources of the Congo,
such as ivory and rubber. King Leopold II’s atrocities may account for the death of almost ten million Congolese natives, a crime of a genocidal scale, which has terribly affected the people of the Congo to this day. Conrad renders his own anti-colonial critique through his central character, Charles Marlow, who learns about the brutal methods of Belgian colonialism while on a journey to the Congo searching for the infamous ivory agent, Kurtz. The study examines how Conrad’s Heart of Darkness critiqued King Leopold II’s colonial rule and contributed to the launching of an international protest which exposed and put an end to the genocide committed against the Congolese in the name of civilization, science, and progress. The campaign eventually forced King Leopold II to quit the Congo Free State in 1908, and unraveled one of the most heinous crimes in history committed under the pretext of “civilization”.

Keywords: Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness, colonialism, King Leopold II, The Congo Free State 1. Introduction For Joseph Conrad, Africa is a symbol of the unknown, an unsolved mystery which he loved to explore since his childhood. Hence, we always observe Conrad dreaming of visiting Africa. Indeed, Conrad described seeing it on a map and indicating the blank space, signifying the mystery of Africa, and expressed his wish to go there one day (Conrad, 2010). In the 1890s, there was widespread news in London about Henry Stanley’s successful Emin Pasha Relief Expedition (Note 1).

During these times, Conrad searched tirelessly for a job at sea to fulfill his childhood fantasies of sailing to Africa. When Conrad arrived back in Brussels, he applied for working on the Congo River. At the height of the colonial campaigns of Britain, France, Portugal, Holland, and Belgium, Joseph Conrad, like everyone else in Europe, had been instilled with a belief that these colonial campaigns were conducted to civilize and educate the ignorant people of Africa and Asia. These campaigns were also perceived as a noble cause motivated by the call of duty and Victorian moral sensibilities. In 1890, Joseph Conrad was appointed as the captain of a steamer on the Congo River by a Belgian trading company. He had sailed on a ship carrying the first batch of rails and ties for the construction of a railway over the Crystal Mountains, from the sea to Stanley Pool, from which boat steamers could sail to the heart of Africa. With regard to the railway over the Crystal Mountains, it was King Leopold II who promoted and financed Henry Stanley’s plan of constructing the railway in order to control every part of the Congo basin. Stanley “would first set up a base near the river’s mouth and then construct a road around the rapids, through the rugged Crystal Mountains—a precursor to a railway” (Hochschild, 1999, p. 38). Joseph Conrad’s trip to the Congo (Note 2) was arguably a revelation for him. During his journey, Conrad noted “evidence of atrocities, exploitation, inefficiency, and hypocrisy, and it fully convinced him of the disparity between imperialism’s rhetoric and the harshest reality” (Watts, 1996, p. 48) of imperialist plundering and looting. Conrad also witnessed forced labor and corruption perpetrated by King Leopold II’s (Note 3) agents and his Force Publique (Note 4) in the Congo. This leads us to examine the relationship between King Leopold II and the Congo Free State. 2. King Leopold II and the Congo Free State King Leopold’s desire for colonial control in Africa is tangibly demonstrated by his tenacious lobbying and bargaining to secure a place for himself during the frantic European scramble to colonize Africa. In the 1890s, the Congo was referred to as the Congo Free State while under the absolute control of King Leopold II of Belgium. Leopold was able to claim the Congo by lobbying, maneuvering, and convincing other European powers like Britain, France, and Germany that he was involved in a philanthropic and civilizing mission in the Congo. In his opening address of the conference in Brussels, King Leopold II explained that the conference’s aim was “to open to civilization the only part of our globe which it has not yet penetrated, to pierce the darkness which hangs over entire peoples, is, I dare
say, a crusade worthy of this century of progress” (Hochschild, 1999, p. 44). For Leopold, it was a holy mission to enlighten and civilize the lives of the Congolese natives. Hence through the use of several sham organizations (Note 5), Leopold was able to lay claim to the Congo, an area almost the size of Europe. Within this context, Peter Eichstaedt (2011) argues that by claiming the Democratic Republic of the Congo as his personal property in the 1870s, Leopold sets “in motion one of the most monstrous plunders ever by a colonial power. Ivory, gold, rubber, and an array of minerals were taken in his name, along with millions of lives” (p. 1). In fact, the colonial scramble for Congo, in particular, and Africa, in general, ironically starts with slogans such as abolishing slavery, and civilizing and weaning the ignorant African natives in an attempt to divide the wealth of Africa (Note 6). In this regard, Adam Hochschild (1999) states that, “in the nineteenth-century European drive for possessions in Africa, people justified colonialism in various ways, claiming that it Christianized the heathen or civilized the savage races or brought everyone the miraculous benefits of free trade” (p. 38).

The moral rationalizations of the civilizing mission were therefore used by European colonialists to justify colonialism. Moreover, the effort to Christianize and civilize the heathen and the savage races may explain why these colonial campaigns are usually preceded by Catholic and Protestant missionary missions in the colonized areas like the mission of David Livingstone in the Congo (Note 7). King Leopold II’s infamous reign in the Congo was notably marred by brutality, the mistreatment of the natives, and the deliberate plundering and looting of natural resources such as ivory and rubber. For example, villagers were terrorized and forced into extracting ivory and tapping rubber. If they failed to collect the required quotas, they were severely punished. The hands of the Congolese were cut and collected in baskets by King Leopold II’s agents to account to their masters for used ammunition since it was so expensive to export it overseas (Note 8). Ivory and rubber were collected for export by Leopold’s agents although his so called purpose was to civilize and educate the natives and abolish slavery. Consequently, it turned out to be a war of enslavement of the Congolese natives. For example, King Leopold II considered forced labor “the only way to civilize and uplift these indolent and corrupt peoples of the Far East” (Hochschild, 1999, p. 37).

Furthermore, to fulfill his colonial aspirations, we find that Leopold took Holland as an example of a small country which managed to accumulate vast wealth out of its colonies. It was time for Belgium to perfect the art of exploiting colonies if it were to survive among the larger colonial powers such as France and Britain. 3. Historicizing Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness: A Critique of King Leopold II’s Colonial Rule After spending six memorable yet hellish months in the Congo, one may argue that witnessing the murder, forced labor, and other atrocities committed by King Leopold II’s agents in the Congo Free State inspired Joseph Conrad to write his novella, Heart of Darkness. Conrad’s experience most certainly provided “a basis for the indignation” of Heart of Darkness (Watts, 1996, p. 48). Conrad’s trip may also account for his realistic depiction of the atrocities perpetrated in the Congo Free State, summed up in Conrad’s own words: “Heart of Darkness is experience ... pushed a little (and only very little) beyond the actual facts of the case” (Conrad, 1999, p. 64). The fact that Conrad had lived for a few months in the Congo “gives Heart of Darkness an authenticity that undoubtedly has contributed to its enduring power and appeal” (Firchow, 2002, p. 22). In other words, Heart of Darkness was actually based on real events and people Conrad either saw or heard about. Therefore, a historical understanding of the Congo Free State is crucial to our understanding of Heart of Darkness and its implicit messages. In this study, I would like to examine how Conrad’s Heart of Darkness has played an important role in exposing the brutal reality of colonialism under the pretense of a civilizing mission. The study focuses on
how placing Conrad’s Heart of Darkness in a historical context has been instrumental in uncovering atrocities committed by King Leopold’s agents to loot and extract the rich resources of the Congo like ivory and rubber, “which may, in turn, account for the death of almost ten million Congolese natives” (Hochschild, 2005, p. 40). This is a crime of a genocidal scale (Note 9) having lasting effects on the Congo and its people till date. My argument is that Conrad's Heart of Darkness is a critique of Belgian colonialism and its extensive impact. Conrad renders his own anti-colonial critique through his central character, Charles Marlow. We observe that Marlow learns of the real motives and brutal methods of colonialism while he is on a journey to the Congo, searching for the infamous ivory agent, Kurtz. For Edward Said (2008), Conrad's Heart of Darkness provides “an extraordinary account of the imperial attitudes of conquest and the tremendous devastation that accompanied it” (p. xiii). Conrad’s account of colonial devastation in the Congo is supported by his trip to the Congo in 1890, which causes him to feel disillusioned about colonialism and its real motives.

These colonial motives were a contradiction to how it was perceived and discussed in Europe, which ironically coined it as the “white man’s burden.” (Note 10) It is a sobering journey for Conrad, which turned out to be a nightmare rather than the romantic dream he had always cherished since his childhood. Joseph Conrad reviewed his feelings after landing in the Congo: “A great melancholy descended on me. Yes, this was the very spot. But there was...only the unholy recollection of a prosaic newspaper stunt and the distasteful knowledge of the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration. What an end to the idealized realities of a boy's daydreams!” (Curle, 1926, p. 10) Conrad’s romantic dream of seeing the exotic land of Africa was shattered, and the noble concept of the “white man's burden” ironically turned into a disgusting crime of looting and robbing people of their natural resources, destroying humanity and lives. It was an experience which moved Conrad from unconsciousness to self-awareness. Conrad’s experience in the Congo had, in fact, magnified his revulsion towards and wariness of imperialism; it served as a reminder of the “Russian Empire which destroyed his family and ravaged his childhood” (Fincham & Hooper, 1996, p. 43). Conrad’s inherent skepticism about colonialism can be related to the fact that he was born into a country (Poland) which had been invaded by Austria, Prussia, and Russia. Moreover, his parents were Polish nationalists exiled by Russian authorities due to their political views. With regard to colonialism, we find that the colonial modus operandi of looting and extortion was supported by an oriental ideology which granted colonial powers the right to control other people merely because they had different complexions or cultures.

Such policies caused Conrad to disapprove the whole colonial project through his mouthpiece, Marlow. Indeed, Marlow remarks: “The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different conception or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much” (Note 11) (Conrad, 1902, p. 13). This passage reflects how Marlow, like his author Joseph Conrad, is tremendously appalled by the extent of brutality and greed seen among the Belgian colonialists in the Congo, so much so that his view of colonialism and its real motives were permanently transformed. It makes Marlow wonder who gives us the right to colonize and persecute other people, just because they are simply different from us! For Hunt Hawkins, Conrad is critical of Belgian imperialism and shows his sympathy for Africans since they are, like Europeans, human. He adds that Conrad rejected imperialism “because it disrupted indigenous cultures” (Peters, 2013, p. 97). In Heart of Darkness, we find the narrator, Charles Marlow, is employed by an ivory trading company to captain a steam boat sailing to the Congo River, whose shape appeared as “an immense snake uncoiled, with its
head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country and its tail lost in the depths of the land” (p. 16). Marlow’s destination is a post where the company’s ambitious agent, Mr. Kurtz, is stationed. It is rumored that Kurtz has amassed huge quantities of ivory employing unspeakable means of cruelty, oppression, and violence against the native Congolese. Marlow’s journey is an enlightening experience which gradually makes him see the brutal reality of colonialism and its destructive impact on both the colonizer and the colonized, stripping both of their humanity. During his trip to the Congo, Marlow realizes that the situation is completely contrary to what is propagated at home about the great work done by Belgian colonists in civilizing ignorant people, as Marlow’s aunt is led to believe. Ironically, it is a panorama of brutality. In his first encounter with the truly abominable nature of colonialism, we observe Marlow pass by a group of laborers working on constructing a railway over the Crystal Mountains: A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head. Six black men advanced in a file toiling up the path. They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads, and the clink kept time with their footsteps … I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope, each had an iron collar on his neck and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking (p. 31).

In this passage, we see Marlow appalled and shocked by the dehumanization of the chained Congolese, who are constructing a railway and involuntarily contributing to white expansionism. Phrases like “every rip” and “the joints … were like knots in a rope” indicate the miserable health of the workers. We see emaciated, chained black prisoners who are being marched to work. They are chained like animals, which imply the nature of their forced labor. In another incident, we see Marlow meet several starving railway workers who have crawled away to die. Marlow saw “now and then a carrier dead in harness, at rest in the long grass near the path, with an empty water-gourd and his long staff lying by his side” (p. 39). Here, Conrad raises the question of forced labor and the oppressive and inhuman conditions Congolese laborers endured. They were reduced to mere animals where they were left to starve and die miserably. In another instance, Marlow observes the “body of a middle-aged negro, with a bullet-hole in the forehead” (p. 40) lying beside the road. He also hears a black worker screaming horribly from being beaten for accidentally causing a fire: “A nigger was being beaten nearby. They said he had caused the fire in some way; be that as it may, he was screeching most horribly” (p. 47). Furthermore, during his walk around the Rapids, Marlow describes how people fled their villages to avoid conscription as porters and collectors of ivory and escaping the brutality of Kurtz: The population had cleared out a long time ago. Well if a lot of mysterious niggers armed with all kinds of fearful weapons suddenly took to traveling on the road [in England] between Deal and Gravesend catching the yokels right and left to carry heavy loads for them, I fancy every farm and cottage thereabouts would get empty very soon…. I passed through several abandoned villages (p. 39).

Marlow sees abandoned villages whose inhabitants fled deep into the forests to escape being enslaved. They were afraid of retribution from Kurtz, a representative example of King Leopold II’s Force Publique, who killed, cut hands, systematically raped women, and burned houses. In addition, villagers were either killed or left to die deep in the forest due to a lack of healthy food and disease if orders were disobeyed. Marlow has no whims about why this brutality is tolerated. It is Belgian colonialism, which is described by Marlow as the conquest of those who are different from us, under the guise of “the philanthropic pretense” (p. 47). The cleared villages and brutality make Marlow wonder what would happen to the English countryside if it were similarly subjected to African imperialism. “I fancy every farm and cottage thereabouts would get empty very soon…. if a lot of mysterious niggers armed with all
kinds of fearful weapons suddenly took to travelling on the road between Deal and Gravesend (p. 39). The English villagers will obviously clear out their villages fearing for their lives and safety of their families, exactly as done by the Congolese villagers. For Marlow, the comparison between Europeans and Africans underscores their equal humanity and confronts the idea that there is nothing such as a lesser person as claimed by Orientalist colonial ideology. In addition, Conrad’s Heart of Darkness renders a harsh critique of King Leopold’s colonial policy which is based on blood, forced labor, and tyranny in return for loads of precious ivory. For instance, Marlow narrates how the Leopoldian colonial economy works: “a stream of ... rubbishy cottons, beads, and brass-wire [were sent] into the depths of darkness and in return came a precious trickle of ivory” (p. 36). Thus, it seems that ivory was taken from the Congo in exchange for some cheap beads and cotton (Note 12). In 1890, ivory still constituted the core aspect of the Congo’s economy before the discovery of rubber and other mineral resources. Ivory is ironically described by Marlow as an idol colonialists pray for: “The word ‘ivory’ rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it” (p. 46).

. It was also every agent’s dream to get appointed to a trading post “where ivory was to be had, so that they could earn percentages” (p. 46). This passage may be referring to the system of commissions bestowed on King Leopold’s agents to encourage them to extract more ivory by any means. When it comes to Conrad’s character, Kurtz, we find that he represents the image of the “lone white agent far up the great river, with his dreams of grandeur, his great store of precious ivory, and his fiefdom carved out of the African jungle” (Hochschild, 1999, p. 144). Kurtz’s shadowy nature is spurred by something dark which lurks deep in Africa, a dark force which lures Kurtz and leaves him unrestrained: you “can’t judge Mr. Kurtz as you would an ordinary man” (p. 113). This dark force which we perceive in Kurtz and is present in Africa cannot be separated from the symbolism with the concept of colonialism and its brutal methods and agents. In other words, it reflects the darkness of the so called civilizing mission itself. Kurtz can also be perceived as an example of colonial “Europeans who have brought an unknown inhumane behavior that seared the soul of the continent” (Eichstaedt, 2011, p. 211) and who tragically sealed the future of millions of people who lived in Africa during King Leopold II’s reign. One may argue that Conrad’s Kurtz is the incarnation of human exploitation, as well as that of the evil spirit of King Leopold II and his merciless colonial expansion in the Congo.

Historically speaking, Kurtz’s character was inspired by several agents (Note 13) whose sole mission was to make quick money and to collect large amounts of precious ivory to send back to Belgium. Kurtz’s character might be based on Captain Leon Romof the Force Publique, whom Joseph Conrad met at Stanley Falls in 1890. When Conrad “passed through Leopoldville, the station chief there was Leon Rom” (Hochschild, 1999, p. 147). The scene of a collection of heads of Congolese rebels surrounding Kurtz’s House, their “heads on the stakes... [looking] black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids” (p. 113) reminds us of Captain Rom whose bed was similarly decorated by the heads of Congolese rebels collected after a merciless military expedition against Congolese rebels and their families. Linking the character of Kurtz to captain Leon Rom may illustrate the significance of a historical perspective in reading Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, particularly if we want to completely grasp the scale of genocide in the Congo practiced by King Leopold II. For example, we see Marlow, on the steamboat, looking through binoculars at what he thinks are ornamental knobs atop the fence posts in front of Kurtz’s house, and then, to his horror, finds that each is only a severed head—“black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids—a head that seemed to sleep at the top of that pole, and, with the shrunked dry lips showing a narrow white line of the teeth...” (p. 113). It seems as if Kurtz had a fondness for shrunked heads since his fence posts were ornamented.
with them. These skulls belonged to the Congolese rebels who refused to comply with Kurtz’s orders or who complied but failed to produce the designated quota of ivory. They were consequently punished by execution. Furthermore, we understand that Kurtz’s decoration of his house with heads could be a sign of power and a stern warning that this will be the same fate for those who refuse to obey orders or fail to collect ivory. Within this context, Michiko Kakutani (1998) writes that Conrad’s Heart of Darkness records in detail “the actual facts of King Leopold II’s brutal rule of Congo in 1890, just as one of history’s most heinous acts of mass killing was getting under way” (p. 1). Indeed, King Leopold II’s hypocrisy is seen in the way he calls his agents “all powerful protectors and benevolent teachers who are engaged in the work of material and moral regeneration” (Brunner & Mills, 2003, p.8).

Therefore, we find Kurtz perceiving himself as a defender of high principles and an author of a report on “The Suppression of Savage Customs.” It is ironically the same prevalent Oriental thinking to which Marlow’s aunt subscribes when Marlow bids her goodbye before sailing to the Congo. She talked about “weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways” (p. 24), to the extent of making Marlow feel uncomfortable. He was about to confess to her that “the company was run for profit” (p. 24). Similarly, we observe that King Leopold II’s agents go about exploiting and looting the Congo in the errant belief that they are civilizing the population and serving “the noble cause” (p.17). For example, besides being a killer, Kurtz is portrayed as an intellectual “emissary of pity, and science, and progress” (p. 50). He is also depicted to be an artist who paints “a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch” (p. 49). Kurtz’s portrayal of being both a killer and a messenger of progress and science may symbolize the colonial strategy of colonizing other countries, being a combination of both cultural and colonial conquest (Note 14).

Kurtz’s intellectual pretensions helped him succeed in “getting himself adored” (p. 112) by the Congolese natives in the inner station. “[L]et us say ... nerves ... went wrong, and caused him to preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites” (p. 100). Here, we see that tribal chiefs crawl on the ground before Kurtz engaging in unspeakable rites, where people obey him with a slavish devotion. They worship him as a demigod. Kurtz himself is involved in unspeakable and shocking rituals which Marlow refuses, out of disgust, to report. It is said that “the rituals involve human sacrifice and the subsequent consumption of a portion of the sacrificial victim” (Moore, 2004, p. 192).

At one stage in Heart of Darkness, the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs asks Kurtz to write a report on the superiority of white Europeans. Kurtz’s report is a reflection of white European superiority, which Kurtz wants the others to follow and worship. It may represent the Belgian colonial strategy adopted by King Leopold II. Kurtz begins his report by arguing the following: We whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, ‘must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might as of a deity,’ and so on, and so on. ‘By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded’ (p. 100). Kurtz ends his report, scrawling with a shaky hand, with an appeal to “every altruistic sentiment it blazed at you, luminous and terrifying, like a flash of lightning in a serene sky: ‘Exterminate all the brutes!’” (p. 101). The order by Kurtz to exterminate all the “brutes” may reveal a genocidal motive behind Kurtz's proclaimed missionary benevolence. It may be interpreted as “a satirical parody of King Leopold’s speeches on the Belgian’s civilizing work in the Congo Free State” (Peters, 2010, p. 147). King Leopold II’s brutality and his colonial conquest of the Congo is whispered by Kurtz while dying: “The horror! The horror!” (p. 142). His final words reflect the sheer horror experienced by the Congolese population who has faced the bitter choice of either working to death or being exterminated. They are “virtually
enslaved and cruelly maltreated in the quest for rubber and ivory” (Bloom, 2011, p. 29). It is also a clear message to the world that what is happening in the Congo is horrible beyond imagination and must stop immediately. Conrad’s revulsion at the scale of the genocidal slaughter seen in the Congo is uniquely expressed. His literary genius allows us to “grasp the numbing regularity in which the slaughter was carried out” (Brunner & Mills, 2003, p. 8). For Conrad, Kurtz is an imperialist. He is a symbol of imperialism and its darkness. His excesses “are portrayed as the natural extension of a system of extracting ivory at any cost” (Brunner & Mills, 2003, p. 7). He is also an arch European, since “All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz” (p. 100). Interestingly, Kurtz’s ancestry is half French and half English, symbolizing the most powerful colonial powers at that time. Finally, Conrad’s Heart of Darkness and its character, Kurtz, “are the creations not just of a novelist but of an open-eyed observer who caught the spirit of a time and place with piercing accuracy” (Hochschild, 1999, p. 152).

4. Conclusion

Despite the criticism leveled by both Achebe (Note 15) and feminists like Straus (Note 16) against Conrad and his novella, Heart of Darkness, Conrad’s work has been instrumental in underscoring the Congolese cause by depicting the atrocities committed, and honestly depicting “the murderous exploitation of the Congo by Belgium’s King Leopold [which had] attained almost mythic status” (Jones, 2006, p. 42). Consequently, Heart of Darkness has contributed to the launch of an international campaign (Note 17) that strove to expose and end the genocide committed against the Congolese. Furthermore, Joseph Conrad personally participated in an international campaign to save lives in the Congo. For instance, Conrad sent letters of support to Roger Casement who, in turn, submitted a parliamentary report documenting crimes against humanity committed by King Leopold II in the Congo. Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness explored the plight of the Congolese natives, confirming the revolutionary role of literature in enhancing our lives and alleviating our suffering. It emphasized Conrad’s awareness that “the novelist is a historian, the preserver, the keeper, the expounder of human experience” (Panichas, 2007, p. 156). Moreover, Conrad’s role as a novelist, a public intellectual, and a defender of human rights along with the efforts of activists like E. D. Morel and Roger Casement (Note 18) have, in fact, stirred an international outcry for world powers to intervene and stop the ongoing genocide in the Congo. This publicity eventually forced King Leopold II to relinquish the Congo Free State to the Belgian government in 1908. This activism also paved the way for Belgian authorities to investigate Belgium’s colonial legacy and the well documented claims of genocide (Note 19) committed in the Congo. It is noted that during King Leopold’s rule, countless deaths were attributed to forced labor, merciless killing, and sleeping sickness (Note 20). Finally, Conrad’s Heart of Darkness has proved to be “ahead of its time’ and exceptionally proleptic text.” (Watts, 1996, p. 48) in rendering an extraordinary critique of colonialism, exposing its truly brutal nature and its lasting impact on the Congolese people who were left to suffer and still experience the effects of colonialism today (Note 21). Conrad’s Heart of Darkness was a polemic for stopping genocide in the Congo. Simultaneously, it called for respecting the human rights of the Congolese, our brothers in humanity.

References


Notes

Note 1. Henry Morton Stanley’s exploration of the Congo region at the invitation of Leopold II led to the establishment of the Congo Free State under Leopold’s personal sovereignty.


Note 5. In 1876, Leopold II hosted a geographic conference in Brussels, inviting famous explorers and philanthropists to stir up interest in a “humanitarian” endeavor for Europeans in Central Africa to improve and civilize the lives of Congolese natives.


Note 7. David Livingstone was a Scottish Congregationalist medical missionary with the London Missionary Society and an explorer in Africa.


Note 9. When it comes to the question of genocide, it is about “processes by which hundreds of millions of people met brutal ends.” (Jones, 2006, p. xix). Until the Second World War, genocide was defined as “a crime without name.” It was only coined and placed in a global and historical context by Raphael Lemkin.

Note 10. The “White Man’s Burden” is a poem by the English poet Rudyard Kipling. It is interpreted to mean that white people have an obligation to rule over, and encourage the cultural development of, people from other cultural backgrounds until they can take their place in the world economically and socially.

Note 11. All references will be henceforth taken from Conrad, J. (1902). *Heart of Darkness*. Virginia: University of Virginia Press.

Note 12. In 1900, Edmund Morel, a human rights activist, noticed that ships that brought vast loads of rubber from the Congo returned only with guns and ammunition for the Force Publique.


**Note 17.** The international campaign and the Congo Reform Association were led by dedicated individuals like Joseph Conrad, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, E. D. Morel and Sir Roger Casement.


**Note 19.** According to Belgian Commission estimates, during the “Leopold period and its immediate aftermath the population of the territory dropped by approximately 10 million people” (Jones, 2006, p. 3).

**Note 20.** During this time, the Congo Free State was swept by an epidemic of “sleeping sickness,” one of the most disastrous plagues recorded in human history. The impact of this disease was exacerbated by slavery, privation, and other adverse conditions imposed by Leopold.


The Backlash of 9/11 on Muslims in Mohsin Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist

Abstract
This paper examines how Muslims are harshly treated after the backlash of 9/11 in Mohsin Hamid’s novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and how they become victims and legitimate targets of hate crimes, negative media stereotypes, physical beatings, disappearance, racial profiling, interrogations at American airports, and detentions in secret places. It addresses how such treatment sheds light on the questions of Muslim integration in the American society, citizenship, multiculturalism, identity, and alienation, belonging, and national affiliation. It also disrupts the dominant American official discourse, which links Islam with terror and portrays Muslims as potential terrorists and a threat to America and values of Western civilization. I also argue that Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* offers a counter literary response not only to the American public rhetoric but also to the dominant literary discourses that prevailed after 9/11, inflamed the American sentiments, and consolidated stereotypes against Islam and Muslims. The study concludes that Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* renders a stark warning message, through its character (Changez) that the harsh treatment of Muslims, American domineering policies, and the blind War on Terror will force many ordinary Muslims to relinquish the American Dream, like Changez, and turn into radicals. The study also reveals that the American reaction toward Muslims after the tragic attacks on 9/11 have been blind, indiscriminate, and disproportionate to such an extent that the very concept of multiculturalism on which the American society is based is threatened. The American society will be prone to internal fissures and disintegration if they fail to accept the “Other” and fail to stop blaming all Muslims for few isolated tragic incidents that they are not actually responsible for. Finally, the research concludes that the mistreatment of Muslims, promotion of Islamophobia, and the War on Terror that followed 9/11 may lead to the exclusion and alienation of Muslims in America, disintegration of the American multicultural society, and the rise of Islamic radical groups such as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

**Keywords: Hamid, The Reluctant Fundamentalist, Muslims, post-9/11 fiction, War on Terror**

**Introduction**

The 9/11 attacks in the United States of America arguably mark a turning point in shaping America into pre- and post-9/11 America. There have been many changes following these tragic attacks, which have left their tragic impact on the Muslim world and affected the lives of Muslims and facilitated negative stereotypes about American Muslims, Arabs, and Islam. Hence, Islam and the Islamic world had subsequently become the target of President George Bush’s “War on Terror,” launched under the pretext of promoting democracy.

When it comes to the question of terror, terrorism can be coined as “the unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence by a person or an organized group against people or property with the intention of intimidating or coercing societies or governments, often for ideological purposes” (Lansford, Watson, & Covarrubias, 2009, p.2). Yet, it is hard to pin down a definite definition of terrorism because there are many incidents that can be called terrorist actions, such as bombings, assassinations, and kidnappings. Furthermore, a person who is seen as a terrorist by one group of people may be viewed in the eyes of his own people as a freedom fighter. Therefore, terrorism is arguably an abstract enemy or a worldwide plague that has no definite borders.

The tragedy of September 11, 2001 has arguably fueled and given “the Bush administration an opening to assemble the required authority and public support to subdue the ‘evil dictators’ of the world”
(Fouskas & Gokay, 2005, p.3). It is worthy to note that George Bush’s War on Terror is based on exercising fear and directing ultimatums to the world. “Every nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists” (Lansford, Watson, & Covarrubias, 2009, p.13). In certain cases, without even a tangible threat, George Bush had reserved the right to use preemptive military force at any place in the world under the pretext of saving American lives and interests. For Bush, the military must be ready to “strike at a moment’s notice in any dark corner of the world. And our security will require all Americans to be forward-looking and resolute, to be ready for pre-emptive action when necessary to defend liberty and our lives” (Fouskas & Gökay, 2005, p.3). One may understand that George Bush’s policy was centered on fighting terror by military force wherever it exits and there is no immunity for persons and countries that harbor and commit terrorist actions. Since 2002, the U.S. government has officially adopted a neocolonial policy called the Bush Doctrine, “which is based on militarist and imperial values with theocratic overtones” (Fouskas & Gökay, 2005, p.3). Bush’s commitment to fight terror includes “the assassination of terrorist and foreign leaders implicated in terrorism against Americans. This new commitment quickly came to fruition with the war in Afghanistan” (Lansford, Watson, & Covarrubias, 2009, p.45). The new American neocolonial policy was also implemented as a justification for “an unprovoked war against Iraq by the neconservative administration of the U.S. government” (Fouskas & Gökay, 2005, p.3) Therefore, countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq became the hub of American military operations. Tragically, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have not created the proclaimed viable and stable democracies. In contrast, Bush’s War on Terror has left behind failed states such as Afghanistan and Iraq, which divided the Arab world into two camps—moderate and radical.

Millions of innocent people have been killed, wounded, disappeared, left homeless, and without a future (Ricks, 2007) The American mainstream media’s response to 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror is largely “simplistic and invidious” (Tolan, Valassopoulos & Spencer, 2013, p.330) and has left its disastrous impact on Muslims. Launching the War on Terror, accompanied by a negative American media campaign of misrepresentation and stereotypes about Muslims and Islam, has terribly affected the lives, safety, and future of millions of American Muslims living in the U.S. The American media has significantly promoted the culture of fear and suspicion among the Americans. It facilitates creating a phenomenon of an invisible and abstract enemy called terror. This means that once America is attacked, it will be hit again by terrorists (Boehmer & Morton 2010).

Islam and Muslims are negatively represented as potential threats to the stability and democratic values of the American society. The U.S. media has “stereotyped and misrepresented Arabs and Muslims for over a century” (Alsultany, 2012, p.2). For example, American media outfits such as Fox News and CNN have always been a reliable source that has inflamed the feelings of antagonism of Americans against Islam and Muslims. They continuously air programs that portray Muslims as terrorist threats and simultaneously show the American government’s heroic deeds that save the American lives and nation (Morey & Yaqin, 2011). Therefore, Muslims are portrayed as fundamentals until they prove otherwise or till they order our beer or their girls show up in miniskirts (Reese, 2007).

In regard to the discourse of blame and scapegoating of Muslims, Lori Peek writes that the 9/11 tragic attacks “left those who shared a common ethnic or religious identity with the hijackers— who, it would quickly be discovered, were all Arab Muslim men—feeling fearful and isolated”(2011). Consequently, Arabs and Muslim Americans have become the targets of violence, harassment, racism, stringent government surveillance, and racial profiling, and hate crimes. In a post-9/11 America, Muslims not only
become alienated but also concerned about their safety at home and that of their relatives abroad. Yet, it seems ironic to demonize and render as “Other” Muslims in a country such as the U.S., which always boasts of being a democratic country and insists that all its citizens are equal before law. On the contrary, democracy is exclusively seen as the American way of life while Islam is associated with terrorism and violence. In this regard, Jane Mummy and Debbie Rodon write that democracy is like a magic word with which America will be ready to go to war as a part of her globalized humanitarianism (2003). Muslims’ feelings of fear, alienation, loss, identity crisis, and citizenship in post-9/11 America have become the focus of Mohsin Hamid’s novel, The Reluctant Fundamentalist.

The Backlash of 9/11 on Muslims in Mohsin Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist

This paper examines how in Hamid’s novel, The Reluctant Fundamentalist, Muslims are treated after the backlash of 9/11 and how they become victims and legitimate targets of hate crimes, negative media stereotypes, physical beatings, disappearances, racial profiling, interrogations at American airports, and detentions in secret places. Furthermore, it addresses how such treatment sheds light on the questions of Muslim integration in American society, citizenship, multiculturalism, identity, and alienation, belonging, and national affiliation. It also disrupts the dominant discourse, which links Islam with terror and shows how Muslims are portrayed by the American official discourse and the media as potential terrorists and threats to America and the values of Western civilization. Within this context, my argument is how Hamid’s novel, The Reluctant Fundamentalist, offers a counter literary response not only to the public rhetoric, but also to the dominant literary discourses that prevailed after 9/11. It also marks a departure in 9/11 fiction, and carries “a sharp critical edge and offers one of the first meaningful representations of ‘otherness’ in the canon of 9/11 fiction” (Keeble, 2014, p.115).

Post-9/11 public rhetoric has equated Islam with terror and this equation has permitted “the intermittent deportation of Muslim migrants and lent inevitability to the invasion not only of Afghanistan but also of Iraq” (Scanlan, 2013, p.22). In regard to fiction, there are several fictional narratives such as John Updike’s Terrorist (2006) and Don DE Lillo’s The Falling Man (2007), and Alexie Sherman’s Flight (2007), which have reinforced the dominant post-9/11 rhetoric. We find that these novels focus, from an American perspective, on themes such as loss, insecurity, American identity, trauma, fear, anger, suspicion, terror, and Islam. These narratives have also contributed to inflaming the American sentiments and consolidating stereotypes against Islam and Muslims, facilitating the creation of a state of Islamophobia.3 Post-9/11 literature portrays Muslims from the East as either radical suicide bombers who hate America and the West or confused disturbed personalities. The Islamic world is negatively represented and the East is constructed to look as a safe haven for terrorists (Lanker, 2013).

Furthermore, both public rhetoric and literary fictional narratives have fueled George Bush’s War on Terror. In this regard, Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton write that the corpus of literature that has emerged after 9/11 is arguably complicit with the global War on Terror agenda led by the U.S., which is heavily based on Orientalist discourse (2010). Furthermore, terror, which is, in fact, a manifestation of a long history of Western colonization, subordination, and oppression of the Muslim world, is strangely presented as a cause rather than an effect. Having said this, the significance of Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist is manifested in its aim to challenge negative portrayals of Islam and Muslims by painting a personalized, insightful portrait of a “potential” Muslim terrorist (Shlezinger, 2010). It also lies in rendering an alternative disruptive literary response to the neocolonial discourse, which has been the
driving force behind the mistreatment of Muslims and the military invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq under the pretext of fighting terror. From a Muslim perspective, Hamid portrays the psychological, emotional, moral, and physical impact of 9/11 on Muslims through his character, Changez, a Muslim Pakistani immigrant who lived in America for a few years before leaving for Pakistan after the backlash of 9/11. The structure and form of the Reluctant Fundamentalist is heavily influenced by the Fall by Albert Camus—a modern narrative that includes one man’s speech to a anonymous listener (Shlezinger, 2010).

The narrative begins in the form of a monologue between Changez and an unnamed American visitor in Lahore’s old Anarakali bazar in Pakistan. It is worthy of note that the American tourist, or who is believed to be a CIA agent, is silent throughout the entire novel except for facial expressions and physical gestures. In his interview with Deborah Solomon, Mohsin Hamid explains that the fact why the American is silent in most of the novel, “in a world of […] the American media, it’s almost always the other way around; representatives of the Islamic world ‘mostly seem to be speaking in grainy videos from caves’ ” (2007, p.1). Hamid says that he has carefully chosen his literary device as “a necessary reaction to the dominance of U.S. interests, media coverage and perspectives in the global war on terrorism. It was time to give the stage to some other perspective” (Lee, 2014, p.345). By making his character, Changez, narrate his whole story to the silent American visitor, Mohsin Hamid wants symbolically to tell that it is time for Muslims to speak about themselves and their experiences since they are always misrepresented, underrepresented, and misunderstood in the Western world.

Hamid’s novel, The Reluctant Fundamentalist, tackles how the backlash of 9/11 has affected the lives of Muslim immigrants who have left their home countries to work, get educated, integrate, and embrace the American Dream. For Changez, 9/11 has dealt a fatal blow to the American Dream he embraced. This may also reflect that the status of immigrant Muslims has irreparably changed. Changez stands as an example of a successful American Pakistani who has integrated into American society. He is educated at a prestigious university, Princeton, works in one of the most influential financial companies in Manhattan, Samson Underwood, and has a beautiful American girlfriend, Erica. Changez narrates how international students in the U.S., like him, are selected through a rigorous testing system and interviews from around every corner of the world and “sifted not only by well-honed standardized tests but by painstakingly customized evaluations interviews, essays, recommendations until the best and the brightest of us had been identified” (Hamid, 2008, p.178). 4 Being one of the best and brilliant students in his class, Changez is selected through a painstaking testing system to work in Samson Underwood. International students, such as Changez, are awarded scholarships, issued visas, and financial assistance. They are expected, in return, to contribute to the American society. “In return, we were expected to contribute our talents to your society, the society we were joining. And for the most part, we were happy to do so. I certainly was, at least at fi ce” (p.178).

However, the 9/11 attacks put the concept of American multiculturalism and the so-called melting pot to test and whether post-9/11 America is tolerant towards minorities like Muslims people who have embraced the American dream and cultural values .” (Khan 2011). According to Anna Hartnell, Mohsin Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist questions the sacrifices needed to be made if one really belongs to America, its system of values, and analyzes how one can be American following the tragic events of 9/11 (2013). These attacks have also shed light on the questions of identity, citizenship, and loyalty. For
instance, what are you, either Muslim or American, and to whom you owe your loyalty? They also pose contentious questions to American Muslims, such as will you act passive when the American government of your new adoptive home attacks your country of origin or a neighboring Muslim country such as Afghanistan and Iraq? What is your attitude toward the hate campaign, which sinisterly targets Islam and portrays it as a religion of terror? What is your next move when you feel alienated, discriminated against, stripped, humiliated at the American airports and treated with disgust and suspicion? What is your response when you see your fellow Muslim colleagues are beaten, humiliated, and sent to unknown detention centers all over the world? What is your answer when you see that the world is divided by the American Empire along the malicious lines of either with “us” or “them” in their War against Terror? Besides these questions, Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist examines the psychological, cultural, social, moral, and ethical intricacies confronted by Muslims in post-9/11 America, who have inhabited two hybrid cultures. For example, Changel’s hybrid position as a Pakistani migrant in America after 9/11 invites a host of questions, such as: has Changel’s integration into the American society been adequate enough to turn a blind eye to American foreign policies toward his home country, Pakistan? Does Changel’s prestigious education and work position leave any space for national affiliation and patriotism?

To elaborate, if we examine the title of the novel, we find the word “fundamentalist,” though there is neither any reference to religion nor to the main character, Changel, who is not a religious man. He is, in fact, a man who has embraced the American Dream without any qualms. In regard to fundamentalism, Robert Spencer and Anastasia Valassopoulos write that it imposes a dogmatic attitude to the inviolability of a particular attitude (2013). But fundamentalism can take different forms since there are economic and political fundamentalisms as well (Morss, 2003). Therefore, fundamentalism cannot only be associated with Islamic extremism, but also with American capitalism. Put differently, fundamentalism is not reserved solely for extreme religious dogma, but includes other ideologies such as “the neo-liberalism that characterized the Bush administration” (Randall, 2011, p.16). Both fundamentalism and capitalism nurture greed, domination, hegemony, and violence (Young, 2001). For example, in terms of the fundamental form of capitalism, Changel’s employer, Jim, exhorts his employees mercilessly to “focus on the fundamentals.” This term is used as Underwood Samson’s guiding economic principle which means “single-minded attention to financial details, teasing out the true nature of those drivers that determine an asset’s value” (p. 98). Later, Changel comes to know the true meaning of strict adherence to the economic fundamentals of his company, Underwood Samson, which is simply suggestive of the American economic control and domination all over the world. Changel is even surprised that it has taken him this long to understand and reach such a conclusion that he cannot be part of project of domination. “It was right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination; the only surprise was that I had required so much time to arrive at my decision”(p.177). Changel does not want to be part of the American Empire and its policy of domination, which controls the lives of poor people in developing countries. In another incident, we find Changel rejoicing while watching the 9/11 attacks on television when on a business trip in Manila. Though his reaction is unacceptable, it forces us to examine the real motive behind it.

The following evening was supposed to be our last in Manila. I was in my room, packing my things. I turned on the television and saw what at first I took to be a film. But as I continued to watch, I realized that it was not fiction but news. I stared as one and then the other of the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Center collapsed. And then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased. (p.83)
Changz’s unconscious reaction seems to be contradictory to his commitment to the American Dream, which has been clearly manifested. Changz does not know himself “why part of him desired harm to a country that had educated and employed him” (Scanlan, 2013, p.32). For example, Changz has never been personally at war with America. He has been educated at Princeton, works at a successful financial company, and is in love with an American girl, Erica. Therefore, what pleases Changz is not the slaughter of innocent civilians where “citizens from many more than ninety nations perished as a consequence of 9/11” (Peek, 2011, p.18). But it seems what amuses him is the paradox that he discovers in himself—part of him is completely integrated and the other unconscious part awakens suddenly, at this particular moment, and realizes that “someone had so visibly brought America to her knees” (p.83).

It is also important to note that the places attacked on 9/11 are icons of the American Empire, its sovereignty, and hegemony all over the world. For Lori Peek, “The violent assaults were designed to be spectacular in their destruction of symbols of U.S. economic, military, and political power” (2011, p.22). Choosing these symbols for an attack was also meant to convey a psychological and figurative message that the Empire can be penetrated at home, attacked and hit in the belly. Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist also reflects on Changz’s initial infatuation, and later disillusionment, with America (Lasdon, 2007). For Changz, it is a love–hate relationship with America or a kind of “a reluctant animosity” attributed to the impact of 9/11 on Muslims and how they are badly treated. The 9/11 attacks had fully served the George Bush administration, which was looking for demons to pursue its political and economic interests. Within this context, Fouskas and Gökay argue that “Islamic terrorism is seen as a demon, which America is looking for to use it as a cover up slogan to advance its political and economic hegemony over all the world” (2005, p.233). Bush’s War on Terror is, therefore, viewed with skepticism and seen as a manufactured device to serve U.S. political and economic interests in Asia and the Middle East. The 9/11 attacks have, undoubtedly, left a deep impact on the lives of the American Muslims and the way they are seen by the American public. In the aftermath of the tragic attacks, Muslims have experienced “a dramatic increase in the frequency and intensity of these hostile encounters such as verbal harassment; violent threats and intimidation; physical assault; religious profiling; and employment, educational, and housing discrimination” (Peek, 2011, p.16).

There are also certain official policies adopted by George W. Bush’s administration, such as racial profiling, the Patriot Act,5 detention, investigation at American airports, wiretapping, monitoring the movement and activities of Muslim American groups, such as charity associations and assemblies. For example, once Changz returns, along with his work team, after his business trip in Manila, to America, he surprisingly encounters a new post-9/11 America. At the airport, Changz has felt humiliated and degraded when he is interrogated and asked to strip down to his boxer shorts while his American colleagues are asked to leave decently—an action that makes Changz feel that he is less than an American. The conversation that Changz has with the Am7manufactured a new American nationalism, which enabled the US to see itself as innocent in relation to the demonic other, but this was after all only a variation of the old theme of American exceptionalism” (2010, p.126).

New York is suddenly adorned with American flags and symbols of “duty” and “honor.” An atmosphere which makes Changz feel strangely that he is no longer living in modern New York but at a place which belongs to the Second World War. It “was suddenly like living in a film about the Second World War.” (pp.130–131)

Such experiences make Changz realize that many Americans have lost their sense of empathy and understanding for innocent Muslims. His disappointment stems from the fact that Americans’ hostile reaction toward Muslims puts them equally at the same level with the radical ones who committed the
attacks of 9/11. It is the post-9/11 America that makes Changez feel disappointed and frustrated with the American people he “has grown to admire over the process of his cultural assimilation (Khan, 2011, p.94). Changez tells the American visitor that,

As a society you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you [...] the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums, not least my family, now facing war thousands of miles away (p.109)

Changez’s words are a critique of the American official blind policy of War on Terror, which has inflicted an unnecessary pain on millions of Muslim people in Afghanistan and Iraq. They also refer to the fact that the Americans can only see their own sufferings and pain while turning a blind eye to the endless sufferings of others. Furthermore, Hamid’ novel, “The Reluctant Fundamentalist,” conveys a message that the personal is political and the political is personal and it is hard to separate them since both are intertwined. For instance, while riding home, Changez sees America shrouded with American flags, mourning, pain, fear, and anger. He has simultaneously felt “the crumbling of the world around [him] and the including destruction of [his] personal American dream” (p.106). It reflects on the fear felt by Muslims and their concerns about their safety since they become relentlessly targeted.6 Even though Changez tries hard to separate what happened on 9/11 from his personal American Dream, the reality of the post-9/11 America is rapidly changing. We notice that Changez does not even want to believe that his American Dream starts crumbling as the world collapses around him. “I prevented myself as much as was possible from making the obvious connection between the crumbling of the world around me and the impending destruction of my personal American dream” (p.106). But the changing reality of the post-9/11 America can explicitly be seen in the unexplained and sudden disappearance of Muslim Pakistani drivers from places such as the Pak-Punjab Deli in New York. The Pakistani drivers’ mysterious absence has left the door open for speculation about their fate.

Pakistani cabdrivers were being beaten to within an inch of their lives; the FBI was raiding mosques, shops, and even people’s houses; Muslim men were disappearing, perhaps into shadowy detention centers for questioning or worse. (p.107) Muslim men are targeted and sometimes disappear without any trace.7 This may be attributed to the Patriot Act, which is a legislation enacted by the Congress to investigate and prosecute suspected terrorists. It has authorized the American authorities to intensify electronic surveillance on means of communication, disclose emails, tap wire phone calls, monitor and search suspects’ homes without any prior notification or court permission (Hafetz, 2011).

Later, Changez finds out that he is mistaken to think that American counter violence and anger against Muslims is only reserved for extremist Muslims, but not for moderates like himself. Actually, he sees himself as a successful Princeton graduate, culturally assimilated to the American society, and immune to American counter violence. But it is a moment of epiphany for Changez when he is attacked by Americans due to his Muslim identity. He realizes that what he thinks of himself as a guarded person is merely an illusion. Changez experiences a series of hate crimes such as verbal abuse, finding his cars car’s tires punctured, telephone lines disrupted, and physically threatened.

I was approached by a man I did not know [...] just then another man appeared; he, too, glared at me, but took his friend by the arm and tugged at him, saying it was not worth it. Reluctantly, the first allowed himself to be led away. ‘Fucking Arab,’ he said. My blood throbbed in my temples, and I called out, ‘Say it to my face coward, not as you run and hide.’ (p.134)
For the first time, Changez loses his usual decent composure and feels wrath raging inside him at this particular moment of challenge. Changez is seen to “unplug a tire iron from his boot and capable of wielding it with sufficient force to shatter the bones of his American abuser’s skull. The men remain in this position for a ‘few murderous seconds’ ” (p.134). These incidents have accelerated Changez’s emotional and psychological alienation in his relationship with his American colleagues at work. They, in fact, pave the way for his process of transformation from being a lover of the American culture and values to an activist who is critical of the American policy and its blind campaign of War on Terror waged against Islam and Muslims in the name of democracy and civilization. After 9/11, Changez finds himself trapped in a place where Muslims are treated with suspicion and Islam is increasingly linked to terrorism and evil. The rapid changes in American society have made Changez, as an American Muslim, feel alienated and unwanted. He experiences inner psychological struggles to find out where he belongs exactly—to either the American society, which treats him as a potential threat, or to his home country, Pakistan. It is also worthy of note that Pakistan, a Muslim country, is traditionally portrayed by the American foreign policy as a safe haven for terrorists and a launching pad for terrorist attacks against American interests. Consequently, Changez loathes himself for being disloyal to his home country, Pakistan, to the extent of comparing himself to a Muslim “Janissary.” Metaphorically speaking, he compares himself to the Christian boys who served the Ottoman Empire to fight against their own people. Changez similarly considers himself as a servant who serves the American Empire against his own Muslim people and fellow brothers. Changez “had thrown in his lot [...] with the officers of the empire, when all along I was disposed to feel compassion for those [...] whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain”(p.152). A comparison, infused by a sense of betrayal, has served as a turning point in Changez’s life and a moment of revelation too. For example, during Changez’s business trip to close an unprofitable company, Valparaiso, Chile, the manager of the company, Juan Bautista, compares him to Janissaries. He refers to Janissaries who served the Ottomans to erase their own civilization.

He tipped the ash of his cigarette onto a plate. How old were you when you went to America? he asked. I went for college, I said. I was eighteen. Ah, much older, he said. The janissaries were always taken in childhood. It would have been far more difficult to devote themselves to their adopted empire, you see, if they had memories they could not forget. (p.173).

Bautista’s words make Changez feel degraded that he is merely a servant, serving and facilitating the American Empire to dominate and control the world financially. Sudden feelings of infuriation, shame, and betrayal, toward his own Muslim people and home country, have gripped and made him realize that he is no longer “capable of so through a self-deception” (p.114). Changez’s transformed personality is manifested through venting his suppressed political opinions and feelings toward post-9/11 America. He tells the American visitor how he resents the American foreign policy and how America conducts itself as the lone supreme power by interfering in every zone of the world and dictating its own terms:

I had always resented the manner in which America conducted itself in the world; your country’s constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable. Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East, and now Afghanistan: in each of the major conflicts and standoffs that ringed my mother continent of Asia, America played a central role. Moreover, I knew from my experience as a Pakistani of alternating periods of American aid and sanctions that I knew was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power. (p.177)
Changz elaborates on how the U.S. dictates its own policy and agenda through exercising its financial and military influence. It is the American stick and carrot policy, which means either financial aid in return for domination or financial and military sanctions in return for disobedience. Mohsin Hamid makes it clear that it is the neocolonial policy of America around the world that has fostered tensions between Americans and the Muslim world. He also shows how the American culture is based on a sense of superiority among the Americans and their arrogant attitude toward the “Other” and how post-9/11 America becomes increasingly intolerant toward the Other people of different races, cultures, and religions. Changz’s personal experience, combined with his political consciousness, makes him rightly believe that, “it was right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination; the only surprise was that I had required so much time to arrive at my decision” (p.177)

In post-9/11 America, Changz has considerably lost his national and cultural bonds with America while he becomes drawn toward reaffirming his national and cultural bond with his native country, Pakistan. His strong desire to leave post-9/11 America and its insufferable treatment toward Muslims makes him purchase his first-class ticket and leave home. Changz is not simply alienated, but his isolation suggests that America fails to live up to its “self- understanding as a post-colonial nation, while still acknowledging its potential to be an ‘exceptional’ melting-pot” (Hartnell, 2010, p.346). The process of Changz’s reas summons has been hard since he initially sees everything in Pakistan through his American eyes. For example, he has felt sad and ashamed seeing the miserable and poor condition of his parents’ home. “I was struck at first by how shabby our house appeared, with cracks running through its ceilings and dry bubbles of paint fl y ho of f where dampness had entered its walls” (p.141). But with time, he comes to understand that such comparison is unfair and one requires a different way of looking, taking into account the political, economic, cultural, and religious, social, and historical differences between the two countries. “a re-visitation of ‘home’ after a prolonged period of time requires a ‘different way of observing’–I recall the American ness of my own gaze when I returned to Lahore that winter when war was in the offing” (p.140).

Changz’s initial feelings of shame are quickly replaced by his deep appreciation that his house remained largely unchanged during his stay in the U.S. “It occurred to me that the house had not changed in my absence. I had changed” (p. 141). He comes to appreciate the rich cultural history that his home symbolizes, a sensation which makes him feel proud of being a Pakistani. “It was far from impoverished; indeed it was rich with history” (p.142). Changz’s leaving New York to settle in Lahore and work as radical lecturer at a university arguably marks Changz’s complete transformation. We find him advocate the disengagement of Pakistan from America and criticize the American foreign policy toward Pakistan in particular, and the Muslim world in general. For instance, Changz is even vocal at the mysterious disappearance of one of his students who is believed to be mistaken for being a terrorist and taken away to “a secret detention facility, no doubt, in some lawless limbo between our country and mine” (p.206).

Changz is resentful and critical of governments such as those of America, which behave as if they are above the international laws, accountability, and can violate laws and human rights under the pretext of fighting terrorism (Carasik, 2015) He is no longer able to bear and turn a blind eye to America’s national and political hypocrisy. He is courageous enough to say on a news channel that “no country inflicts death so readily upon the inhabitants of other countries, fighters, so many people so far away, as
America” (p.207). Besides his critique of America’s biased and hypocritical policies, Changez has led demonstrations demanding autonomous Pakistani politics far away from the American imposing policies. Changez’s political activism against the American hegemony and its war against terror, which has left millions of people killed, injured, and homeless in Afghanistan and Iraq, has deemed him as an anti-American.

At the end of the novel, Changez notices that there is a “glint of metal in the American’s jacket pocket,” (p.209) while shaking his hand. It is unclear whether the American visitor is a tourist or a CIA agent tracking Changez as a potential threat to the security of America and its interests. But Changez is quick to assure him that he does not believe in violence and spilling blood. He is simply a university teacher who speaks the truth to power and enlighten his own students about the reality of this world. “I am a believer in non-violence; the spilling of blood is abhorrent to me, save in selfdefense [...] I am no ally of killers; I am simply a university lecturer, nothing more or less” (p. 206). Changez uses nonviolent means in his critique of America, relying on the same logic and reason used in the Western nations that pride themselves on democracy and civilization.

Conclusion

Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist renders a warning message through his character, Changez, that the American domestic and international policies toward Muslims and the Islamic world after 9/11, if not changed, will turn ordinary Muslims such as Changez into radicals, and violence will breed violence. It also finds out that the American domineering policies and its blind War on Terror will force many ordinary Muslims to relinquish the American Dream, like Changez, and convert them into radicals. Furthermore, the American reaction toward Muslims after the 9/11 tragic attacks has been blind, indiscriminate, and disproportionate to such an extent that even the people of different nationalities were killed because they resembled Muslims. The study also finds out that by mistreating, targeting, and alienating Muslims, one is hitting hard at the concept of multiculturalism on which the American society is based. Hence, American society will be prone to internal fissures and disintegration if they fail to accept the “Other” and fail to stop blaming all Muslims for a few isolated tragic incidents that they are not actually responsible for. It is also the right time to stop targeting Muslims after the backlash of 9/11, taking into account that Muslims constitute an important component of the American society, particularly, and Europe, in general. This paper concludes that the mistreatment of Muslims, promotion of Islamophobia, and the War on Terror that followed 9/11 may lead to the exclusion and alienation of Muslims in America and explain the rise of ISIS.8 Finally, Hamid renders a message that many Muslims, like Changez, want to live in peace, dignity, and prosperity like all other human beings in the world and it is the right time to facilitate such a healthy environment for them before it is too late.
Endnotes


References


GLOBALIZATION AND THE QUESTION OF SERVITUDE IN ARAVIND ADIGA’S THE WHITE TIGER

Abstract

This paper examines the way in which Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger acts as a harsh critique of the notion of the “New India,” which is still plagued with a system of servitude and rampant political, economic, and social corruption. It also sheds light on the social, economic, and cultural impact of globalization on the poor of India, particularly in terms of its role in widening the gap between the upper and lower classes. It argues that both globalization and the system of servitude have contributed to creating two facets in India: the India of Light and the India of Darkness, where the poor are marginalized and kept at the periphery, far from the center. The study concludes that The White Tiger issues a stern warning that the division of Indian society will inevitably lead to violence, destruction, and anarchy. To avert this, the economic and social disparities that keep millions of Indians living in extreme poverty should be addressed, the system of servitude and discrimination should be dismantled, and it should be ensured that all human beings in India are able to live with dignity and in equality. Key Words: The White Tiger, Aravind Adiga, globalization, servitude, India of Light, India of Darkness. 1-Introduction Globalization1 can be defined as "a process in which more and more people become connected in more different ways across larger distances" (Lechner, 2009, 15). This worldwide integration permits people to travel, communicate, and invest internationally. It helps companies "market their produces widely, acquire capital and human resources more efficiently, share advanced technology, and enjoy economics of scale" (Wells, Shuey, & Kiely, 2001, 37). Globalization also implies a shrinking of the world in terms of space and time, since it "increases the ‘thickness’ of human interaction and the impact this interaction has on the earth itself " (Ervin & Zachary, 2008, 2).

However, globalization has transformed our present social conditions and contributed to the weakening of nationality and the creation of globality (Ritzer, 2009). This rapid process of intercontinental, social, political, and economic integration has come with promises of equality and high standards of living for everyone. In spite of the fact that the ongoing global changes are essential to human beings, these changes do not similarly affect everyone in society. Though globalization can have a positive impact on people, it can also drastically affect some sectors of society by widening the gap between the poor and the rich.2 Critics such as Chomsky (2002), Falk (1999), and Petras and Veltmeyer (2001), critically deconstruct the concept of globalization and find it to be a destructive force. It creates "profound asymmetries between the center and the periphery" (Rajgopal, 2002, 134), which have been responsible for poverty, economic destabilization, and inequality.

2-Globalization in India

If we examine the impact of globalization on India, we find that the country has undergone tremendous change since it opened up its markets in the late 1980s and early 1990s. For Ann Harrison, "India liberalized its international trade as part of a major set of reforms in response to a severe balance of payments crisis in 1991" (2006, 299). Rajiv Gandhi’s government,3 for example, started to liberalize the economy by removing economic restrictions and high taxes imposed as part of the Nehruvian closed economy (Assayag & Fuller, 2005). In 1990, Manmohan Singh4 adopted a determined policy of liberalization that integrated India into the global economy. Singh’s economic policy led to an increase in direct foreign investment, a reduction of foreign trade barriers, and to a growing number of Indians working for global enterprises. For Raj Nayar, the economic liberalization of India “refers to deregulation and decontrol in a national economy—an economic process inextricably linked with globalization"
(2006, vii). By the mid-2000s, it became clear that life for many people in India had been changing rapidly. Globalization has undeniably raised the standard of living of the Indian rich and the upper middle classes. It has facilitated the growth of information technology and the development of new cities like New Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore, with new and expanding marketing opportunities, such as the building of malls and luxurious complexes. These changes are the most obvious markers of "India Shining," which is a concept promoted in the BJP's electoral campaign5; a campaign that puts emphasis on the potential benefits the Indian people will reap from a liberal economic policy, such as access to house and car loans, and the prospect of India becoming a hub for growing information technology (Varughese, 2013).

In the Indian context, contemporary globalization has reached an unprecedented level, to the extent that "the government has neglected agricultural needs to promote industrial needs" (Suman, Tapan, & Subarno, 2009, xv). The farming sector is also “thrown up in the name of Special Economic Zones to multinationals and to agricultural big business” (Deb, Sengupta, & Datta-Ray, 2008, 4). The emphasis on industrial rather than agricultural needs has led to the marginalization of India’s population inhabiting rural villages. In this regard, Arundhati Roy says that In a country like India, 70% of the population lives in rural areas. Their lives depend directly on access to natural resources. To snatch these away and sell them as stock to private companies is a process of barbaric dispossession that has no parallel in history. (2000, 43)

The focus on industrial production has caused the marginalization and dispossession of 70 percent of the Indian population whose lives depend on land and natural resources. This may explain why India accounts for a third of the world's poor, as well as the tragic cases of farmers' suicides. Farmers are driven to death by desperation and deprivation as a consequence of government economic policies that integrate with the international economy (Schmidt & Jacques, 2003). These drastic economic changes and policies adopted by the Indian government have thus created two countries: the India of Light and the India of Darkness. The India of Light represents the rich who comprise a small minority of the Indian population, while the majority lives in the India of Darkness, a place marred by poverty, misery, and deprivation. The impact of these changes on India is examined thoroughly in Aravind Adiga's6 novel, The White Tiger.

3-Globalization and the Question of Servitude in Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger

In spite of having spent many years outside India, Aravind Adiga has “masterfully caught the changing mental makeup of the India’s underprivileged class who are no longer content to dawdle their lives away in poverty but want opportunities, moral or immoral, to stride ahead in the race of life” (Mathur 2011, 2). Speaking of how The White Tiger was initially conceived while traveling to write for Time magazine, Adiga says that the book was born of hanging around stations and having conversations with servants and rickshaw pullers in India. For Adiga, it is meant to, capture the voice of men you meet as you travel across India....What struck me was how funny a lot of these people were, how similar their voice was, their sense of humor, their cynical intelligence. But theirs was a voice that had not been captured. It was important for me to get this voice down . . . and to do that without sentimentality. (Suri 2008, 63) The White Tiger is arguably a critique of "the smugness of the Indian elite, the complicity
of Indian capitalism, and the neo-colonialism flourishing in shining India" (Lau & Dwivedi, 2014, 84). It is an attempt to give a voice to the silent majority of the marginalized lower class who suffer from poverty, discrimination, unemployment, denial and dispossession. It is worthy of note that Adiga felt shocked coming home to see the stark changes globalization has created in India. He sees what others fail to see in the impact of globalization on the social, economic, cultural, and moral aspects of Indian society in terms of the poor, marginalized, down-trodden people and their chances of survival in the New India. Within this context, Adiga says that, "At a time when India is going through great changes and, with China, is likely to inherit the world from the west, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society....it's not an attack on the country, it's about the greater process of self-examination" (Jeffries, 2008, 1).

One may argue that Adiga's observation of the rapid changes caused by globalization coupled with the system of servitude, were the driving force behind his writing of The White Tiger. Adiga is, however, keen to point out that his real motive was to highlight the injustices of Indian society. His critique is driven only by a belief that India urgently needs to undertake a process of self-examination of its economic, political, and social systems, rather than any wish to tarnish the image of his own country.7 Adiga's sense of urgency is shared by Michael Portillo, who maintains that The White Tiger is an angry book, which gives expression to the lower class anger the privileged upper class people have ignored (Suri, 2008).

The White Tiger is about the dark side of the New India. It takes an unblinking look at the reality of India's economic prosperity and progress. Adiga's ostensible mouthpiece, the character Balram Halawai, belongs to the marginalized caste of the sweet-makers, located in the “India of Darkness”. He narrates the brutal injustices of the rising India. For example, Balram reflects sarcastically on the divide between the rich and the poor: "In the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat – or get eaten up" (Adiga, 2008, 54)8.

The White Tiger revolves around the struggle between the upper and lower classes in their quest for economic and political power. Lily Want also refers to Adiga's chronicling of both “an India of Darkness and an India of Light” (2011, 71), where Balram ponders on the rigid boundaries between the center and the margin, and their underlying relationship which is fraught with discord and antipathy, essentially defining what is known as the class struggle. When it comes to the question of the class struggle, it is important to consider the role of production in the determination of class. For Karl Marx9, the process of production constitutes the basis of class construction, and the individual's status within a class is defined by his role in the process of production. The individual's ideological and political consciousness is also decided by his class position (Marx & Engels, p. 2002). Within this context, The White Tiger can be seen as a realistic depiction of the brutal class struggle between the upper and lower classes and the gap between them, which is shown to be widened and intensified by globalization.

According to Lena Khor, The White Tiger is a critique of "the socioeconomic conditions promoted by a ruthless form of neoliberal globalization which privileges profit over people" (2013, 43). It aims to highlight the disturbing fact that a neo-liberal economic policy can widen the gap between the rich and the poor by helping a small minority to prosper at the expense of the majority. This is why, as Brouillette points out, Adiga asks his readers in interviews to situate the novel "in opposition to business books for aspiring elites, and . . . newspapers . . . which boast overwhelmingly of celebratory treatments of the
globalization of markets and the arrival of the ‘new India’” (Brouillette, 2011, 42). However, it is argued here that The White Tiger examines not only the impact of globalization on the poor and marginalized of India’s villages, but also the system of servitude which is an integral part of Indian society. Servitude is defined as the state of being submissive and under control of someone who is more powerful.10 (Ray & Qayum, 2009). Globalization and servitude, together, are shown to contribute to the poverty and suffering of the poor and marginalized who are kept at the periphery in the India of Darkness; a world of which no one is aware because everyone is busy looking at the shining towers of New Delhi which symbolize the new India.

Adiga’s The White Tiger is arguably a witty parable of a present-day India which is still plagued with servitude and rampant corruption. It is a critique of a false notion of the New India and a quest for equality and justice in the face of poverty, greed, and the political corruption of the feudal landlords. For Adiga, The White Tiger is an attempt to "relocate India in a political and economic context" (Suri, 2008, 59). This is why he presents us with a new India of two worlds: the "India of Darkness", represented by Balram Halawai of Laxmangarh, and the "India of Light", symbolized by Mr. Ashok of New Delhi. Balram explains that: "India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness. The ocean brings light to my country. Every place on the map of India near the ocean is well off. But the river brings darkness to India — the black river" (12), alluding to the fact that people prosper and thrive in the India of Light at the expense of the rich resources stolen from the India of Darkness. The novel highlights the fact that poverty dominates every aspect of life in the India of Darkness (Jadav, 2014).

Balram, with his satirical observations on the painful realities of the New India, is a representative of the marginalized poor who strive and struggle for a better future and a place within it. The White Tiger begins with Balram narrating his life story in a letter to Mr. Wen Jaibo, the premier of China, on the eve of his visit to Bangalore, a hub of information technology and entrepreneurs. It is through visits like that of the Chinese premier that contracts are signed and trading zones are built and expanded. Balram wants to make sure that visiting foreign officials won't leave with a belief in the state propaganda of Indian officials, such as the idea that it is possible to "Become an Entrepreneur in Seven Easy Days!!" (4). Instead, he wishes them to know the other, largely ignored, story of how "entrepreneurship is born, nurtured, and developed in this, the glorious twenty-first century of man" (4), and to wonder how a nation like India, which does not have the infrastructure to serve the majority of her own people when it comes to basic human needs, like clean drinking water, sewage systems, electricity, proper public transport, or health care services, does at all manage to have “entrepreneurs. Thousands and thousands of them. Especially in the field of technology. And these “entrepreneurs—we entrepreneurs — have set up all these outscoring companies that virtually run America now” (2-3).

In this passage, Balram enlighten’s the Chinese premier about the brutal and heart-wrenching reality of the New India by presenting him with his own, corrective narrative. Balram’s letters reflect his journey from the India of Darkness to the India of Light, and shows what it really takes for poor people like him to make it. Through his journey, Balram exposes the sufferings and oppression of the victimized, marginalized classes, those who are silenced socially and politically. The novel thus gives expression to the anger against injustice and inequality in all its forms raging within such people. In The White Tiger, Adiga deconstructs the system of servitude and its mechanisms. For instance, we find Balram, a servant seeking his freedom and identity, asking crucial questions, which highlight his servitude, its underlying implications; and pondering whether it will ever be possible to break free from it: “What keeps the millions of poor Indians work in servitude? How stable is such system? Why does the Rooster
Coop work? How does it trap so many millions of men and women so effectively?(150), "What if one
day, for instance, a driver took his employer's money and ran? What would his life be like?" (150).
Balram's soliloquy reflects how hard it can be to achieve liberty in the New India, where masters exploit
the miserable economic conditions of their servants and their desperate need to survive. Through
Balram, Adiga examines further the system of servitude which relies on an underlying relationship
between masters and servants, which involves "a handful of men" training "the remaining 99.9% — as
strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way — to exist in perpetual servitude" (149). Here, we see
how the entire Indian economy is practically underpinned by the servitude and trust of servants. India is
notably a place which does not need a secret police to keep its people down because its system is based
on the truthfulness of its servants. "Masters trust their servants with diamonds in this country! . . . Why
doesn't that servant take the suitcase full of diamonds? He's no Gandhi, he's human, he's you and me.
But he's in the Rooster Coop" (149).

It is the system of servitude, or the "rooster coop", which prevents servants from killing and stealing
from their masters. This may explain why it is unusual to find a master killed by his servant in India.
Adiga's portrayal of Balram's journey could be seen to stem from a wish to awaken a currently absent
resentment and class consciousness in such servants, which may incite a revolutionary ideology
encouraging them to revolt against their masters. Jeffries (2008) attributes the absence of such
resentment and class consciousness to the fact that the poor just assume that not being rich is merely a
fact of life which has to be accepted. The White Tiger emphasizes the disastrous impact the
system of servitude has on the lives of the poor. For instance, Balram is born in Laxmangarh, in the
district of Gaya, in Bihar, an impoverished area which represents the India of Darkness. He is brought up
by his father, a rickshaw puller, in extremely poor and miserable conditions. The people there are
trapped in poverty by the few families that rule the roost and exploit its natural resources (Want, 2011).
People in Laxmangarh are shown to be living under the mercy of feudal landlords, like the Buffalo, the
Stork and Wild Boar, who control their means of subsistence. The Wild Boar, for example, owns all the
good agricultural land around Laxmangarh, and "if you wanted to work on those lands, you had to bow
down to his feet, and touch the dust under his slippers, and agree to swallow his day wages" (21).
Laxmangarh is also described by Balram as a place that has been located in darkness since India's
independence. It suffers from a lack of technological progress, roads, and electricity, compared to cities
like New Delhi or the capital of information technology, Bangalore. In Laxmangarh, he cites:

Electricity poles—defunct. Water tap—broken. Children—too lean and short for their age, and with
oversized heads from which vivid eyes shine, like the guilty conscience of the government of India (16)
Balram criticizes the government's plans for improving the life of the poor in a place where children look
like ghosts with "oversized heads" caused by malnutrition. Ironically, Balram finds that instead of
providing the poor people with electricity, clean drinking water, and proper nutrition, the Indian
government sells them mobile phones to accrue profit. People also forget to name their children in a
place like Laxmangarh, and this is exactly what happens to Balram. He is called Munna by his parents
which means 'boy.' 'That's all I've got sir' I said. It was true. I'd never been given a name. 'Didn't your
mother name you?' 'She's very ill, sir, she lies in bed and spews blood. She's got no time to name me'
(10). It is also noticeable that the name Balram is only given to him by his school teacher, Krishna, during
his school days. At school, Balram catches the attention of the school inspector who is impressed with
his intellectual abilities. He presents Balram with a gift, a book entitled, Lessons for Young Boys from the
Life of Mahatma Gandhi (30), and praises him for his intelligence and diligence. He singles out Balram as
a great person among a crowd of thugs, by comparing him to the white tiger: “In any jungle, what is the
rarest of animals the creature that comes along only once in a generation?” I thought about it and said:
‘The White Tiger.’ ‘That’s what you are in this jungle.’” (30). But the miserable and poor conditions
prevent Balram from completing his education, particularly after the death of his father. He is forced to
leave school to sustain his family and settle its piling debts. We therefore find Balram joining his brother,
Kishan, “working in a tea shop, smashing coals and wiping tables” (32). During his struggle for survival,
we see Balram work as a coal crusher and table sweeper, with very minimal earnings. His main concern
is to secure bread and housing for his family, and healthcare for his father who is dying from
tuberculosis. Finally, Balram decides to learn to drive to earn more money and improve the economic
conditions of his family: "Granny had agreed to let them invest in my driving lessons” (47). Destiny
smiles on Balram when he gets an offer to work as the driver of a landlord’s son, Mr. Ashok, and his
wife, Pinky Madam. It is an opportunity for Balram to leave the India of Darkness and enter the India of
Light, far away from the misery of sheer poverty.

In The White Tiger, Adiga presents to us the symbols of both countries of India. The India of Light
represented by Mr. Ashok who is very rich, educated, and a very important figure in the New India while
the India of Darkness is symbolized by Balram who is very poor, marginalized, and less educated. This
contrast is emphasized when Mr. Ashok first lays eyes on Balram: He looked me up and down, from
head to toe, the way I had been looking at him ever since I had come to the house. His eyes seemed full
of wonder: how could two such contrasting specimens of humanity be produced by the same soil,
sunlight, and water? (68) Ashok’s wonder is created by the gap between the poor and the rich,
where the poor are regarded and treated as less-than human, or like animals. When Balram works with
landlords, like Mr. Mukesh and Stork, for instance, he finds that they expect their pets to be treated like
humans: "They expect their dogs to be pampered, walked, petted, and even washed" (67). They expect
their animals to be treated like humans, while, ironically, treating their servants like animals. This is
elaborately illustrated when Balram takes the dogs for a walk: “Then I took them around the compound
on chain while the king of Nepal sat in a corner and shouted, “Don’t pull the chain so hard! They’re
worth more than you are!”(67). One may understand that the dogs of the rich landlords are seen as
more worthy than the poor servants and this may construe why their dogs have to be treated with a
special care.

Further, we find that the poor in the new globalized India have no political representation since
they are deprived of the right to vote. Their voices are forced to be silent due to the ongoing alliance of
the politicians and the rich. Balram recounts how the teashop owner has sold their votes: “He had sold
our fingerprints which the illiterate person makes on the ballot paper to indicate his vote” (81). Balram's
father is also deprived of his right to vote by others who vote in his place: "My father told me that night,
I’ve seen twelve elections — five general, five state, two local — and someone else voted for me twelve
times”(84). We thus find that the votes of the poor are rigged or sold. In some cases, people are
terrorized or even killed if they ask to exercise their voting rights, and their deaths are not even
registered as murder when the killer belongs to the ruling party. During his work as a driver in New
Delhi, Balram witnesses the huge gap between the haves and the have-nots. He sees the way in which
the workers who build the great towers and malls of the city are exploited and live miserably on
the streets close by. They are seen scattered around the city hoping to find a better life. They are huddled in
stinking quarters and afflicted with mosquitoes and cockroaches. Their inhuman life conditions are
described by Balram as follows:
Thousands of people live on the sides of the road in Delhi. They have come from the Darkness too—you can tell by their thin bodies, filthy faces, by the animal-like way they live under the bridges and overpasses, making fires and washing and taking lice out of their hair while the cars roar past them (99).

They are, thus, easily recognizable as coming from the India of Darkness, from their appearance and the way they live like animals under the bridges. For Iqra Shagfuta (2013), they do not have any control over their lives which are charted by their rich masters. Their destinies are determined by their class and caste. While caste is defined by religion and culture, class is determined according to a person’s relationship with the means of production. But both the influences of “socio-economic organization” and “production relations” intertwine (Basile, 2013, 98). The fact that caste represents destiny for people in India, is made clear by Balram: “See Halwai, my name, means, 'sweet maker.' That’s my caste - my destiny. Everyone in the darkness who hears that name knows all about me at once” (53).

The idea that is generally promoted of “Shining India” is shown to be dependent on a system of servitude, which itself promotes class segregation and injustice. Both the rich and the poor go to the India of Light to pursue their dreams, but their dreams are completely different and never concur: “See, the poor dream all their lives to get enough to eat and looking like the rich. And what do the rich dream of? Losing weight and looking like the poor” (191). According to Om Mathur, the benefits of globalization are that "a few economic sectors have been impacted, and the most obvious changes have been in the built environment, e.g., new buildings and spatial structure" (2006, 43). As markets expand, some cities have become important strategic centers of financial investment and information technology, but they are also defined by class segregation. Within this context, we find Balram wondering about the mentality of the rich. They are geniuses in terms of town planning, but in Gurgaon, for instance, they have failed to build parks and playgrounds, which helps to ensure complete segregation from poor people: "it was just buildings, shopping malls, hostels, and more buildings. There was a pavement outside, but that was for the poor to live on" (191). Balram notices that even in highly developed cities, there are slum areas similar to Laxmangarh. These slum areas are inhabited by people, like Balram, escaping from the India of Darkness, seeking a new life in the India of Light: The poor bastards had come from Darkness to Delhi to find some light — but they were still in the darkness. Hundreds of them, there seemed to be, on either side of the traffic, and their life was entirely unaffected by the jam (116).

Due to the changing realities of the new globalized India, we find people deserting their villages, leaving their families and migrating to the big cities, such as New Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore, in search of jobs and a better future. They leave in order to survive and support their families back home, but, as Adiga demonstrates, they are, unfortunately, blackmailed, forced to work in inhuman conditions, humiliated, and exploited by their employers. Here, Adiga sheds light on the inhuman working conditions of the poor people in New Delhi; they are deprived of their basic human rights of decent living and proper working conditions. As David Allen and Bryan Husted point out, each year, millions of people are leaving the India of Darkness to come to the India of Light, where poverty is seen as “a medieval master who puts each human being against every other and where men and women are slaves to landlords" (2010, 299).

Balram represents such people as, through his journey of discovery, he is shown to encounter forces which try to exploit, humiliate, and rob him of his identity and humanity. For example, when Pinky
Madam kills a child in a car accident while drunk driving, he is forced to sign a statement accepting full responsibility for the accident:

TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN, I, BALRAM HALWAI, SON OF VIKRAM HALWAI, OF LAXMANGARH VILLAGE IN THE DISTRICT OF GAYA, DO MAKE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT OF MY OWN FREE WILL AND INTENTION: THAT I DROVE THE CAR THAT HIT AN UNIDENTIFIED PERSON, OR PERSONS, OR PERSON AND OBJECTS, ON THE NIGHT OF JANUARY 23RD THIS YEAR.....I SWEAR BY ALMIGHTY GOD THAT MAKE THIS STATEMENT UNDER NO DURESS AND UNDER INSTRUCTION FROM NO ONE. (143)

No one reports the death of a child to the police, which is fortunate for Balram who otherwise would have been imprisoned for a crime he did not commit, like many others who are imprisoned for the sake of their masters: "The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle-class masters" (145). The accident episode is an eye-opening experience for Balram who realizes the falseness and cruelty of the so-called justice system. This incident shows us the way in which poor workers can be blackmailed and exploited. It shows them to be owned like slaves by their masters, as Balram relates: "We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul and arse" (145). He wonders why, in spite of having so much money, the rich still treat "us like animals" (176). The incident also introduces the problem of child labor, which involves children leaving their villages, alone, to work in big cities like New Delhi, living under bridges without anyone to care for them, like the one killed by Pinky Madam, whose parents are not around to register a complaint or report the loss of their child. The discrimination, degradation, and depravation Balram experiences in the India of Light is further illustrated when he is prevented from entering a shopping mall because of his class:

If he walked into the mall someone would say "Hey, That man is a paid driver! What’s he doing in here?" There were guards in grey uniforms on every floor — all of them seemed to be watching me. It was my first taste of the fugitive’s life (128)

The mall guards also prevent Balram’s fellow drivers from entering the mall, and he relates how they are recognized from their attire:

The guard at the door had stopped him. He pointed his stick at the man’s feet and shook his head—the man had sandals on his feet. All of us drivers too had sandals on our feet. But everyone who was allowed into the mall had shoes on their feet...The man in sandals exploded, “Am I not a human being too?” (125).

Class discrimination makes Balram feel isolated and alienated within his own country. Thorat and Neuman (2012) suggest that this is a deliberate policy adopted by the upper classes in order to perpetuate the subordination of the lower classes and prevent their social mobility. Even the builders who work on the rising towers of New Delhi are not allowed to have a look at what they have just built. The ill treatment of the poor is further illustrated when Mukesh insults Balram for not being able to find a rupee coin he loses while getting out of the car. Mukesh has just bribed someone with half a million rupees, and so the loss of a rupee is not the issue. It is about mistrust of Balram and the fear that if he is capable of stealing one rupee, he may also steal millions. This is reflected in Mukesh’s humiliation of Balram:

“Get down on your knees. Look for it on the floor of the car.” I got down on my knees. I sniffed in between the mats like a dog, all in search of that one rupee.
“What do you mean, it’s not there? Don’t think you can steal from us just because you’re in the city. I want that rupee.” “We’ve just paid half a million rupees in a bribe, Mukesh, and now we’re screwing this man over for a single rupee. Let’s go up and have a scotch.” “That’s how you corrupt servants. It starts with one rupee. Don’t bring your American ways here.” (117)

By humiliating Balram and treating him like a dog, Mukesh wants to teach his son, Ashok, that a servant cannot be trusted, and any incident, even minor, should not be taken for granted. This same attitude towards servants is demonstrated when they are given a list of do’s and don’ts: Balram, for instance, is told never to switch on the AC or play music when he is alone. In another incident, servants are shown to be the subject of their masters’ ridicule, which is designed to break them down psychologically, but is also shown to help suppress their masters’ own sense of inferiority. For instance, Ashok and Pinky Madam make fun of Balram’s poor command of English when he mispronounces the word “moll”:

“It is not maal, it’s a mall” he said. “Say it again.” I kept saying “Maal,” and they kept asking me to repeat it, and then giggled hysterically each time I did so. By the end they were holding hands again. So some good came out of my humiliation. (124)

Balram’s humiliation seems to be a source of amusement for Ashok and his wife as well as an opportunity to patch up their marital differences, as indicated by their “holding hands again” (124). Balram also has to undertake all kinds of humiliating, menial jobs, such as massaging his master, carrying cash bribes to politicians, and entertaining the men by bringing them women and drinks. In The White Tiger, Adiga also exposes the corrupt nature of the Indian political system, which he portrays as being steeped in bribery. Balram is shown to discover that the secrets of prosperity and success in the India of Light are based on bribery, murder, the ability to abscond from judicial proceedings, and opportunism, rather than the prayers and Gandhian values Indian children are generally brought up on. He learns the bitter reality of the new globalized India while driving Mr. Ashok to Delhi, where he witnesses him evading tax payments related to his coal mines by bribing officials. He notices that the rich people go to New Delhi to settle their black money while the poor go to the city in search of a better economic life (Hussein, 2012).

The wealth of the Indian nation is notably wasted by the politicians who receive Mr. Ashok’s bribes. From his master’s corrupt practices Balram concludes that “The history of the world is the history of a ten-thousand-year war of brains between the rich and the poor. Each side is eternally trying to hoodwink the other side” (217). It is the eternal struggle between the rich and the poor where one eats or gets eaten up. Balram’s class consciousness makes him keen to move out of the India of Darkness, represented by the “Rooster Coop” where people are, metaphorically speaking, caged like chickens without equal and basic human rights. Balram compares the rooster coop to the market in Old Delhi: Go to Old Delhi, behind the Jama Masjid, and look at the way they keep chickens there in the market. Hundreds of pale hens and brightly colored roosters, stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they’re next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with human beings in this country (147). The poor are aware that they are merely roosters who guard the coop until it is their turn to be chopped up and eaten. They are still trapped in the coop because they do not have the courage to rise up against their masters. Being afraid for the safety of their families makes them mental and physical slaves to the system of servitude: the Indian family, is the reason we are trapped and tied
to the coop. . . . only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed — hunted, beaten, and burned alive by masters— can break out of the coop. That would take no normal human being, but a freak, a pervert of nature. (150)

It seems to take an extraordinary human being, like Balram, to break out of the rooster coop in order to seek dignity and freedom. Balram refuses to accept his lot, to stay caged up, and this, coupled with his years of suffering injustice and inequality, is the reason for his violent breakout. For Balram, the only option seems to be to kill and steal from his master. It seems the only way left to make it in the New India: “I was looking for the key for years, but the door was always open” (228). Adiga gives us insight into Balram’s deep psyche when he begins to plan to kill and steal from Ashok: Go on, just look at the red bag, Balram — that’s not stealing, is it? I shook my head. And even you were to steal it, Balram, it wouldn’t be stealing. How so? I looked at the creature in the mirror. See Mr. Ashok is giving money to all these politicians in Delhi so that they will excuse him from the tax he has to pay. And who owns that tax, in the end? Who but the ordinary people of this country — you! (208) Adiga also depicts servants exploiting their masters, which is born of anger, rage, and revenge. They know that the India of Light thrives only on the natural resources stolen from the India of Darkness, which belongs only to them. For them, it is only a small redemption for what has been stolen from them: “The more I stole from him, the more I realized how much he had stolen from me” (230). In the final chapters, Balram kills Mr. Ashok, steals his money and settles in Bangalore as a successful entrepreneur working in a call center for drivers. Through murder, Balram seeks his freedom and a new identity in the India of Light: “I have switched sides: I am now one of those who cannot be caught in India...I’ve made it! I’ve broken out of the coop! ... I’ll never say I made a mistake that night in Delhi when I slit my master’s throat” (275-6).

The killing of Mr. Ashok and the stealing of his money suggests that people huddled in the coop will finally break out of it as Balram has done. It also indicates that freedom has a price, and that it takes conscious effort to dismantle the structures of servitude, inequality, oppression, and privation (Rahman, 2011). Balram’s breakout is not ostensibly a smooth transition, but a revolutionary one, implying that those trapped in the India of Darkness will not be silenced forever; their voices will no longer be sold out and their future will not be compromised. It is also a symbolic message to say that if the poor are not given equal place in the new globalized India, they will take the law into their own hands, carving out a place for themselves, exactly as Balram does. Furthermore, the killing indicates that the system of servitude is falling apart and poverty, slavery, and corruption should thus be eliminated from Indian society. Balram is unafraid of the consequences of his revolt because he does not want to die as an unknown, poor driver who belongs to the India of Darkness. He is also conscious of the fact that without revolution, people will remain in poverty and misery in the India of Darkness forever. For Balram, signs of revolt and revolution are imminent as he sees men discuss, talk and read by the dim light of Delhi: I saw hundreds that night, under trees, shrines, intersections, on beaches, squinting at newspapers, holy books, journals, Communist Party pamphlets. What were they reading about? What were they talking about? But what else? Of the end of the world. And if there is blood on the streets-I asked the city-do you promise that he’ll be th first to go- that man with the fat folds under his neck? (188-9).

Freedom from servitude does not seem, thus, to require a miracle, only awareness and consciousness, and that is summed up in Balram’s words: “I was looking for the key for years. But the door was always open”(228). It is the key of freedom, justice, equality, and emancipation from servitude, which is hidden by man’s ignorance and lack of courage. It seems that enlightened and conscious people, like Balram, will not stand the ugliness of servitude and will live in dignity, but those who are dormant will be like
"Hippos lie in mud and do nothing—that's their nature" (237). Finally, Adiga’s The White Tiger can be seen to be a realistic, unflattering, and eye-opening presentation of the New India on the brink of unrest. It presents a warning that the New India will not be able to move ahead without solving the pressing problems of servitude, poverty, and political and social corruption. Only then, we can talk about "Shining India," setting an example for other nations to follow. Thinking of himself as a rare white tiger among his generation, Balram succeeds in what seems to be the impossible: breaking free from the chains of servitude, poverty, and inferiority in order to survive and make it: "I've made it! I've broken out of the coop" (275).

4-Conclusion:

One may conclude that through his fictional character, Balram, Adiga deconstructs the three pillars of the New India: enterprise, democracy, and justice, which turn out to be mere clichés obscuring the reality that its foundations are in fact economic, social, and political corruption, and a culture of servitude. He is keen to get the view across that, in spite of India’s economic prosperity and growth, the vast majority of its population are living in shocking poverty. In other words, The White Tiger serves as a mirror reflecting the fact that, despite its claims of a booming economy, India is not “shining” and still lives closer to the darkness. Moreover, Adiga’s The White Tiger renders a harsh critique of the impact of globalization on the poor, in terms of its exacerbation of inequality and injustice in the form of the class struggle in India. It throws “a terrible light on the darkness and the creatures it produces” (Rennison, 2010, 5), and presents a warning that servitude and poverty, intensified by globalization, will inevitably turn people into monsters, like Balram, poor, marginalized, and down-trodden people will not wait long to take what they believe to be rightfully theirs. In the absence of equality, justice, and a more equal distribution of wealth and resources, there will always be Balrams ready to take the law into their own hands, and to destroy in order to survive and “make it”. For them, acts of subversion are the only means of asserting their identity and place in the New India. Furthermore, it seems that the division of Indian society into two countries: the India of Light and the India of Darkness, due to globalization and servitude, will consequently lead to an inevitable collision of the classes. Therefore, to fix the economic disparities and lift up the millions of Indians who live in extreme poverty should be a part of any serious government plan to address India’s growing problems. Finally, for Aravind Adiga, it seems that a politically, economically, and socially corrupt system that fails to provide social justice, can be seen to breed destruction and anarchy. To avert this, we need to create a decent world based on equality, respect, and dignity where "humans can live like humans and animals can live like animals" (273).


3- In the 80s, the government led by Rajiv Gandhi has adopted a policy of economic liberalization in India and promoted the growth of the telecommunications and software industries.

4- In the 1990s, the Finance Minister, Manmohan Singh has carried out several structural reforms that liberalized India's economy and adopted several measures which prove to be successful in alleviating India's economic crisis. 5- By the time of the elections in 2004, the Bharatiya Janata Party shifts its position away from protectionism toward globalization and its electoral campaign has recommended increasing foreign investment in certain important sectors.

6- Aravind Adiga begins his journalistic career at the Financial Times and Time. He has covered the stock market and financial news. His debut novel, *The White Tiger*, has won the 2008 Booker Prize. He is the fourth Indian-born author to win the prize, after Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai.


12- Gurgaon is a leading financial and industrial city of India, situated in the National Capital Region near the Indian capital New Delhi in the state of Haryana.

13- Child labor is a practice of letting children work. The practice deprives them of their childhood, and is harmful to their physical and mental development. The causes of child labor can be attributed to rising

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Globalization. New York:
Kafala System and its impact on Migrant Laborers in Benyamin Daniel’s *Goat Days*

Abstract

In this paper, we try to examine the mistreatment, enslavement, forced labor, violence, and persecution meted out against Indian migrant laborers in Saudi Arabia. We also attempt to explain the Kafala, system of sponsorship, its mechanism, and how migrant laborers like the protagonist of Benyamin’s *Goat Days*, Najeeb Muhammad, become victims to such system. This study sheds light not only on Najeeb’s dehumanizing confinement, fear, mental agony, and physical torture but also on his resistance and rebellion against his own enslavement. It concludes that the story of Najeeb underscores the pressing need for the government of Saudi Arabia to reform the Kafala sponsorship system to prevent the exploitation of vulnerable migrant laborers and to ensure decent, safe working and living conditions for them. These reforms should be enforced by monitoring sponsors who would ensure that violators are persecuted. It is also an obligation shared by the migrant laborers’ sending countries which should create awareness among migrant laborers about the working conditions laws, benefits and rights expected in the Gulf States to avoid persecution and slavery like Najeeb. This study concludes that Najeeb’s narrative of slavery in Saudi Arabia harms its image and holy status as an enlightening minaret of Islam and its loving and peaceful religious teachings that do not permit slavery, oppression, exploitation and humiliation. Keywords: Goat Days, Benyamin Daniel, Migrant Laborers, Kafala System, slavery.

1. Introduction

After the discovery of oil, the Gulf States witnessed a tremendous influx of Indian migrant laborers. As a result, development programs which focus on providing schools, hospitals, improvement of transport and communication were taken up. This resulted in “a spurt in demand for not only highly skilled technical experts but also for semi-skilled and unskilled workers.” (Abhyankar, 2008, p.182). Historically speaking, Indian laborers have constituted a central pillar in supporting the British Empire. Millions of Indian laborers were shipped to the British colonies all over the world between 1830 and 1920. (Howard,
Indian laborers were also sent to replace the freed slaves working on the cotton and sugar plantations of the West Indies. Gabi Afram writes that there was “an early Indian migration of unskilled labor to work on mines and plantations in British colonies.” (2012, p. xii). It was a systematic policy adopted by the British Empire to recruit Indians not only to serve the British Empire as laborers but also as soldiers. Indian soldiers were used heavily in this capacity during the First World War, 1914–1918. (Beckett, 2014). The discovery of oil was instrumental in establishing Arab Gulf States which were supervised, monitored, and protected by the British Empire in its own power struggles against Ottoman and German interests. (Kamrava, 2005). More recently, the British Empire has been replaced by American economic and political interests which have played a prominent role in reshaping the political map of the Gulf States and particularly Saudi Arabia. (Edwards, 2014). After the oil boom in the 1970s, Arab Gulf states witnessed unprecedented waves of migrant laborers seeking jobs and a better life. It is reported that the “labor migration to the petroleum-rich states of the Arabian Peninsula comprises the third-largest transnational migration flow in the contemporary world.” (Gardner et al., 2013, p.2).

The Gulf War in 1990, created instability driving Arab laborers out of the region. For example, Palestinians were driven out of Kuwait due to their so called implicit political support to Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait. (Hassan, 1999). Asian laborers, including Indians, migrated to the Gulf States to fill this gap. According to the latest statistics, there are almost fifteen million migrant laborers in the Gulf States coming mostly from Asian, African, and Arab countries. (Gardner et al., 2013). Ninety five percent of Indian migrant laborers are concentrated in six countries in the Middle East, namely Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and Kuwait. Saudi Arabia has, in fact, become a primary destination and attracted large numbers of Indian migrant laborers. This migration to Saudi Arabia may be attributed to political crises, poverty, and unemployment in their country of origin-India. In 1994, Saudi Arabia received sixty-five percent of annual labor outflow from India.(Cortina & Ochoa-Reza, 2013). There are an estimated two and a half million Indian migrant laborers in the Gulf, the majority of them hail from Kerala. However, what makes Kerala account for the largest number of Indian migrant laborers is “the need for low skill laborers where most of the Kerala laborers happen to be young, unmarried, less educated, and unemployed or underemployed.”(Parekh, Singh, & Vertovec, 2003, p.119). Saudi Arabia represents the world’s largest contributors of foreign exchange remittances to India where money sent, particularly by migrant laborers from Kerala, accounts for fifteen percent of the total financial remittances sent to India. (Kumaraswamy, 2012). Money that migrant laborers send home is not only important to their families but it also helps sustain their country’s economy. According to Ayuk-Taylor, H., et.al, “remittances earned in Saudi Arabia contribute heavily to supporting the economy of migrant workers’ source countries, often accounting for a large proportion of their annual Gross National Product.” (2014, p.53). In 2011, remittances represented three percent of India’s GNP (Cortina & Ochoa-Reza, 2013). India’s share in outward remittances has been increasing. “With more than US$1.58 billion in official outward remittances in 2008, India is fast becoming a large remittance-sending country”. (Afram, 1912, p. 87). This may construe why countries, like India, often ignore violations committed against its overseas citizens fearing that any real protest may harm bilateral economic and political relations between sending countries such as, India and Gulf States. Instead, India has adopted a policy which encourages migrant labor export due to the financial benefits of the remittances sent by migrant laborers. (Vlieger, 2012).

2- The Status of Migrant laborers in the Gulf States
Despite the valuable role that migrant laborers play in developing and sustaining the economies of the Gulf States, they face inequality, exploitation, exclusion, forced labor slavery, abuse, human enslavement, brutality, and dehumanization. (Kymlicka, W., & Pföstl, E., 2014).

Migrant laborers spend years separated from their families where they work in extremely low paid jobs and dehumanizing living conditions. Their passports are held by their sponsors according to the laws of the sponsorship system; thereby, it further limits their travel out of the country. The legal framework that “regulates both the ownership of businesses and the employment of non-citizen labor is known as the Kafala.” (Kymlicka, W., & Pföstl, E., 2014, p.177).

Kafala fosters and facilitates exploitation, slavery, miserable living conditions, and low wages for migrant workers due to the fact that the migrant’s legal ability to live and work in the Gulf States solely depends on a single sponsor or employer. Moreover, Kafala is a binding system which denies migrant laborers the right to get transferred from abusive sponsors who, in return, report them to the government as trouble makers and absconders, in a way which could make migrant workers risk losing their legal status and could make them liable to deportation. Irudaya Rajan argues that there is a large number of undocumented migrant laborers “due to the malpractices of the employers such as refusal to release the passport or denial of consent to switch jobs.” (2014, p.21). Migrant laborers are facing further exploitation and humiliation at the hands of sponsors following the global financial crisis, reduction of jobs, and wage manipulation. Migrant workers are heavily exploited as they accept lower wages from what was agreed upon earlier. This is because according to the Saudi laws of labor, “the only contracts with legal validity are those written in Arabic. The contract must include the agreed-upon terms of employment, and must be in writing, drawn up in Arabic and in duplicate, one copy to be retained by each of the parties.” (Sherry, 2004, p.20). Only contracts that are written in Arabic are valid, while contracts written in another language are not recognized as valid. Consequently, this may lead to wage exploitation since migrant laborers sign contracts in their home countries that often include different provisions, benefits and wages than those signed once they arrive in the host country. Employment contracts usually include articles about working, living conditions, wages, deductions, and costs; additionally, recruitment agencies tend to provide false information to migrant laborers concerning the basic conditions of their work and contracts. Migrant laborers are often forced to sign a new Arabic contract without knowing and understanding its provisions and content. (Ayuk-Taylor et al., 2014).

3- Revisiting the Kafala System and its Impact on Migrant Laborers in Benyamin Daniel’s Goat Days

Although South Asian migrant laborers and their experiences constitute a prominent phenomenon in the Gulf States, there is a dearth of fictional literature which examines the painful predicament of South Asian migrant laborers and their dehumanizing working conditions. This may account for the importance of this critical study of Benyamin Daniel’s novel, Goat Days. The novel explores the experiences of Najeeb Muhammad, an Indian migrant worker, living and working in Saudi Arabia. It also reflects on the urgency of tackling migrant laborers’ painful experiences in diasporic fictional works. In this paper, the author examine the mistreatment, enslavement, forced labor, violence, and persecution meted out against Indian migrant laborers in Saudi Arabia. I also attempt to explain the system of sponsorship, its mechanism, and the way migrant laborers like the protagonist of Benyamin’s Goat Days, Najeeb Muhammad, become victims to such system. This study also tries to uncover the gripping and painful reality that lies behind the façade of employment in the Gulf States. Benyamin’s Goat Days is based on a true story about a migrant laborer who is found in Saudi Arabia after being assumed missing for a long
time. Benyamin writes that when he heard about Naejeb, he “decided to meet him—not because I thought it was a good story but through sheer curiosity. This man had been through so much and after a while it felt like it became my duty to tell the world about people like him, living their lives in such suffering and pain” (East, 2013, p.1). Benyamin’s Goat Days examines the life of Naejeb who dreams, like other South East Asian migrant laborers, to work in the Gulf States, earn money, and send it to their families at home. Unfortunately, Naejeb has to go through painful experiences where he finds himself working as a slave laborer taking care of goats at a goat farm in the middle of the Saudi Arabian desert at the mercy of a cruel sponsor or Arbab. It portrays Naejeb’s struggles to survive and the challenges that he faces in his journey from slavery to freedom where he fights for his own emancipation. (Waheed, 2012). Naejeb narrates his route from Kerala to Riyadh and from Riyadh to the Saudi Arabian desert in his quest for economic betterment.

Benyamin’s Goat Days sheds light on the plight of a South East Asian migrant laborer who may have worked for years in the Gulf States, learned Arabic, but who will never be given the right to apply for citizenship as would be the case in many other countries. As a result of “the stringent naturalization and citizenship laws prevalent in the gulf countries, it is almost impossible for any immigrant to become a citizen of any Gulf country.”(Parekh, et al., 2003, p.119). Denying migrant laborers citizenship means that they have no political rights, and this creates a huge gap between natural citizens and migrant laborers. This policy of exclusion has alienated migrant laborers in the Gulf States. A majority of the migrant laborers are seen as strangers and foreigners who work in humiliating conditions without legal rights. These circumstances worsened after the global financial crisis (Rajan, 2014). In Goat Days, Benyamin renders that the peripheral and marginal voices of migrant laborers and their plight. It presents a critique of the helplessness of migrant laborers who find themselves trapped in the Gulf States while simultaneously exposing the dark side of the Gulf prosperity which can, otherwise, be seen only as a good example of modern urbanity. (Pal, 2012). As a prelude, Naejeb’s journey to Saudi Arabia is fraught with difficulties starts with him selling everything that he has to secure the required amount of money to travel and finish visa procedures conducted by an agent in Bombay. Migrant laborers usually enter the labor market in Saudi Arabia through recruitment agencies, “which uniformly charge fees to handle the labor contracts, traveling arrangements, basic job training, and other issues related to the their employment in the country”. (Ayu-Taylor et al., 2014, p.54). Naejeb narrates the process that every Indian migrant laborer to the Gulf has to go through to obtain a visa: “The very next day, I went and my friend’s brother-in-law. He asked for thirty thousand—twenty to be given to him within a fortnight before he left for the Gulf. He had to give to the Arab to process the visa. After getting the visa, the remaining ten had to be given to the agent in Bombay for the ticket and other expenses. That was not an amount that I could put together without difficulty. Still, daringly, I agreed. Yes.” (p.37)

Naejeb struggles to secure the amount needed to obtain a visa. He solves this issue by “mortgaging the house and the little amount of gold Sainu had as jewelry, and by collecting small amounts from other sand miners and by borrowing from everyone I knew. Yes, ‘fix up’ best describes it.” (p.37). There are several testimonies rendered to human rights organizations from migrant laborers who have entered Saudi Arabia legally and paid lots of money to recruitment agencies in their home countries to secure legal working visas. (Batty, 2014).They either sell their properties back home or assume heavy debts to meet the costs of working visas. Unfortunately, once they are in the kingdom, Virginia Sherry argues, migrant laborers find themselves “at the mercy of legal sponsors and de facto employers who had the
power to impose oppressive working conditions on them, with effective government oversight clearly lacking. Unaware of their rights, or afraid to complain for fear of losing their jobs, the majority of these workers simply endured gross labor exploitation. (2004, p.2).

For Najeeb, and those that he represents, his journey is a dream which is about to be fulfilled where he can work in the Gulf and secure a better economic future for his family: “I dreamt a host of dreams. Perhaps the same stock dreams that the 1.4 million Malayalis in the gulf had when they were in Kerala—gold watch, fridge, TV, car, tape recorder, VCP, a heavy gold chain.” (p.38). Najeeb’s excitement and joy on hearing the news that his visa is ready may have exceeded the joy of thousands of Indian migrant laborers working in the Gulf. “Finally, the telegram from the agent in Bombay arrived: ‘Visa ready. Come with the balance amount.’ The joy that I experienced then! It was greater than the joy of the tens of thousands of Malayalis who had reached the Gulf before me, I am sure.” (p. 38). Indian Migrant laborers are arguably lured by stories of success coming from the Gulf States which loom larger than the painful reality of migrants who live in constant humiliation and subject them to slave-like conditions. Migrant laborers travel to Gulf States seeking opportunities which turn out to be merely traps for them. They usually come back home with nothing but painful memories of the land which crushed their dreams and forced them to live in servitude. Similarly, Najeeb’s harrowing experience in Saudi Arabia has betrayed and shattered his dreams. When Najeeb, especially, recalls these moments, he feels “nauseated as though from the stench of a fourth-rate film scene.” (p. 39). The events in Benyamin’s Goat Days are narrated to us in a flashback, begin at a Sumesi prison. It is a place where migrant laborers end up after escaping from their abusive sponsors. “Many migrant labourers flee their employers after finding out they are cheated or mistreated. They hand themselves down to police where they are deported back home in the general amnesty that the government offered for undocumented foreign workers (Sherry, 2004, p.22). Sumesi prison is a place where Najeeb voluntarily resorts to as an escape from the brutal treatment of his sponsor since there is no other place for him to go. Najeeb describes the Sumesi prison blocks which are divided according to nationality. “One block for each nationality—Arabs, Pakistanis, Sudanese, Ethiopians, Bangladeshis, Filipinos, Moroccans, Sri Lankans, and then, finally, Indians. Most of the Indians were surely Malayalis. Naturally, we were taken to the Indian block.” (p.11). Najeeb enjoys his freedom in prison compared to the life he had before with his abusive sponsor: “For him jail provided relief from the suffering he had been enduring. For many, it was inconceivable to return to the Arabs who had been torturing them. They must have endured so many beatings before they reached the jail.”(p.22).

For Najeeb, Sumesi prison had become a sanctuary compared to the terrible life he had before. We find Najeeb justify his voluntary imprisonment as an indicator to his previous terrible sufferings: “Can you imagine how much suffering I must have endured to voluntarily choose imprisonment?” (12). This shows how Najeeb’s previous life had “subverted his idea of confinement and freedom.” (Rajasekaran& Jose, 2015, p.81). Therefore, life in prison not only represented a new kind of freedom for Najeeb and Hameed but also an eye opening experience that they were not the only victims of the dark side of being a migrant laborer in Saudi Arabia. Najeeb says, “Everyone who ended up in the jail had a similar story like mine to tell—of pain, sorrow, suffering, tears, innocence, and helplessness” (p.20). Stories of the other migrants in Sumesi prison gave Najeeb some sense of psychological relief and liberation. Migrant laborers usually abscond from their abusive sponsors to prisons from where they get deported back to their home countries. Normally, sponsors would search for migrant absconders at hospitals and prisons for two months before they register a complaint with the police and give up the search.
A migrant laborer’s worst fear was to get retrieved from the prison by their abusive sponsors and sent back to work. In Goat Days, Benyamin sheds light on the Kafala system and how laws are manipulated by Arab sponsors to enslave migrant laborers on parade days: The Arab enjoyed more freedom in a foreign land. On these parade days, any Arab could freely move around the Sumesi prison if he carried a paper showing that he had registered a complaint in a police station. If he managed to find his absconding slave, he could drag him out and present him before the jail warden and submit his petition to him. The nature of the case would change. The man who was in prison for a petty case would be turned into a criminal offender (p.22). Therefore, we find that sponsors take migrant prisoners back without any human consideration; instead, they shouting accusations at them such as “he ran away after stealing my money; he tried to rape my daughter; he tried to kill me.

The prisoner’s face would reflect the abjection of a goat being led to a slaughter.”(p.22). Sponsors are empowered by the Kafala system which grants them the right to hold a migrant laborer’s fate in their hands. According to the Kafala system, any migrant laborer is denied a work permit in the Gulf States without a local sponsorship or Kaif. Migrant workers “cannot enter Saudi Arabia for work without a local guarantor or sponsor, which can be an individual, a government agency, or a private institution.” (Ayuk-Taylor et al. 2014, p.55). Once the employment sponsorship expires or gets terminated, migrant laborers must leave the country at their own expense as they immediately become illegal residents. The kafala system ties a migrant laborers’ ability to live and work in the host country to the permission of their sponsor. Consequently, it denies them the opportunity to seek alternative employment. Sponsors usually cover the expenses of migrant laborers such as recruitment documentation and medical exams. Due to the large amounts that they pay to recruitment agents, sponsors oppose the abolition of the sponsorship system. Therefore, sponsors hold their passports, wages, and subject them to cruel working conditions. Migrant laborers who protest and are unhappy with their poor working conditions expose themselves to food deprivation, physical abuse, isolation, the risk of losing their jobs or even being falsely charged and deported. (Waheed, 2012). Benyamin sheds light on the collaboration and complicity among sponsors, Saudi prison officials and courts and how they all operate without respect to the rule of law and human rights. For instance, the Sumesi prison is described by Najeeb as a place where “the prisoners, lying down in whatever space they could manage, resembled dead bodies laid out after a natural disaster.” (p. 13). Najeeb narrates his most terrifying moments on the weekly “Parade Day” at Sumesi prison when Arab sponsors are called to identify their absconding migrant laborers. The day for the Arabs to identify the absconding workers—a tearfilled day in prison.

On that day, after breakfast, all of us were made to stand in a line outside the block. Arabs would walk in front of us looking at each of us carefully, like eyewitnesses trying to identify the accused. There would be a few unfortunate ones among us each week. The first reaction of the Arab who recognized his worker was to land a slap that could pop an eardrum. Some even unbuckled their belts to whip the prisoners till their anger subsided. (p. 21). The prison system is strongly linked to the Kafala system. It is actually founded to supervise and monitor migrant laborers. The identification parade exposes the pitiable condition of migrant laborers who “bear the scars of a traumatic past, and an unknown fear of a ghastly future that awaits them.” (Tasseen & Mohsin, 2015, p.308). However, when Najeeb arrives at Saudi Arabia, we see him waiting at the airport for his sponsor to come and take him where he is destined to work and live like a slave in the masara. Najeeb tells his own story of working at the goat farm in the desert where he encounters an awful reality which is completely different from the shining dreams that he shared with his wife, Sainu. Najeeb is disillusioned when he lands in Saudi Arabia and
finds out that he is an alien to the land and is new to the profession of a shepherd, tending goats in a desert land. (Fernandez, 2014).

He has to sleep miserably on the ground at the goat farm without bed and cover. Najeeb sums up his first night in the Gulf as a disaster. My back ached. I smiled at the emptiness. What dreams I had had! An AC car, an AC room, a soft mattress with a TV in front of it! I laughed. What else could I do in my present condition? No one else could have realized how far my dreams were the reality of my situation. My first night in the Gulf was such a fiasco (p.63). Though slavery has been legally abolished in different parts of the world, we find that Najeeb is subject to dehumanizing and slavish working conditions. For Brian Keely, the diaspora has become a new form of slavery. (2009). For example, Najeeb finds himself trapped in the desert and forced to change his living habits and rituals. “The Arbab signaled to me that I should eat. I had not even brushed my teeth in the morning, nor followed any of my morning rituals. I had not taken a bath. Had it been at home, I would not even drink coffee without first dunking into the river- even when it rained.” (p.68). Najeeb is forced to violate his hygienic habits like brushing his teeth and bathing. “But that day, for the first time, I violated all my hygiene rules. I had drunk milk without brushing my teeth. Hunger for one and a half days forced me to ignore my habits. I sat outside the tent and greedily ate the new dish called khubus, even though I had nothing to dip it in or to smear it with.” (pp.68–9). Najeeb’s meals consist of bread, milk, and water. Besides this, there are constraints on cleanliness due to lack of water. He finds himself in unbearable situations where he has to clean himself with stones after defecation. “I had never faced such a predicament in my life .... The harshest for me was this ban on sanitation.” (p.78). Najeeb’s sponsor’s main priority is to ensure that the work is done. He is not concerned about the comfort or discomfort of his laborer. He says, “The Arbab cared only about my work, not my discomforts”. (p.94). His abusive behavior drives Najeeb to question the hospitality of Arabs, “Is this the legendary Arab hospitality that I have heard about? What kind of Arbab are you, my Arbab? Don’t deceive me. In you rests my future. In you rest my hopes.” (p.59). Benyamin’s Goat Days is not only about Najeeb’s confinement but also about his fear, mental agony, and physical torture. Najeeb clearly understands that displaying the gun and binoculars is to be taken as an explicit message by his sponsor that any attempt to escape will only result in death. Both these objects instill fear in Najeeb to the extent that he succumbs to his sponsor’s brutal abuse in the desert. When it comes to physical abuse, we find Najeeb persecuted and lashed by his sponsor for anything seen as a violation of the rules of goat farm such as using water and not separating new born goats from their mothers. “I felt a lash on my back. I cringed at the impact of their sudden smack. I turned around in shock. It was the Arbab, his eyes burning with rage. I did not understand. What was my mistake? Any slip-up in my work? Did I commit some blunder?”(p.77).

Benyamin shows through his character, Najeeb, how migrant labors are enslaved, imprisoned, and persecuted in Saudi Arabia. Najeeb experiences moments of anxiety, fear, boredom, and sickness. He feels that the years he spent in Saudi Arabia are extracted from his life since time appears to literally stop for him. He is merely waiting for something to happen which would allow him to escape out of his slavery. This means that he has to spend a total of three years merely waiting for a miracle to happen since he is isolated in the desert from any human and social contact. At the same time, Najeeb is fully aware of the fact that anxiety and fear are useless and would endanger his life; therefore, he must adapt to his new environment in order to survive. Anxiety and worry were futile. That world had become alien to me. Now only my sad new world existed for me. I am condemned to the conditions of this world. I have fallen headlong into the anxieties of it, and it is better to identify with the here and now. That was
the only way to somehow survive. Otherwise, my growing anxieties would have killed me or my sorrows drowned me. May be this was how everyone who got trapped here survived, no? (p.95).

This undying urge to survive has boosted his courage in the face of adversity. However, one of the most tragic aspects of the situation of migrant laborers is that they silently accept the exploitation, oppression, and deprivation of their legal rights because they view themselves as powerless humans in a foreign country. In such condition, Virginia Sherry writes, migrant laborers arrive in Saudi Arabia ignorant of “the rights they have under existing Saudi law and the actions they can take when inequities and mistreatment occur” (2004, p.5).

4- The Urge to Rebel

Benyamin’s Goat Days is not only about the dehumanizing condition of Najeeb but also about his resistance and rebellion against his own slavery. When it comes to the mechanism used by Najeeb to resist his own solitary confinement and inhumane conditions, it is done by the virtue of his inner psychological strength, adaptation and strong faith in God. Such a mechanism is instrumental in his survival and return: “I would often wonder how I survived for such a long time in that scorching heat without even a drop of water and with no rest at all. The two factors that helped me through that phase were my desire to live and my infinite faith in Allah.”(p.119).

It is noticeable that the only means of survival urges left for Najeeb has been the language of brutality of his sponsor, and the language of hope and humanity seen through Najeeb’s communication with goats. Najeeb finds himself living on a goat farm isolated from people and he sums up his plight by saying: “I lived on an alien planet inhabited by some goats, my Arbab and me” (p.125). Najeeb also recounts the painful torment of his slavery since his only companions are the goats. We find him identify with goats on a symbolic level to survive particularly when he is denied any human communication or compassion: “To tell you the truth, I have often felt that goats can understand things better than some humans.” (p.121) Najeeb is deprived of any human communication and only finds goats to interact with. He gradually develops a strong familial bond with the goats as seen when he names the new born goat, Nabeel—the name he has picked for his own unborn son. For Shaista Taskeen and Syed Mohsin, Najeeb has assigned “human characteristics to these goats who shared his loneliness. He scolded the goats, cuddled them and adored them like his family.” (2015, p. 310). He finds himself in a situation where he has to sleep and live like the goats he shares a home with. He is seen eating the husked wheat which belongs to the goats to the extent that he comes to realize that “I had indeed become a goat.” (p.150).He tells that: Each of them was dear to me in one way or another. Have you ever looked carefully at a goat’s face? It is quite similar to a human’s. I named the goats not only by looking at their faces but also relating their names to some character traits, their gait, the sounds they made, by incidents that reminded me of them. Just as how one gets a nickname back home ... So there were many strange and personal reasons for each name I gave the goats. The logic of the names might be lost on others but they made perfect sense to me (pp. 161–162).

For Najeeb, the goats become symbols of his survival, inner yearning, and longing for home. Najeeb names goats after the names of his children, relatives, and the people in his own town. In this way, Najeeb is able to create a similar home environment where he is able to resist his own solitary confinement and keep his sanity: “It is a craving that makes us hate our present condition. Then, that craving takes the form of a crazy urge to rush home, like a wild boar rushing wildly through sugarcane fields when it’s been shot.” (p.146). Due to the fact that Najeeb is isolated from language, location,
people, and even his sponsor, he creates an environment which helps him sustain his existence and maintain his very humanity. When it comes to faith, we feel Najeeb's spirituality and connection to God in his distress during his work as a slave laborer at a goat farm. Faith has played an instrumental role in his survival: I didn't know if Allah heard me or not. But the belief that Allah was looking after me instilled in me a new confidence ... For me, prayers were my bolt-hole. It was because of faith alone that I could be strong in spirit even when I was weak in my body. Otherwise, I would have withered and burnt like grass in that blazing wind. (p.153).

For Najeeb, God is not only a savior but also a source of confidence to which he turns in dire need. Although Najeeb desperately wants to leave the goat farm, he has no clue as to the map of the area: "I did not know anything about this country, not even about the area I was in. In which direction—east, south, west or north—should I run to find a way out."(p.141). Besides, the disappearance the scary figure whom he met when he arrived at the goat farm and later his death by his Arbab makes Najeeb feel terrified. "It was a human palm! A palm rotting away to the bones. With intense fear and anxiety I started brushing away the sand. I had merely removed a layer of earth when a human skeleton came into view. I was really terrified now." (p.174). The death of the scary figure may also reflect on the issue of the mysterious disappearance of migrant laborers in the Gulf States whose fate is unknown. (Ullah, et al. 2015). Despite overwhelming dangers, Najeeb is determined to escape even if it costs him his life: "[L]et me die at the hands of the Arbab. I cannot take the suffering anymore."

(p.122). He will revolt against his sponsor and his brutal treatment once an opportunity comes: “If you do not use this moment, you might never get a chance like this, ever. You do know that such opportunities do not come again and again. Do it. Escape from this hell somehow. My hand, indeed, moved towards the trigger.”(p.134). Yet, Najeeb stopped short of killing his sponsor once he heard him praying and calling him by his name, Najeeb, for the first time instead of the usual calls, Himar or Inti. “That call of prayer softened my heart. I did not feel like escaping after killing a coward who had been crying for my help. I returned the gun to its place.”(p.134). Later, Najeeb devises alternative ways to survive and return home. He flees with two of his friends, Hakeem and a Somali man who works at a nearby farm. The novel ends with Najeeb’s deportation to India. However, a question still lingers in his mind: does his sponsor not recognize him or has he pretended not to see him at the parade day? He thought, “Either the Arbab had lied to mask the pity he had shown his prey or he had revealed a horrible truth. Wasn’t he my sponsor then? Had he illegally held me captive?” (p.251). These questions which reflect the pathetic situation of migrant laborers in Saudi Arabia are finally summed up by Benyamin’s Goat Days, “This is not just Najeeb’s story, it is real life. A goat’s life.” (p.255)

5- Conclusion

To conclude, in Goat Days, Saudi Arabia is seen through the eyes of migrant laborer, Najeeb Muhammad. The story of Najeeb underscores the pressing need for the government of Saudi Arabia to reform its laws and regulations to prevent the exploitation of vulnerable migrant laborers. Benyamin’s Goat Days highlights the importance of reforming the Kafala sponsorship system which is given precedence over the national and international labor laws. It should also ensure decent and safe working and living conditions of migrant laborers which include: outlawing passport confiscation, respecting contracts and regular payment. These reforms should be enforced by monitoring sponsors and ensuring violators are persecuted. There is also the obligation shared by the migrant laborers'
ending countries such as; India, which should create awareness among migrant laborers about the working laws, benefits and rights expected in the Gulf States to avoid persecution and slavery like in case of Najeeb. Benyamin’s Goat Days conveys a warning message to the Gulf States, in general, and to Saudi Arabia, in particular, that there is a growing public anger nationally and internationally related to the unbearable ordeal of migrant laborers which must come to an end. This study concludes that Najeeb’s narrative of slavery in Saudi Arabia contradicts with its image and holy status as an enlightening minaret of Islam and its loving and peaceful religious teachings that do not permit slavery, oppression, exploitation, humiliation, blackmailing, threatening, breaching of contracts, and violation of human dignity and rights.

Endnotes

1. Kafala is a system used to monitor migrant laborers working mostly in the construction and domestic sectors in the Gulf States.

2. Benyamin’s Goat Days has become a bestseller winning the Kerala Sahitya Academy award and shortlisted for the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature in 2012 and 2013 respectively.

3. Arbab is a Persian word which means boss, master, and landlord.

4. Himar is an Arabic word which means a donkey.

References


**BREAKING SILENCE IN RAJJAALSANE’S GIRLS OF RIYADH**

**ABSTRACT**

In this paper, I would like to examine the status of women in Saudi Arabia and how patriarchy, double moral standards, tribal mentality and social hypocrisy violate their basic human rights as represented in RajaaAlsana’sGirls of Riyadh. The researcher also argues that Al sanea’sGirls of Riyadh can be seen as an awakening call for enhancing and improving women’s rights in Saudi Arabia and visionary in its scope in the light of the Arab Spring which is raging through the Arab world. Feminist, analytical and textual methodology has been used in this paper. KEYWORDS: Feminism, Patriarchy, Religion, Status of Women, Saudi Arabia

**INTRODUCTION**

It seemed to me, and to many other Saudis, that the Western world still perceives us either romantically, as the land of the Arabian Nights and the land where bearded Sheikhs sit in their tents surrounded by their beautiful harem women, or politically, as the land that gave birth to Bin Laden and other terrorists, the land where women are dressed in black from head to toe and where every house has its own oil well in the backyard!1

In this paper, I would like to examine the status of women in Saudi Arabia and how patriarchy, double moral standards, tribal mentality, traditions and social hypocrisy violate their basic human rights as represented in RajaaAlsana’sGirls of Riyadh. I also argue that Al sanea’sGirls of Riyadh can be seen as an awakening call for enhancing and improving women’s rights in Saudi Arabia and visionary in its scope in the light of the Arab Spring2 which is raging through the Arab world. RajaaAlsana’sGirls of Riyadh is not only an endeavor to shatter stereotypes perceived about Saudi women living3 in Saudi Arabia but also sheds light on the status of Saudi women and their struggles to negotiate their survival in a patriarchal, oppressive society still ruled by tribal traditions, customs and misuse of religion. Within this
context, Rajaa Alsanea writes, —The book is not intended to represent all girls in Riyadh but it is designed to draw back the


veil and, —reveal another side of Saudi life to the western world. In this regard, Nawal al-Saadawi stresses the urgent need for:

re-reading of Arab history from the viewpoint of Arab women so they can be aware that the struggle of Arab women against sexual, national, and class oppression is not newly born, and that the Arab women’s movement doesn’t come from the void, and is not modeled on women’s movements in the West, but is evident throughout the course of Arab and Islamic history, extending over fourteen centuries.5

What makes Alsanea’s Girls of Riyadh unique, explosive and illuminating for readers in Saudi Arabia in particular, and the Western world in general, is its daring treatment of urgent issues which are considered taboo in Saudi Arabian society and for giving voice to the voiceless majority of Saudi women by a female voice from within. This may account for banning Al Sanea’s Girls of Reyadh from being published in Saudi Arabia. Within this context, Mariam Abdullah says that Al Sanea’s Girls of Riyadh —caused a ruckus in Saudi Arabia. The novel was banned outright by Saudi courts because it, —ignited vices and subverted the foundations of Saudi literary tradition. In Girls of Riyadh, Al Sanea tackles urgent themes such as love relationships between men and women, gender segregation, the status of the divorced woman and how she is perceived by the Saudi Arabian society, oppressive patriarchal traditions and customs, banning women from driving, the rising number of educated women and their impact on the traditional and conservative life in Saudi Arabia.

BREAKING SILENCE IN RAJAALSANEASThe GIRLS OF RIYADH

Girls of Riyadh starts with a narrator, an unknown girl who is the administrator of a subscribing group on the internet. She has a clear intention to talk about the stories of her girlfriends who are imprisoned behind black walls and whose lives and potential are wasted in the name of rigid conservative traditions
and customs. The narrator does not only give voice to her four girlfriends but also to thousands of women whose stories are marginalized, buried, and never heard about. The unknown girl/ narrator says:

I shall write of my girlfriends, for in each one’s tale I see my story and self prevail, a tragedy my own life speaks. I shall write of my girlfriends, of inmates’ lives sucked dry by jail, and magazine pages that consume women’s time, and of the doors that fail to open. Of desires slain in their cradles I’ll write, of the vast great cell, black walls of travail, of thousands, thousands of martyred, all female, buried, stripped of their names in the graveyard of traditions.7

The unknown girl narrates the stories of her four girlfriends, Gamrah Al-Qusmanji, Sadeem Al- Horaimli, Michelle Al-Abdulrahman and LameesJedda through sending emails to her subscribing group every Friday in Saudi Arabia. By using the internet as an effective means of communication, the narrator’s motivation is to expose the tyranny of life and society against her girlfriends by spreading the word for millions of readers in one second. Alsanea exposes how it is painful to see that men and women are unable to meet, exchange ideas, nurture

4 Ibid,III.


8 For more information on the impact of social media , see, Denis G. Campbell, Egypt Unshackled- Using social media to @#: the System (New York: Cambria Books,2011) 154
friendship and develop their social skills before they are married. In conservative societies like Saudi Arabia, you are not allowed to date a girl or see her before marriage. You have to see her once and decide in the presence of both families. The girl also uses the same opportunity to see the man and make up her mind.

In *Girls of Riyadh*, the narrator starts with the story of Gamrah Al-Qusmanji who gets married to Rashid Al-Tanbal after the *shoufa* where the two families permit the prospective husband to see the girl only once to decide whether he approves of her or not. If he does, it is followed by the official engagement and the signing of the marriage contract which signals the *milakah period* that normally concludes with the wedding ceremony. According to Simone De Beauvoir, —For girls, marriage is the only means of integration in the community, and if they remain unwanted, they are, socially viewed, so much wastage. This is why mothers have always eagerly sought to arrange marriages for them. 12 The narrator continues to describe the Muslim wedding of Gamrah where weddings in Saudi Arabia usually provide a space for older women to scrutinize the young women who might be possible prospective brides for their sons. In return, young women do their best to show their beauty and great manners at weddings in a way to attract the attention of prospective mother-in-laws. Within this context, the narrator says:

> At weddings, receptions and social gatherings where ladies meet, especially the old ladies looking to make a match, you must follow this strategy to the letter: —You barely walk, you barely talk, you barely smile, you barely dance, be mature and wise, you always think before you act, you measure your words carefully before you speak and you do not behave like a child.13

After marriage both Rashid and Gamrah go to Chicago so that Rashid can finish his postgraduate studies in electronic commerce. Seven nights pass and Rashid does not care about his wife’s feelings. He stays away from her and doesn’t even touch her due to the poor advice made by Gamrah’s mother, —Her mother’s Golden Rule was spinning in her mind. Don’t be easy. Refusal – it’s the secret to activating a man’s passion.”14 Citing both cases of Gamrah’s sisters, Nafah and Hessah who did not give themselves to their husbands till the fourth night. Rashid hasn’t touched Gamrah even though she has been quite ready to ditch her mother’s theories after seven nights after feeling that “the policy of withholding had decidedly backfired in this case.”15
Commenting on the role of the mothers in reinforcing patriarchal oppressive traditions and conceptions, Cheryl Rubenberg states that, —it is women who teach girls the rightness or the truth of their traditionally defined roles, responsibilities, relations, and restrictions. Mothers provide their daughters with things that are haram, eib, and mamnoua16Ironically, Gamrah received training in the art of seduction from the same woman, "who had


10 Shoufa is where the two families permit the prospective husband to see the girl only once to decide whether he likes her or not

11 Milkah period’is the official engagement and the signing of the marriage contract.


14 Ibid,6.

15 Ibid,10.

16Cheryl.A.Rubenberg, Palestinian women : Patriarchy and resistance in the West Bank ( USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2001),79
ripped pages out of the romance novels Gamrah used to borrow from her friends at school, and who wouldn’t even let Gamrah go over to her friend’s houses except Sadeem” 17 who knows her family well. It is worthy to note that Arab women are not taught about their bodies and their sexual life. Regardless of age, women enter marriage in complete ignorance of such fundamental issues. Hence, —making love in the sense of being a mutually satisfying pleasurable part of married life is rare. 18 Gamrah tries to seduce her husband, Rashid, after she has waited too long for her true wedding night which unfortunately ends in painful failure.

As long as her husband was so bashful, she would have to help out, smooth the way for him just as her mother had advised her. They went up to their room and she began to flirt with him shyly. After a few moments of innocent seduction, he took things into his own hands. She gave herself up to it despite the enormous confusion and anxiety she felt. She closed her eyes, anticipating what was about to happen. And then he surprised her with an act that was never on her list of sexual expectations. Her response, which was shocking to both of them, was to slap him hard on the face then and there! Their eyes met in a stunned moment. Her eyes were filled with fear and bewilderment, while his were full of an anger the likes of which she had never seen. He moved away from her quickly, dressed hurriedly and left the room amid her tears and apologies. 19 Rashid’s mistreatment of his wife continues. For example, he becomes unable to bear her wearing the hijab. 20 Muslim women wear lose garments that do not show their bodies and they should not expose any body parts except their faces and hands. They normally wear the hijab for social, moral and religious reasons. Women sometimes wear the hijab to please their family, husbands and society. In the case of Gamrah, Rashid forces her to give up her hijab which becomes a source of irritation and embarrassment to him taking into account that they both live in USA now, a different Western culture where women normally don’t veil. Rashid says, —Why don’t you wear ordinary clothes like the other women here? It’s as if you are trying to embarrass me in front of my friends with the things you wear! And then you wonder why I don’t take you out with me! 21
Hence, Gamrah surprisingly wants to please him by taking off her coat and hijab at the theatre while together in hope that she can win his heart back but when he sees her without the Hijab, he thinks she looks very ugly and asks her to wear the Hijab again to hide her ugliness. "He studies her with a sidelong stare, and after just a few seconds, he said, —Taking them off isn’t making you look any better. So just put them again. 22 Rashid’s persistent odd behavior and cruel treatment towards Gamrah has instilled doubts in her. She starts wondering if her husband loves someone else. "Her eyes filled with tears as the idea hit her: Can Rashid possibly be in love with someone else? 23. After elapse of a certain time,


18 For more information, please see Cheryl.A. Rubenberg,  _Palestinian women : Patriarchy and resistance in the West Bank_ ( USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2001)


22 Ibid, 51.

23 Ibid, 52 156
Gamrah discovers by mere chance the photos of Rashid’s extra marital affair with an American-Japanese woman called Kari. —These photos were the missing link in Rashid’s inexplicable behavior toward her.

24Her mental torment and psychological conflict can be painfully manifested in the following questions which cross her mind:

So why would he marry me if he didn’t want me? Gamrah asked herself time and time again. She asked her mother whether she had heard anything from Rashid’s family to suggest that he had been forced to marry her. But did it make sense that a man - and he was every inch a man, whatever else he turned out to be - would be forced to marry a woman he didn’t want, no matter how compelling the reasons?25

In an attempt to save her marriage, Gamrah decides to meet Kari face to face. —This young wife took up arm, intent on fighting to defend her marriage and struggle for the sake of its survival. 26 In return, Kari mocks and humiliates her by calling Rashid in front of her who, in return, has vented his anger against his wife.

Look, lady! You’re the one who is going and you’re the one who is apologizing. And after that you are getting on the first airplane out of here and you are going back to your family and I don’t want to see your face here ever again. I’m not a man that a woman like you is going to order around!.27

Gamrah, amid her tears, has confessed by touching her belly that she is pregnant. In the back of her mind, she thinks she can change the behavior of her husband, Rashid, through her pregnancy as her mother has advised her. —If all else fails; pregnancy was the only way to ensure that a marriage continues. 28 But when Rashid finds out she is pregnant, he slaps her and sends her back to Riyadh followed by her divorce documents.

What? Pregnant? You are pregnant! How did that happen? Who gave you permission to get pregnant? You mean you’re not taking the pills? Didn’t we agree there would be no pregnancy until I finish my PhD and we go back to Saudi? You figured you could twist my arm with these filthy tricks!29

In Girls of Riyadh, Al Sanea exposes the plight of easiness and frequency of divorce of women by men in Saudi Arabia30 who no longer appear beautiful to their husbands or those who assert their own identities and individualities. Hence, they are, unfortunately, slapped with rejection, desertion and finally divorce. Within this context, American Bedu comments on the high rate of divorce in Saudi Arabia:

When a couple marries in Saudi it is generally a joining of families. Honor and face of a family (or tribe) may be at stake when a couple divorce. There is always a cost to the Saudi woman who becomes a divorcee. She may lose regular access to any children. She must have a male mahrem31 who is
responsible for her and her actions. If she is perceived as responsible for a divorce from an honorable and respectful man she may become ostracized from her own family and society.\textsuperscript{32}


26 Ibid,79.

27 Ibid,84.

28 Ibid,84.


31Maleguardian.

In *Girls of Riyadh*, the narrator poses serious questions to the readers and wonders why divorced women are slapped with rejection and social stigma. Is divorce a major crime committed by the woman only? Why does not our society harass the divorced man the way it crushes the divorced woman? I know that you readers are always ready to dismiss and make light of these naïve questions of mine, but surely you can see that they are logical questions and they deserve some careful thought. We should defend Um Nuwayyir and Gamrah and other divorcees. Women like them don’t deserve to be looked down on by society, which only condescends from time to time to throw them a few bones and expects them to be happy with that. Meanwhile, divorced men go on to live fulfilling lives without any suffering or blame.33

In a conservative society like Saudi Arabia, a divorced woman suffers from social stigma and is usually seen as a disgrace. She should be monitored all the time fearing that she will bring shame to the family. For Nawal El Saadawi, “the great majority of Arab women... are still, —terrorized by the mere word, divorce which means hunger, no home, and the unrelenting remarks of those around them. 34 In the case of Gamrah, after being divorced from Rashid, her family prevents her from going out since she is now divorced and any deed from a divorced woman may bring her ill-reputation due to the perception of divorced women as damaged goods regardless of the causes of the breakup. But her girlfriends like Sadeem manage to get her out of her isolation every now and then. In this regard, Nawal El Saadawi argues that a woman is considered by the Arabs as, —a menace to man and society, and the only way to avoid the harm she could do was to isolate her in the home, where she could have no contact with either one or the other. 35

To avoid such disgrace, Gamrah’s uncle, Abu Fahad, has arranged her to meet an obnoxious marriage prospect with Abu Musa’ed which doesn’t work. Abu Musa’ed has divorced his wife after ten years of marriage because of his own infertility. He is looking for a younger wife who may bring him children. But he is offensive and rude when he stipulates that he will not accept Gamrah with her son:

Now, as you know very well, he started in, talking to her uncle, —I’m a Bedouin and a soldier, and I am not interested in making’ clever little chitchat with you fancy city folk. I heard your niece had a little boy from her first
husband. So the fine print as I see it is, the boy stays here with his grandmother. To clarify, here, I am not gonna raise a kid who isn’t my own, he is not welcome in my house.36

After hearing such an arrogant and a humiliating stipulation, Gamrah has walked out of the room fuming with indignation and anger at Abu Musa’ed’s arrogance, her father’s passivity, uncle’s coldness and mother’s helplessness. She resists being victimized twice at the altar of patriarchal traditions and customs.

She went on ranting about this shameless man and his small print, this man who demanded so brazenly that she gave up her little boy for his sake, even though the man was clearly not going to produce any children himself! How could he possibly dare to take away her only son? How could he demand that she make such a sacrifice? Who did he think he was, anyway, this Bedouin soldier, that he could speak to her uncle in such a conceited, self-important way? She had heard about those Bedouin men and theirdifficult natures, but never in her life had she had the bad luck to encounter someone as offensive as Abu


35 Ibd,136


Musa’ed.37
Gamrah’s resistance to protect herself and her son from being humiliated is met with anger and threat from her uncle directed towards Gamrah’s mother. He does not even address Gamrah as if her future is not at stake or the subject of marriage does not belong to her only. He, instead, turns indifferently and arrogantly towards her mother saying:

Your girl has no shame, Um Mohammed! She is so spoiled.... She isn’t completely without children to fill her life. And we all know that leaving her here to sit around without a man to shield and protect her isn’t a good thing. People are always talking, sister, and besides, we have other girls in the family who should not pay for what people say about your divorced daughter.38

Her uncle, Abu Fahad, wants Gamrah’s family to get rid of her by marrying her to an old infertile man, Abu Musa’ed, and leaving her newly born baby behind since he is afraid that the prospects of marriage of the other girls in the family will suffer due to society’s negative attitude towards a divorced woman like Gamrah. —He wants to dump me on that old defective junk of a man just so he can be rid of me and clear the way for good men to marry his own daughters? 39 Within this context, Rubenberg argues that gossip is the primary process by which society enforces the honor code on the individual. What women fear most is being talked about. A girl’s prospects are entirely dependent upon her reputation; the mere hint of dishonor can ruin a girl’s life.40

Provoked and agitated, Gamrah has resisted by ranting at her mother’ face:

Why? Why do I need a man to shield and protect me? Does your brother think I’m a disgrace, or I cannot protect my own self? You people don’t realize that I am a grown woman now and I have a son! My word should count and I should be listened to! But no! You think absolutely the opposite from how any reasonable family would think. That’s even worse than what you did to me in my engagement to Rashid!41
Here, we find that Gamrah asks her mother legitimate questions which deconstruct the oppressive, patriarchal mentality which looks down upon women as just passive sexual objects only. To elaborate further, patriarchy mandates that females be denied the possibility of an independent life experience outside the family confines. The more confined a woman can be kept, the less exposure she has, and the less she is able to think for herself, the less likely she is to challenge her husband’s authority and decisions. However, one may argue that Gamrah’s story ends with a note of resistance and defiance since she refuses to be victimized. She asserts her own identity and choices in life where one can chart her own future except herself.

When it comes to Sadeem, we find that her story is not less tragic than the story of Gamrah. She is raised by her father after her mother’s death after her birth. Her first emotional tragedy is caused by her fiancé Waleed Al-Shari who deserts her before their wedding party. Waleed used to call Sadeem every day expressing his love and devotion. —Waleed called her dozens of times a day - he called the minute he woke up in the morning, before going to work, at work, after work and finally for a long conversation before going to sleep that would stretch on sometimes until the sun was peeping

37 Ibid,191.
38 Ibid,191.
39 Ibid,192.

40 For more information on the impact of gossip on women’s future, please see Cheryl.A. Rubenberg, *Palestinian women: Patriarchy and resistance in the West bank* ( USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2001)


over the horizon. 43 Waleed has been impatient, distressed and is unable to wait until the wedding day which is supposed to take place after Eid Al-Fitr due to Sadeem’s studies. Hence, Sadeem decides to make it up for him by giving herself to him one night considering that he is her husband officially despite the wedding not having yet taken place. —Seh was convinced that he wouldn’t be satisfied unless she offered him a little more of her, —efminity, and she was willing to do anything to please him, the love of her life, even if it meant exceeding the limits she has spent her lifetime guarding. 44 Surprisingly, Waleed suddenly disappears after that night and never shows up again. Sadeem has been desperate to reach him but his, —cell phone was always switched off and the private line in his room was always busy. 45Waleed eventually sends her divorce papers claiming that he no longer feels comfortable with her. Being divorced now, Sadeem starts blaming herself as she did not wait until after the wedding party asking herself questions which reflect her psychological and emotional torment.

Had she been wrong to give herself to Waleed before wedding celebration? Did it make any sense at all to believe that that was the cause of him avoiding her? Why, though? Wasn’t he her legal husband, and hadn’t he been her legal husband ever since they signed the contract? Or did getting married mean the ballroom, the guests, the live singer and the dinner? And what she had done - did it somehow deserve punishment from him? Hadn’t he been the one who initiated it? Why had he encouraged her to do the wrong thing and then afterward abandoned her? And anyway, was it wrong; was it a sin, in the first place? Had he been testing her? And if she had failed the test, did that mean she was not worthy of him? He must have thought she was one of those girls who were easy! But what kind of stupidity was this? Wasn’t she his wife, his lawful partner? Hadn’t she on that day placed her mark in that big register next to his signature? Hadn’t there been acceptance, consent and commitment, witnesses and an announcement to the world? No one had ever cautioned her about this!.... So where was the error? Where was the sin? 46

She blames herself as she has not waited until after the wedding party. Sadeem never tells her family about that night since she knows deeply she will be viewed with suspicion and she will never be
understood by her family and society. She believes the reason that Waleed has divorced her is that he thinks she is any easy girl who had previous sexual experiences. According to the customs and traditions in Saudi Arabia, man and woman are considered officially engaged when their marital vows are exchanged and documents are signed. Hence, the period which spans from the time of signing the documents till the night of the wedding is called an engagement period. Engaged women should remain virgins till the wedding night though there is no law in Islam47 which does not allow them to sleep with their men before the wedding night since they are officially and lawfully wed. But we find unfortunately the power of oppressive traditions and tribal customs over religion where the patriarchal masculine society views Sadeem’s action as a huge mistake and where men definitely get the impression that the girl can be immoral and, —loose if she does such a thing. Sadeem's tragedy continues when she has left Saudi Arabia to London to recuperate from her first emotional and psychological trauma after her


44 Ibid, 32

45 Ibid, 33

46 Ibid, 33.

divorce. She wants to sit with herself, reflect on everything and becomes psychologically whole again. But London has intensified her loneliness and pain since there is no one beside her.

London was nothing but gloom.... the city was as dark and cloudy as her mood. The silent apartment and her empty pillow added to her unhappiness, leading her to shed more tears than she had known it was possible to produce. Sadeem spent a lot of time crying. She wept tears that burned her eyes, for the wrong, the darkness that had enveloped her, that had shrouded her defamed femininity. She cried and cried, mourning her first love, buried alive in its infancy before she could even find pleasure in it.48

All she can do is to seek God’s forgiveness hoping that the despicable Waled will not scandalize her and drag her name in the mud by revealing why he has divorced her —Allah, shield me! Keep his evil from me! Allah, I have no one but You to come to, and You are the most knowledgeable of my condition. 49 In London, Sadeem is destined to meet a Saudi guy, Firas Al Sharqawi where she falls in love with him deeply. Dr. Firas Al Sharqawi is a diplomat and a politician who is well known personality with lots of connections and respect:

A successful man with a fertile brain and a forceful personality, he was known to be someone who leads and is not led, who rules and is not ruled. Very soon after his return from London, Firas’s reputation spread. In his capacity as a counselor in the king’s cabinet, the royal diwan, his face often shone out from the pages of newspapers and magazines.50

However, Firas and Sadeem’s love relationship is doomed to fail. Firas's position in society prevents him from getting married to Sadeem, a divorced woman. He is afraid that people’s gossip to such marriage will tarnish his image and position as a man who belongs to an elite family in the political circle. For that reason, he never approaches the subject of marriage with Sadeem during their love relationship though he loves Sadeem. —She would remember the day years ago when he had alluded to broaching with his parents the subject of his attaching to a divorcee, and their response, which had hurt her so deeply that
she had intentionally —forgotten it. 51 In this regard, her friend Michelle, has shared her own inner thoughts with Sadeem about Firas’s attitude of not approaching the subject of marriage:

Sweetie, this is the escape strategy of an immature little boy. You find that he has given it some thought and then tells himself, so why should I take someone who is divorced when I haven’t ever been married? Even divorced men are looking for girls who haven’t been married, so why would I end up with a woman who has been previously married? You’ll find him weighing her in his mind and saying, if I want to become a government minister or some other high official later on, I need to find a woman who will give me some standing, a woman to help me with her family name and her looks and her genealogy and her social position and wealth! I am not going to take one who is flawed from the start because she’s been divorced, and then watch people devour me with their waspish tongues.52

Here, Alsanea sheds light on the plight of divorced women in the Saudi society who are viewed unfavorably as immoral women especially if they travel outside the country and meet men as in the case of Sadeem. When it comes to guardianship, women reject it and see it as demeaning to them. They refuse to be treated like children who need guidance and constant monitoring. Within this context, the Saudi activist Wajeha Al-Huwaider compares male guardianship to slavery.

48 Ibid,
49 Ibid,61.
50 Ibid,143.
51 Ibid,
52 Ibid,181.
The ownership of a woman is passed from one man to another. Ownership of the woman is passed from the father or the brother to another man, the husband. The woman is merely a piece of merchandise, which is passed over to someone else — her guardian ... Ultimately, I think women are greatly feared. When I compare the Saudi man with other Arab men, I can say that the Saudi is the only man who could not compete with the woman. He could not compete, so what did he do with her? ... The woman has capabilities. When women study, they compete with the men for jobs. All jobs are open to men. 90% of them are open to men. You do not feel any competition ... If you do not face competition from the Saudi woman ... you have the entire scene for yourself. All positions and jobs are reserved for you. Therefore, you are a spoiled and self-indulged man.53

However, to protect his position and status in society and avoid a social stigma, Firas gets married to a girl of his family’s choice. A decision which makes Sadeem reflect painfully on her lot, “Was it possible for Firas to marry someone other than her? How could such a thing happen? After all this love and the years they had spent together? Did it make any sense that a man of Firas’s strength and resourcefulness was unable to convince his family that he could marry a divorced woman? Or was it just that he was incapable of convincing himself of it? Had she failed, after all of her attempts, to reach the level of perfection befitting a man like Firas.” 54. To add salt to the wound, Firas offers to keep his secret relationship with Sadeem, something Sadeem has vehemently refused:

In his incessant text messages, he hinted to her that he was willing to remain her beloved for the rest of his life. That was what he wanted, in fact, but he would be forced to conceal it from his wife and family. He swore to her that the entire business was out of his hands; that circumstances were stronger than they were; and that he was in more pain at his family’s decision than she was. But there was nothing he could do. There was no path before them but patience. He tried to convince her that no woman would ever be able to replace her in his heart. He told her that he pitied his fiancée because she was engaged
to a man who had tasted perfection in another woman and that taste would remain forever on his tongue, making it impossible for any ordinary woman to erase it.55

Here, we find Firas so weak to face society and so selfish to risk his elite position. Instead, he shows his utter helplessness by resigning to please the patriarchal society supported by oppressive traditions and conventions rather than fighting for his love with a woman who trusts him and loves him genuinely. Sadeem finally musters her courage and ends her dead end relationship with Firas and gets married to her cousin Tarik who adores her. When it comes to Michelle, she is born to a Saudi father and an American mother. She meets Faisal Al-Batran by chance when he asks her to allow him to enter the shopping mall as her bother. It is noteworthy that men are not allowed to enter areas where women are present where gender segregation's policy is adopted in Saudi Arabia. The Police of Morals and Virtue56 are keen to see that men and women do not mix at all to avoid any harassment towards women and keep the religious nature of Saudi society.


55 Ibid,211.

56They are the government-authorized or government-recognized religious police of Saudi Arabia. They enforce varied interpretations of Sharia law. 162

One may argue that Michelle and Faisal's meetings can be seen as the beginning of a mutual love. Michelle has been able to celebrate a Valentine’s Day for the first time in her life. It is also noteworthy that love is treated like an unwelcome visitor in Saudi Arabia. For example, Valentine’s Day is seen as Western practice or value which ignites immoral feelings between boys and girls and is thus not welcomed at all. To elaborate further, in Saudi Arabia, people started celebrating Valentine's Day in the late nineties due to the influence of means of communication, technology and globalization. But this was before, —punishments and fines were instituted for owners of flower shops who gave out red roses to their VIP customers by the most intricate and convoluted ways as if they were smuggled goods. 57Hence, we find in Girls of Reyadah that the university, where Michelle studies, officially decides, based on the request of the Police of Morals and Virtue, to ban all forms of celebrations on Valentine's Day:

Many gifts were confiscated and the girls who had worn red clothes or accessories had to make pledge that they not repeat their behavior next year. In the years that followed, clothes were subject to inspection even before the girls were inside the campus gates where they could take off their wraps. That way, the inspectress could return the culprit to her chauffeur, who still would be waiting there, to be taken immediately home if there was the slightest sign of the Crime of Red on her person, even if it was a mere hair tie.58

Here, one may argue that love is viewed negatively and with suspicion. To bypass restrictions on love and meetings among lovers in a very conservative and traditional society like Saudi Arabia, Al Sanea exposes how lovers use internet, telephone lines and other means of technology as the only outlet to express the love they feel for each other:

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The telephone lines in Saudi Arabia are surely thicker and more abundant than elsewhere since they must bear the heavy weight of all the whispered croonings lovers have to exchange and all their sighs and moans and kisses that they cannot, in the real world, enact - or that they do not want to enact due to the restrictions of custom and religion, that some of them truly respect and value.59

Here, one may find out that women’s connection to the male world is through online chat rooms and cell phones where they are not tragically allowed to choose with whom they can spend the rest of their lives. However, Michelle’s love relationship with Faisal has continued for almost a year. But when Michelle asks Faisal to marry her, he backs off since his mother refuses to allow him to marry a girl not of the family’s choice:

The minute Um Faisal heard the English name Michelle, one hundred devils swarmed into her head. Faisal hastily tried to correct his mistake. People called her Michelle but her real name was purely Saudi….The family of that girl was not of their sort. They must ask Faisal’s father, since he knew infinitely more about genealogies and families. But from the start, his mother suggested, this line of conversation did not augur well. The girl had tricked him! Aah, the girls of this generation! How awful they were! And aah, for her young, green son- she never would have expected him to fall into the trap of a girl such as this! She asked him who the girl’s maternal uncles were and as soon as she heard that the girl’s mother was American, she decided to bang the door shut for good on this fruitless dialogue around this utterly ridiculous topic.60

Besides this, Michelle is born to an American mother which is viewed negatively in Saudi Arabian society and this is manifested in Michelle’s angry words, “Why does not this society respect the difference between my family and

57 Ibid,58
58 Ibid,58.
59 Ibid,145.
60 Ibid,93.

other Saudi families? Everyone considers me a bad girl just because my mother is American! How can I live in such an unjust society? Tell me how, Faisal!”61

In Girls of Riyadh, we also find that the Saudi Arabian society is split into two classified sects, tribal whose ancestry is traceable, and non-tribal whose ancestry is not traceable where there is no inter-tribal marriage between these two sects. "Our Saudi society resembles a fruit cocktail of social classes in which no class mixes with another unless absolutely necessary, and then only with the help of the blender!” 62

Faisal tells Michelle that his mother does not support the idea of his marrying her which has been a severe shock for her:

All he said was that he hoped Michelle would consider what the consequences would be if he were to challenge his family; there was no power on earth, he said, that could block or lessen the awful things they would do to hurt both him and her, if he insisted on marrying Michelle. She would never be accepted by his family, and their children would suffer for it. He had not even made an attempt to object to his mother because of the utter futility of it. It was not because he didn’t love her, he said. But they didn’t believe in love! They believed only in their inherited beliefs and their traditions from across the generations, and so how could one possibly hope to convince them otherwise?63

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But Faisal falls short to tell his mother about his strong love for Michelle, "The simple truth of it was the one thing that he could not say plainly to his mother: the girl loved him and he loved her. He loved her even more than she loved him, he was sure."64 Hence, Faisal succumbs tearfully to his destiny by obeying his mother given that, —He loved no one in the universe more than his mother, and he had never opposed her, never ever, never in his life. He wept also for the sophisticated girl, his beloved who understood him and whom he understood, more than any two people in this world could ever understand each other, Michelle with her Najdi beauty and American personality, who wouldn’t be his.65 The last thing Faisal has said to Michelle to her before he leaves is that she is lucky because she is not from the kind of family he is from. In comparison, Michelle’s decisions are only her own and she has her own individuality and "not those of the —tribe. She was better off without him and his family. Her wonderful free spirit wouldn’t be sullied by their rules; their poisonous thoughts and insidious ways would not destroy her goodness.66

In spite of the wound that Faisal has inflicted, Michelle is sure that Faisal loves her truly and fiercely, and that he still loves her as she loves him but he is passive and submissive to the will of a society, a society which is, "riddled with hypocrisy, drugged by contradictions, and her only choice is to either accept those contradictions and bow to them, or leave her country to live in freedom.67 Michelle also comes to realize that love, "was treated like an inappropriate joke. A soccer ball to play with for a while, until those in power kicked it away."68

After such a disappointment, Michelle travels to San Francisco to study, turning her back to a country where people cannot decide and choose for themselves:

61 ibid,91.
62 ibid,43.
63 ibid,111.
64 ibid,95.
65 ibid,95.
66 ibid,111.
67 ibid,112.
68 ibid,166
All Michelle wanted was to hear that she had been accepted in one of the schools there so that she could bundle up her belongings and turn her back on a country where people were governed - or herded - like animals, as she said to herself over and over. She would not allow anyone to tell her what she could and could not do! Otherwise what was the point of life? It was her life, only hers, and she was going to live it the way she wanted, for herself and herself only.69

After that, Michelle travels back Dubai where her father decides to move the whole family. In Dubai, Michelle works at one of the satellite TV channels owned by the father of her Emirati girlfriend, Jumanah. One may argue that Michelle serves as Alsanea's mouthpiece in her criticism of the Saudi Arabian society with its degrading attitude towards love, suppressive traditions and conventions, lack of women's rights and misuse of religion which need urgently to be examined, revised and reformed.

Michelle had become truly frightening lately, the way she talked about freedom and women's rights, the bonds of religion, conventions imposed by society and her philosophy on relations between the sexes. She was continually advising Gamrah to become tougher and meaner in asserting herself and not to give an inch when it came to defending her own rights.70

Michelle also becomes a mentor and an eye opener for her girlfriends like Gamrah and Sadeem, advising them about ways of how men think, experiences in life and how important it is to assert one's own identity and individuality in spite of all odds:

This is the way our men think, unfortunately. No matter how impressive he is or how refined his thinking is or how much in love he is, he still considers love something that can only happen in novels and films. He doesn't get it, he does not conceive of love as a foundation that builds a family. Maybe he is even a really cultured and highly educated guy who’s been around. Maybe he knows deep down that love is a basic human need, that it isn’t shameful for a man to choose his partner in life himself, as long as he’s completely sure she’s the right one. But he is still afraid. It worries him to even think about following a path different from the path his father followed, and his uncle, and his grandfather before them. And anyway, he'll think, Those old men are still living with those shut-up women of theirs. So something must have gone right. What they did was successful. It’s got to work because
everyone else has done it. So he follows their steps and doesn’t go against their way of doing things. That way, no one can come along someday and rub it in that he failed because he strayed from the path of his ancestors. Our men are just too scared to pay for their own decisions in life. They want others to follow, others to blame.71

Sadeem, Gamrah and Lamees have been influenced by Michelle’s words which, "evoked strong echoes in all of them…. but they knew, in their hearts, that she was right."

When it comes to Lamees, we find that she has been successful in both her professional career and her love life. In regard to love, she gets married to a man of her choice, Nizar, and moves to Canada with her husband to get her Boards in Medicine. Lamees plays the role of the fortune teller among her girlfriends who is always consulted by them about their emotional relationships and future matches. For example, she teaches her ill-treated friend, Gamrah, how to use the internet, send e-mails and chat online to break through the isolation that is imposed upon her after she is divorced and left with a baby. Lamee likes Ali, the brother of her friend, Fatima. Ali is studying Medicine with Lamees at the same

69 Ibid, 112-3.

70 Ibid, 175.

71 Ibid, 181.
university, but the relationship has to end abruptly after they are both caught in a café by the Police of Morals and Virtue where dating is not allowed in Saudi Arabia and it is seen as a punishable offense:

One day, as Lamees and Ali sat together in a café on al-Thalatheen Street, a band of men from Al-Ha’ah swooped down on them and led the pair off swiftly to two separate SUVs and headed immediately for the organizations nearest bureau. There, they put Lamees and Ali into two separate rooms and began interrogations. Lamees could not bear the hurtful questions put to her. They asked her in detail about her relationship with Ali. They used coarse language and they forced her to hear words that would have embarrassed her even in front of her most intimate girlfriends. After trying for hours to appear selfconfident and completely convinced of the rightness’ of everything she had done, she collapsed in tears. She really did not believe that she had done anything that was cause for shame. In the next room, the interrogator was putting pressure on Ali, who lost his cool completely when the man asserted that Lamees had confessed to everything and that he might as well come clean.72

The senior officers has contacted Lamees’s father telling him that she has been apprehended with a young man in a café and is being held at their headquarters and that he must come and get her after signing a promise that his daughter would never again engage in such an immoral act. Ali, on the other hand, suffers at the hands of the Moral Police and his plight is intensified due to his Shiite identity:73

Her father arrived, his face so pale from the sudden call. He signed the necessary papers and then was allowed to take her. On the way home, he tried to suppress his anger and to console, as much as possible, his sobbing daughter. He vowed he would not tell her mother or sisters what happened, on one condition: she must never again meet that boy outside the hospital building. Yes, he admitted, it was true that she was allowed to go out on her own with her male cousins and the sons of his friends and her mother’s friends in Jeddah. But in Riyadh, things had to be different!74

One may find out that Lamees’s father is very understanding and acts like her friend but he insists that she never meets anyone outside the university in the future fearing for the reputation of his own daughter in a very conservative Saudi Arabian society. However, Al Sanea exposes the plight of women, mistreatment of women and how they are treated as inferior or lesser persons. For instance, when it
comes to marriage, we find that men can sign their marriage declaration, while women had to print their thumb. In the case of Sadeem, we find that she is not allowed to sign her marriage certificate but to print only though she is educated:

During the official proceedings, Sadeem pressed her fingerprint onto the page in the enormous registry book after her protest about not being allowed to sign her name was dismissed. —My girl, said her aunt, “just stamp it with your fingerprint and call it a day. The Sheikh says fingerprint, not signature. The men are the only ones who sign their names.”75. We also notice that women are banned from driving in Saudi Arabia76. It is the only place in the world where

72 Ibid,139.


74 Ibid,140.

75 Ibid,31.

76 For more information on driving ban in Saudi Arabia, please see, Mai, Yamami, Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives (New York: New York University Press,1996) 166
women are legally not permitted to get behind the wheel. Women may risk arrest for riding in a vehicle not driven by a chauffeur or a close male relative. While Saudi men can travel anywhere, women are also not allowed to travel inside the country or abroad without a written permission from their closest male relative. In this regard, Farzaneh Milani explains that the driving ban, “stems from universal anxiety over women’s unrestrained mobility.” Milani explains further why gender segregation in Saudi Arabia is unique:

In Saudi Arabia that anxiety is acute: the streets - and the right to enter and leave them at will - belong to men...Gender apartheid is not about piety. It is about dominating, excluding and subordinating women. It is about barring them from political activities, preventing their active participation in the public sector. Resisting the ban on women’s driving in Saudi Arabia, it is Manal Al Sharif, the Saudi woman who started the Women2Drive Campaign, which has created uproar in Saudi Arabia, defying the prohibition imposed on women to drive by driving home from her work at Aramco. According to Guy Adams, —Manal al-Sharif became a global symbol of the struggle for gender equality in the Middle East after a video of her driving through the streets of Khobar was uploaded to YouTube last April, at the height of the Arab Spring. She was later arrested and imprisoned for nine days. In Girls of Riyadh, to bypass restrictions imposed on women’s driving, Gamrah, Michelle, Sadeem and Lamees have used the chance to go outside driving using the occasion of Gamrah’s marriage. —Michelle had an international driver’s license. She took charge: she drove the BMWX5 SUV with its dark-tinted windows. She had managed to rent it through one of the car showrooms by putting the rental in the name of her family’s male Ethiopian driver.

When it comes to love, one may argue that it will painfully take a long time for it to come out into the light of day in Saudi Arabia. You can sense that, —in the sighs of bored men sitting alone at cafes in the shining eyes of veiled women walking down the streets, in the phone lines that spring to life after midnight.

CONCLUSION

One may conclude that women in Girls of Riyadh are still victims of male-dominance, strict traditions, tribal customs and misuse of religion in a very conservative society like Saudi Arabia. In spite of the
harsh circumstances they live in, we also find out strong women like Gamrah, Sadeem, Michelle and Lamees who do not give up and surrender but women who are full of determination, hopes and dreams in spite of all odds, setbacks and pain they experience. They, in fact, chart their own destinies and assert their own individualities. In other words, we find women who embrace modernity and retain the good values of their religion and culture. Finally, Girls of Riyadh can be seen as an urgent call for reform, reevaluation and improvement of the status of women in Saudi Arabia. It is timely for Saudi women to take their equal rights and legal positions as fully dignified human beings, especially taking into account the Arab spring which is currently is raging through the Middle East.


78 Ibid, 1.


80 The women to drive movement is a campaign by Saudi Arabian women for the right to drive motor vehicles on public road. In 2011, the Arab Spring motivated women, including al-Huwaida and Manal al-Sharif, to organize a more intensive driving campaign to start on 17 June 2011. From 17 June to late June, about seventy cases of women driving were documented in Saudi Arabia.


The Patriarchal Class System in Nawal El Saadawi’s *God Dies by the Nile*.

Abstract

Socialist feminists see class as central to women's lives, yet at the same time not ignoring the impact of patriarchy on their lives too. For them, women are victims of both the capitalist class and patriarchy. My argument is that women in God Dies by the Nile are victims of the patriarchal class system consolidated by politics, religion, and social customs. I argue further that for patriarchal class ideology to survive as an oppressive system, brutal force implements and instills such ideology in society. The impact of such ideology on women has been manifested through double moral standards, rape, sexual exploitation, psychological instability, illegitimate children and violence. This study also sheds light upon the plight of poor women employed by upper-class people at shamefully low salaries and who are frequently sexually abused by their masters and masters’ sons. Furthermore, I foreground how El Saadawi strives hard to deconstruct the patriarchal class system by revealing its dark side where women are preyed upon, raped, and destroyed for being women and even men are eliminated for failing to support fully such system. Finally, *God Dies by the Nile* ends with a note of resistance against the patriarchal class system by both Fatheya and Zakeya respectively. It is a message that collective efforts, by women all over the world regardless of their class, race and religion, are urgently needed to eradicate their oppression. I come to conclude further that for El Saadawi, it is only through political organization and a patient, long-enduring struggle that women can become an effective political power which will force society to change and abolish the patriarchal class structures that keep women victims. My analysis will be drawn on views of socialist feminist theorists like Juliet Mitchell, Nancy Holmstrom, and Heidi Hartmann.

Introduction
For Socialist feminists, women are victims of both class and patriarchy. Nancy Holmstrom defines socialist feminism as an attempt “to understand women's subordination in a coherent and systematic way that integrates class and sex, as well as other aspects of identity such as race/ethnicity or sexual orientation, with the aim of using this analysis to help liberate women.” (2003:38). In other words, socialist feminists see class as central to women's lives, yet at the same time not ignoring the impact of patriarchy on women's lives. For example, Juliet Mitchell believes that some aspects of women's lives in the family are economic while the others are social and ideological. Mitchell argues that any change in the status of women should be accompanied by the defeat of capitalism as well as patriarchy through social and ideological means respectively. “The Marxist revolutionary must link arms with the Freudian Psychoanalyst in order to effect women’s full and final liberation.” (1974:412). She suggests that we should use Marxist strategies to topple capitalism and psychoanalytic strategies to overthrow patriarchy. Socialist feminists like Nancy Holmstrom, Juliet Mitchell and Heidi Hartmann summarize Nawal El-Saadawi’s socialist feminist views centering on original causes of women’s oppression; “the patriarchal class system which manifests itself internationally as world capitalism and imperialism, and nationally in the feudal and capitalist classes of the third world countries.” (1997: 91).

My argument is that women in God Dies by the Nile are victims of the patriarchal class systemii consolidated by politics, religion, and social customs. El Saadawide constructs the patriarchal class system by showing us its dark side where women are raped and destroyed for being women and even men are eliminated for failing to support fully the patriarchal class system. If we examine the title of the novel, God Dies by the Nileiiii, one may say that it is a metaphor for both patriarchal class and religion. The title may also reflect El Saadawi’s intention to reveal the interplay between the political power of the ruling class, the oppression of women in rural Egypt and the misuse of religion. “In any society, it is not possible to separate religion from the political system, nor to keep sex separate from politics. The trilogy composed of politics, religion and sex, is the most sensitive of all issues in any society.” (El Saadawi 1980:4). Furthermore, in God Dies by the Nile, we find that the Mayor of Kafr El-Teen, symbolizes the patriarchal class system “ People like him ,who live on top of the world, don’t know the word impossible. They walk over the earth like Gods.”(54)iv while Zakeya, on the other hand, symbolizes how women can be victims of such system. Within this context, April Gordon argues:

Women typically face more disadvantages and exploitation than men do. They must cope not only with poverty and underdevelopment; they are also limited by patriarchal attitudes and practices, some predating capitalism, others established during the colonial period. These patriarchal attitudes and practices, which privilege men, continue to permeate African societies from the level of the family up to the state. (1996:7)

In other words, the capitalist economic system tends to promote a growing class inequality, which can leave many women subject to patriarchal class oppression. In this regard, El Saadawi attributes women’s oppression and subordination to the fact that the gap between the rich and the poor is increasing and that is why women are suffering more. They suffer from the capitalist economic system. (McMillan: 1999).

2. Patriarchal Class System and its impact on women in God Dies by the Nile

For Karl Marx “The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social
existence that determines their consciousness.” (1972:20-1). Therefore, we can see the impact of upper class is manifested on the consciousness of the toiling class whether women or men. In case of Nefissa, when her father has told her that she is expected to go to the Mayor’s house, she has not been able to sleep that night. “She was only twelve years old at the time, and her small mind spent the dark hours of the night trying to imagine what the rooms of the Mayor’s house could be like. Through it flitted images of a bathroom in white marble, which the children of the neighbors had told her about. They added that the Mayor bathed in milk each night.”(20). Such impact is also manifested economically on Haj Ismail who tears himself away from the comparison between himself and the Mayor only to find himself “lost in the contemplation of the mayor’s expensive cloak, while his hand kept fingering the coarse fabric of his own galabeya.”(12). Class also has its tremendous psychological pact on the lives of the poor lower class people. For example, when the Mayor jokes with Haj Ismail in a friendly way, the feelings of inferiority which have recently invaded Haj Ismail are largely dispelled. “Was not the Mayor cracking jokes with him? Was this not a good enough reason to feel his confidence restored, to feel that the social gap between them was narrowing? He felt pleased.” (13). It seems that not only lower class people’s economic lives are defined by the Mayor and the bourgeois class he symbolizes but also their psychological balance and emotional stability. “The village barber was still busy turning over in his mind the title of ‘doctor –healer’ which the Mayor had bestowed upon him. It made him feel as though he had been accorded a bachelor’s degree in medicine, which put him on an equal footing with any medical doctor in the area.” (16). In another incident, we also find that feelings of inferiority have led Sheikh Zahran to extol the Mayor’s bourgeois class “Tell me, your highness, you who knows so much. Are people in Misr the same as in Kafr El Teen?” (16) while simultaneously speaking ill of his own poor lower class people.

All peasants steal. Theft runs in their blood like the Bilharzia worm. They put on an innocent air, pretend to be dull, kneel down before Allah as they would never think of disobeying him, but all the time, deep inside, they are nothing but accused, cunning, unbelieving, impious sons of heretics. A man will prostrate himself in prayer behind me, but once he has left the mosque, and gone to the field, he will steal from his neighbor, or poison the man’s buffalo without batting an eyelid.....He might even commit murder, or fornication. (15)

Here, one can see how far class gap between the rich and the poor can terribly affect the psychological balance and emotional stability of the poor toiling classes. And how such gap creates social evils and breeds hypocrite characters like Sheikh Zahran who are ready to do anything to please their masters.

In God Dies by the Nile, El-Saadawi uses sex metaphorically to expose and reveal the dehumanizing effects of the patriarchal class order. We notice that sex is used as an instrument of power, which may take a material, physical and religious form against women. For example, the Mayor’s affairs with the daughters of Kafrawi, Nefissa and Zeinab reflect the material power of the ruling class serving as a source of the sexual exploitation of women in particular and the ruled in general. The Mayor “the representative of government in Kafr El Teen”(13) symbolizes the ruling class in general whose power and resources are ultimately under his basic control. Within this context, Nabila Jaber argues “that Gender oppression is class oppression and women’s subordination is seen as a form of class oppression which is maintained because it serves the interests of capital and the ruling class.”(2001:101). Moreover, Sheikh Hamzawi sheds the light on the Mayor’s oppressive power. “He holds their daily bread in his hands and if he wants, he can deprive them of it. If he gets angry their debts double, and the government keeps sending them one summons after the other. “Either pay or your land will be confiscated.” (106). Commenting on the significance of the land for poor farmers, Frantz Fanon says that
“for them the most essential value is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and , above all, dignity. (1963 :34). Here, one tends to say that such government represented by the Mayor is tyrannically based on sheer caprices of those who control it and on a crude display of brute force. “The Mayor was using his position to exploit the peasants, and to spend the money he squeezed out of them on his extravagant way of living, and his extravagant tastes in food, tobacco, wine and women.”(13 ). In other words, we find that the Mayor uses his wealth and power to exploit poor people economically, psychologically and sexually. Concerning the Mayor’s sexual exploitation of women, we find that “he’s got strange tastes where women are concerned, and if he likes a woman he can’t forget her. You know he’s pretty obstinate himself. Once he sets his eyes on a woman he must have her, come what may.”(54). In the case of Nefissa, Sheikh Zaharan tries to persuade her to accept the Mayor’s offer. “Our Mayor is a generous man... You will be paid twenty piastres a day. You’re a stupid girl with no brains. How can you throw away all the good that is coming to you? Do you prefer hunger and poverty rather than doing a bit of work?”(20-1). Nefissa resists back “I work here in my father’s house, Sheikh Zahran, and I work in the fields all day... I do not want to go to the Mayor’s house.’(21). Finally, she is forced to work in the Mayor’s house against her will by her father, Kafrawi. “Violence against women and extracting women’s labour through coercive labour relations are, therefore, part and parcel of capitalism.”(Mies 1986: 170-1). Her painful tragic exit from her house to the Mayor’s house is metaphorically conveyed to us through the eyes of the donkey. “The donkey suddenly lifts its head and brayed in a long, drawn-out gasping lament...She looked into the eyes of the donkey and saw tears. (21-2). Later, the Mayor rapes Nefissa. She becomes pregnant, bares a child, throws the baby away, and disappears. “The girl has disappeared, Zakeya. She is gone.” (6). Ironically enough, through the scheming consciousness of the Mayor, her painful end is narrated to us.

True, Nefissa’s story had remained a secret, but who knew? May be this time things would not be concealed so easily. He tried to chase away his fears. Who could find out the things that had happened?. He was above suspicion, above the law, even above the moral rules which governed ordinary people’s behavior. Nobody in Kafr El Teen would dare suspect him. They could have doubts about Allah, but about him...It was impossible.(98)

Even superstitious beliefs based on ignorance and poverty are used by the ruling class to continue oppressing the poor in general and women in particular in the name of religion. For example, the Mayor uses Haj Ismail, one of his oppressive tools, to use traditions and religion to persuade Zeinab, Nefissa’s sister, to work in the Mayor’s house, something which will in turn cure her aunt Zakeya. On the following day, before dawn, Zeinab is to take another bath with clean water from the Nile, meanwhile repeating the testimony three times. Then do her prayers at the crack of dawn. Once this over she is to open the door of your house before sunrise, stand on the threshold facing its direction and recite the first verse of the Koran ten times. In front of her she will see a big Iron Gate. She is to walk towards it, open it and walk in. She must never walk out of it again until the owner of the house orders her to do so. He is a noble and great man, born of a noble and great father, and he belongs to a good and devout family blessed by Allah, and His prophet. During this time Zakeya should lead the buffalo to the field, tie it to the water-wheel, take her hoe and work until the call to noon prayers. (91).

Here, one may notice that women are victims of patriarchy fortified by religion, traditions and politics. Within this context, Adrienne Rich argues that “Patriarchy is the power of ideological, political system in which men--by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.” (1976: 57-8). In the Mayor’s house,
Zeinab is sexually exploited and raped by the Mayor. “He pulled on it so hard that it split with a rending sound. She gasped, ‘My galabeya! It’s my only galabeya!’ He tore the remaining folds around her body, held her tight, whispering in her ear, ‘I will buy you a thousand galabeyas.” (100). In this regard, Susan Brownmiller says that the secret of patriarchy lies in rape which is an act of forcing a woman to have sexual intercourse against her will. “Both the possibility and the actuality of rape served as the main agent of the perpetuation of male domination over women by force.” (1975 :209).vi Here, one may contend that the meaning of rape is connected to the concept of women as property which has become man’s basic weapon of force against women. Furthermore, these rape cases of both Nefissa and Zeinab shed the light on the plight of women who work as servants in upper- class houses.

It is important to note that God Dies by the Nile presents a horrific picture of how poor servant women are employed by upper-class people at shamefully low salaries and who are frequently sexually abused by their masters and sons. In this regard, Heidi Hartman attributes women’s underpayment and oppression of women to “men’s desire to control women is at least as strong as capital’s desire to control workers. Capitalism and patriarchy are two different beasts, each of which must be fought with different weapons.” (1981 :23). Consequently, even the Mayor’s son, Tariq, uses his class status to molest and violate female servants in the Mayor’s household. This is conveyed to us by Tariq’s mother who is conscious of the plight of poor servant women. “Matters have gone so far that I have now decided to employ only menservants. Pray tell me what happens to your virtue when you are so occupied pursuing the girls on the telephone, or across windows, or standing on the balconies, or don’t you know that our neighbors in Maadi have complained to me several times?” (39). Concerning female domestic servants working in upper-class homes, El Saadawi clarifies that they are particularly prone to sexual assault as a result of class differences.

The small maidservant . . . is the only remaining "sex avenue" for the hungry males that are panting with thirst of sexual frustration, and lying in wait for any chance or hope of satisfying it . . . . The boys are less liable to feel guilty if sex is practiced with a servant girl, and in addition they are not doing wrong to somebody of their own class, but to a creature who is socially very much their inferior. In addition she is preferable to a prostitute since sex with her is free of charge and does not threaten them with the chance of venereal disease. (1980: 23)

Hence, one may say that Tariq’s aggressive sexual conduct can be considered as a violation of the powerless women by the powerful upper class people where the values of greed, lust, extravagance and pleasure are allowed to flourish on the misery of the toiling masses. However in God Dies by the Nile, we find that the Mayor is not only a symbol of class but also symbolically foregrounded as the ultimate god of patriarchy. He is perceived as a kind of demigod in the village. Such perception of the almost godly power of the Mayor leads Sheikh Zahran to say “we are God’s slaves when it’s time to say our prayers only. But we are the Mayor’s slaves all the time” (53). This shows how the lives of lower class people are completely controlled by the Mayor both economically and psychologically.

For patriarchy to survive as an institution, it has to be fortified by religion, politics, and social customs. Interestingly enough, we notice that the Mayor, a symbol of patriarchy, is fortified by three interrelated forces. Religious ideology represented by the Imam of the Mosque, Sheikh Hamzawi, local and cultural traditions symbolized by the local healer, Haj Ismail, and the coercive power of the political establishment personified by the Head of the Village Guard, Sheikh Zahran. Through the consciousness of the Mayor, we are introduced to his tools of oppression and domination “there were three men in
Kafr El Teen who knew almost everything about him. The Chief of the Village Guard, the Sheikh of the mosque, and the village barber. Without them he could not rule Kafr El Teen. They were his instruments, his aides and his means for administering the affairs of the village.”(98). Here, El Saadawi tries to deconstruct the patriarchal class system by exposing its dark side where women are raped and destroyed for being women and men are killed for failing to fortify and support fully the patriarchal class domination .“You do not know the Mayor, Fatheya. He’s a dangerous man, and fears no one, not even Allah. He can do injustice to people and put them in goal when they have done nothing to merit it. He can even murder innocent people.”(106). Therefore, the oppressive nature of the patriarchal class order can be explicitly seen through the incarceration of Kafrawi and Galal, the rape and disappearance of both Nefissa and Zeinab and the murder of Elwau, Fatheya, and their adopted child.

Moreover, God Dies by the Nile uncovers a social world of what it is like to grow up in a patriarchal class society based on gender and class. Patriarchy, for El Saadawi, is an all-inclusive system that informs social, political, and religious structures. (MaltiDouglas : 1995). It has social, religious, and political roots that serve to fortify it. For example, the Mayor’s wife, is able to see the hypocrisy of the patriarchal ideology. When her son, Tariq, complains that sexual immorality has become rampant because women have supposedly thrown virtue overboard “Girls have no morals these days, father.”(39), she challenges him while throwing suggestive glances at her own husband, the Mayor.

She raised one eyebrow and said, ‘Is that so. Master Tariq. Now you are putting on a Sheikh’s turban and talking of virtue. Where was your virtue hiding last week when you stole a ten pound note from my handbag, and went to visit that woman with whose house I have now become familiar ?where was your virtue last year when you assaulted Saadia, the servant, and obliged me to throw her out in order to avoid a scandal ?(39)

Within this context, Nabila Jaber argues “that there are two modes of patriarchy: private patriarchy that is enacted in the authority of men over women in family and public patriarchy as manifested through the state and increasingly the religious establishment, particularly Islam.” (2001:101).vii The patriarchal class oppression of women rooted in the sexual division of labor within the family is protected by government, which sees the family as private rather than public. (Gordon:1996). And that reflects how state plays a crucial role in fortifying the patriarchal class system through enacting laws which consolidate the authority of men.

Deconstruction of patriarchy continues through exposing these patriarchal double moral standards concerning female and male sexuality. For El Saadawi , the whole society is permeated by a dichotomy of moral standards for females and others for males. “At the root of this anomalous situation lies the fact that sexual experience in the life of a man is a source of pride and a symbol of virility, whereas sexual experience in the life of women is a source of shame and a symbol of degradation.”(1980:31). since men rule over and dominate women, they, in turn, permit for themselves what they forbid for women. The Mayor, a symbol of patriarchy, justifies the double moral standards “Men have always been immoral. But now the women are throwing virtue overboard, and that will lead to a real catastrophe. The Mayor’s wife replies “Why catastrophe? Why not equality, or justice?”.(39). Therefore, chastity and virginity are considered essential for women while freedom and sexual licentiousness are looked upon as natural where men are concerned. John Caldwell argues that “The patriarchal belt is characterized by male domination, son preference, restrictive codes of behavior for women, and the association of family honor with female virtue. In many areas, the preoccupation with female virginity leads to honor killings in the event of real or perceived sexual misconduct by women.”( 1982:162). Therefore, moral values are
man made and imposed by the ruling class with the aim of serving certain economic and political interests to ensure the situation from which that class draws power is maintained. To put it differently, the historical defeat of the female sex, for Friedrich Engels, has begun in the wake of the agricultural revolution and the advent of civilization and class society. (Engels: 1972).

Hence, one cannot ignore the economic and political dimensions that shape and influence the moral values imposed on women. “We cannot look at the cultural gap without looking at the economic gap or at the inequality between countries, the inequality between classes in each country, and the inequalities between the sexes in the family and in the state.” (El Saadawi 1997: 135)

It is noticeable for patriarchy to survive as an oppressive system; its ideology must be instilled in society. We also find when that ideology has not fully been imbibed; force has been used to implement it. Even force is used from the lower class people like Kafrawi and Masoud who are reminded that their patriarchal authority and manhood is at stake if they do not resort to the use of force to get their daughters comply with their orders. For example, when both Kafrawi and Masoud ask what they are to do when their daughters refuse to comply, Sheikh Zahran retorts by challenging their manhood. “What can you do?! Is that a question for a man to ask?” responded Sheikh Zahran, even more heatedly. ‘Beat her. Don’t you know that girls and women never do what they’re told unless you beat them?.” (21). Hence, one may argue that in patriarchy, even the victim plays the role of the victimizer. We can see that even the most powerless man is led to believe that he has the right to beat his wife and daughters and accept the idea that his women like everything in his peasant life belong to the patriarchal ruling class.

Commenting on how ideology is forcibly implemented, Antonio Gramsci argues that patriarchy is “a repressive system that can be maintained only by the sheer force of coercion.” (1971: 12). For Gramsci, a complete hegemony of an oppressive system is achieved only when the victims, through a process of cultural and religious socialization, become alienated. They learn to deny their existential being and imbibe the views of their oppressors. In God Dies by the Nile, this is clearly represented by Om Saber, the daya whose various functions include female genital mutilation, abortions, defloration, and exorcism.ix

At weddings she would lead the yoo yoons, paint the feet of girls and women with red henna, and on the wedding night she would tear the virgin’s hymen with her finger, or conceal the fact that it was already torn by spraying the white towel on which the virgin’s blood was supposed to pour with the blood of a rabbit or a hen. But when it was a time for mourning her suffering knew no bounds. She would slap her face with both hands repeatedly, scream out in agony, chant a hymn of sadness to the deceased, and wash the body if she was a female. She was always busy solving the problems of girls and women, carrying out abortions with a stalk of mouloukheya, throttling the new-born baby if necessary, or leaving it to die by not tying the umbilical cord with a silk thread so that it bled to death. (72)

The most critical role of the daya is to uphold and consolidate the patriarchal image of women. She is simply reinforcing the patriarchal value placed on the sanctity of the hymen in the life of a woman to preserve the sense of honor of the men in the patriarchal family. Here, El Saadawi narrates to us the importance and sanctity of the hymen in the life of Fatheya. “she did not see the clean white towel stained red, nor the wound the woman’s nail had made in her flesh. But she felt her virgin colors had bled, for in her ears resounded the beat of the drums, the shrieks of joy and the high-pitched trilling of the women.” (31-2). Within this context, Gordon-Chipembere argues that “maintenance of one's virginity ensured a good marriage, which created the possibility of moving the family out of economic
hardship, or into another class.” (2006:3).x El Sadaawi continues exposing the ugly head of patriarchy by shedding the light on genital mutilation, an inhuman practice which is fortified by economic, social, moral and ideological factors.xiI has profound physical and psychological impact on women. In regard to such barbaric practice meted against women, Dorkenoo argues that the health risks are immense.

The first being death. A long term result of circumcision is the development of neuroma, which renders the entire genital area unbearable to touch. Also, there is the presence of vulval abscesses, constant infections, damage to other vital organs, and the greater susceptibility to HIV because of the interchange of blood during penetration or de-infiltration with an unclean circumciser’s tool. Needless to say, a circumcised woman feels severe pain during intercourse - known as dyspareunia. (1992::8)

Fatheya is conditioned culturally since her childhood that she has something impure about her and needs to be cut. “Then one day Om Saber came to their house, and she was told that the old woman was going to cut the bad, unclean part off. She was overcome by a feeling of overwhelming happiness. She was only six years old at the time.”(32). Here, we find that El Saadawi tries to make us pay attention to this inhuman crime and the patriarchal mentality behind such practice; a practice which is meant to dominate women and consolidate the patriarchal image of women as sexual objects “To keep women monogamous, to attenuate the woman’s sexuality, to control reproduction too.” (1997: 65).Taking into account the economic and political factors behind such practice, Fawzia Khan emphasizes that “we must place the issue of clitoridectomy in a global context of capitalist oppression and injustice of which women are victims.” (1997:88).

However, El-Saadawi seeks to examine the multi-dimensions of patriarchy and its reliance on religion as its ideological bulwark.xii In regard to patriarchy and how it is fortified by the religious ideology, Sheikh Hamzawi and Fatheya’s marriage stands as an example. It seems that Sheikh Hamzawi’s position as a religious leader of the community “responsible for upholding the teachings of Allah, and keeping the morals and piety of the village intact”(30) enables him to force Fatheya to marry him against her will. What do you do?” exclaimed Haj Ismail, now looking furiously. ‘Is that a question for a man to ask? Beat her, my brother; beat her once and twice and thrice. Do you not know that girls and women are only convinced if they receive a good hiding?’ Masoud remained silent for a moment, then he called out, ‘Fatheya, come here at once.’ But there was no answer, so he climbed up on the top of the oven, pulled her out by her hair, and beat her several times until she came down. Then he handed her over to Haj Ismail and the same day she married the pious old sheik. (31)

Sheikh Hamzawi was himself an impotent man and all of “Haj Ismail’s potions and amulets had been totally ineffective restoring or even patching up his virility. (27-8). Due to his sexual impotency, the most that Sheikh Hamzawi can manage is to caress Fatheya’s thighs and nothing more. Therefore, one may say that by marrying Fatheya, Sheikh Hamzawi has condemned her to a perpetual state of virginity and misery. She was expected to live in his house surrounded by all due care and respect, never to be seen elsewhere except twice in her life. The first time when she moved from her father’s to her husband’s house. And the second when she left her husband’s house for the grave allotted to her in the burial grounds. Apart from that .....

It seems that in the Arab-Islamic family, the wife’s main obligations are to maintain a home, care for her children, and obey her husband. “He is entitled to exercise his marital authority by restraining his wife’s movements and preventing her from showing herself in public.”(Mohdadam 2004:137). Commenting on the situation of women in general, El Sadaawi says “I remember my mother saying that my

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grandmother had moved through the streets on only two occasions. The first was when she left her father’s house and went to her husband’s house to be buried. Both times no part of her body was uncovered. (1997:87)”.

*God Dies by the Nile* ends with two scenes symbolic of resistance against the patriarchal class system by Fatheya and Zakeya respectively. We find Fatheya reject the double moral standards of patriarchy that condemns the ‘son of sin’ rather than the sinner himself.xiii”Every time something goes wrong in the village, they will blame this [the] poor, innocent child. What has the child got to do with the cotton worm, Hamzawi? Was it he who told the worm to eat the cotton? The brain of a buffalo has more sense in it than the mind of these people here in Kafr El Teen.” (112-3). In regard to the question of the illegitimate child, El Saadawi argues that “moral codes and standards in our societies very rarely apply to all people equally. This is the most damning proof of how immoral such codes and standards really are.” (1980:27). It also alludes to the fact that many illegitimate children were born as a result of the sexual freedom enjoyed by men in the patriarchal class system. We see Fatheya fighting tooth and nail against those who now seek to destroy her adopted ‘son of sin.’ “She was a wild animal, ferociously fighting those who surrounded her in the night. She hit out at the men with legs, and her feet, with her shoulders and her hips all the while holding the child tightly in her arms.” (115).

During the course of her courageous resistance, Fatheya ultimately comes to her ultimate death resisting the religious, political and traditional forces that consolidate and legitimize patriarchy. Suddenly his eyes picked up a small shadow lying on the bank of the river, a short distance away. He went up to it, lifted it from the ground and came back carrying the torn body of her little child. Sheikh Metwalli held it out in his arms and laid it down softly on her chest. She curled her arms around it tightly and closed her eyes. And now when they lifted her they found that her body was light and easy to carry. They carried her as far as the house, and on the following morning buried her with the child held tightly in her arms. Hamzawi bought her a shroud of green silk and they wrapped her in it carefully. They dug a long ditch for her and lay her softly down in it, then covered her with the earth which lay around (116-7).

It is worthy to note that the victims, whether illegitimate children or raped women like Nefissa and Zeinab are sacrificed at the altar of the patriarchal class system, “a civilization where man is god and decide how best to satisfy his interests, his desires and his whims.”( Saadawi 1980:62). The other scene ends with Zakeya whose son Jalal and her brother Kafrawi are being jailed by the Mayor and her brother’s two daughters Nefissa and Zeinab were raped by him too. Zakeya finally becomes desalinated and god of patriarchy becomes demystified in her own mind. She sees counter-violence as her only sensible choice to resist the oppression meted against her own family in particular and women in general. Consequently, she walks out of the door and pauses for a moment before crossing the lane to the Iron Gate of the Mayor’s house.

The Mayor saw her come towards him. ‘One of the peasant women who work on my farm,’ he thought. When he came close he saw her arm rise high up in the air holding the hoe. He did not feel the hoe land on his head and crush it at one blow. For a moment before, he had looked into her eyes, just once. And from that moment he was destined never to see, or feel, or know anything more. (137)

By killing the Mayor, a s symbol of the patriarchal class oppression, one comes to conclude that El Saadawi , through her character Zakeya , conveys a message to all women in the world that resistance is the only option left for them if they want to eradicate oppression meted against them.
Conclusion

One comes finally to conclude that patriarchy in God Dies by the Nile emerges as a system with political, economic, social, cultural, and psychological manifestations bound together by underlying class dynamics. Such oppressive systems, represented by the abusive and exploitative figures of male authority, is the real cause behind the suffering of Zakeya, Nefissa, Zeinab and Fatheya. For oppressive patriarchal class ideologies to survive, brutal force implements and instills such ideology in society. The impact of such ideology on women has been manifested through double moral standards, rape, sexual exploitation, psychological instability, illegitimate children and violence. With the murder of the Mayor, Zakeya finally restores her sense of freedom and self-respect by resisting oppression meted against her family. Within this context, Frantz Fanon comments that “this violence represents the absolute line of action.” (1963 :67). One also comes to find out that women pay dearly with their freedom and dignity to obey the laws of the patriarchal class system that dominates society. They also pay a heavy price in order to become free. El Saadawi, through her characters Zakeya and Fatheya, conveys a message to all women that resistance is the only option left to eradicate oppression and deconstruct the patriarchal class structures that enslave them. Furthermore, one can see the importance of collective action taken by women to resist the patriarchal class oppression meted against them. And that may reflect El Saadawi’s vision which it is only through political organization and a patient, long-enduring struggle, women can become an effective political power which will force society to change and abolish the patriarchal class structures that keep women victims.xiv

Notes.

1- Heidi Hartmann observes “the categories of Marxist analysis give no clues about why women are subordinate to men inside and outside family and why it is not the other way around.(1981: 41). In regard to patriarchy, she defines it as “a set of social relations between men which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women.”( 1981:14) Please see Heidi Hartmann. “ The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism : Towards a More Progressive Union,” in Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism, Lydia sergeant, ed. Boston :South End Press, 1981.


3- For Mary Murry “class and patriarchy have been organically rather than accidentally or contingently related. Because class and patriarchy have been organically connected ,we cannot draw hard-and-fast boundaries around them. The relationship between them has been a symbiotic one.” (1995:123). Please see Murray, Mary. The Law of the Father? Patriarchy in the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism .Rout ledge: New York, 1995. In regard to Maria Mies , she argues that “capitalism cannot function without patriarchy. Capitalism requires never-ending capital accumulation; therefore, it requires

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patriarchal man-woman relations.” (1986: 170-1) . She also believes that capitalism and patriarchy are not two separate systems, but intrinsically connected as capitalist patriarchy. Please see Mies, Maria. Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labor. London: Zed, 1986. “I am going to characterize as a socialist feminist anyone trying to understand women's subordination in a coherent and systematic way that integrates class and sex, as well as other aspects of identity such as race/ethnicity or sexual orientation, with the aim of using this analysis to help liberate women.” (Holmstrom 2003:38). Please see for further information Holmstrom, Nancy. “The Socialist Feminist Project.” Monthly Review. 54.10(2003): 38

4- In regard to the suffering faced by El Saadawi in her writing career, we find that the original title, God Dies by the Nile was censored by Arab publishers, seemingly due to religious sensitivity to the metaphoric extension of death to God. “I want to write freely about . . . religion, sex, God, authority, the state. But the publishers also censor me. Even in Beirut. I'll give you an example: my book God Dies by the Nile-they rejected the title totally. We settled on Mawt al-Rajul al-Wahid ’ala al-Ard.” (1990:403) . Please see El Saadawi, Nawal. “Reflections of a Feminist.” In Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing. Eds. Badran, Margot and Miriam Cooke. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990 . 394-404. El Saadawi speaks about the corrupt nature of her country's government, the dangers of publishing under such authoritarian conditions and her determination to continue to write and convey the truth. Danger has been a part of my life ever since I picked up a pen and wrote. Nothing is more perilous than truth in a world that lies. Nothing is more perilous than knowledge in a world that has considered knowledge a sin since Adam and Eve... There is no power in the world that can strip my writings from me. (Memoirs of a Woman Doctor :1989 ). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal. Memoirs of a Woman Doctor. Trans. Catherine Cobham. San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1989.


6- In regard to the Zar, El Saadawi says that women are “treated with all sorts of magic or traditional rituals, including a form of exorcism in which the ‘devils’ or ‘evil spirits’ are driven away by a violent collective dance carried on until all the participants reach a trance –like state.” (1997:89). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal. The Nawal El Saadawi Reader. London & New York: Zed Books, 1997.

7- In order to put an end to rape, Simone de Beauvoir proposes that women must demystify it, by naming it, describing how it operated, and above all, by fighting it. (De Beauvoir: 1989). See De Beauvoir, Simone. The Second Sex. USA: Vantage: Books Edition, 1989.

8- According to Michael Mann, the patriarchal society is one in which power is held by male heads of households. There is also clear separation between the public and private spheres of life. In the private sphere of the household, the patriarch enjoys arbitrary power over all junior males, all females, and all children. In the public sphere, power is shared between male patriarchs according to whatever other principles of stratification operate. Please see Mann, Michael. “A crisis in stratification theory.” In Gender and Stratification. Eds. Crompton, Rosemary and Michael Mann. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986.40-56. “The Arab states embody various patriarchal structures and Arab society clings to a patriarchal system in which women's position within and duties toward the family precede their rights as individuals.” (Zuhur 2003:17). Please see Zuhur, Sherifa. “Women and Empowerment in the Arab World.” Arab Studies Quarterly.25.4. (2003): 17. In Sexual Politics, Kate Millett establishes that patriarchy is a system where male domination is achieved through ideological means. She argues that it

9-For El Saadawi,“ the patriarchal family, therefore, came into existence mainly for economic reasons. It was necessary for society simultaneously to build up a system of moral and religious values, as well as a legal system capable of protecting and maintaining these economic interests. In the final analysis, we can safely say that female circumcision, the chastity belt and other savage practices applied to women are basically the result of economic interests that govern society.”(1980:41). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980.

10-Concerning the inhuman practice of genital mutilation, El Saadawi says “Circumcision is most often performed on female children at the age of seven or eight (before the girl begins to get menstrual periods). On the scene appears the daya or local midwife. Two women members of the family grasp the child’s thighs on either side and pull them apart to expose the external genital organs and to prevent her from struggling like trussing a chicken before it is slain. A sharp razor in the hand of the daya cuts off the clitoris.” (1980:33). She argues further that “numerous were the nights which I spent by the side of a young girl in a small country house or mud hut during my years in rural Egypt, treating hemorrhage that had resulted from the long dirty finger nail of a daya cutting through the soft tissues during the process of defloration.”(1980:29). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980.

11-In regard to ceremonies performed, Natasha Gordon-Chipembere argues that some female circumcision ceremonies were accompanied by ululating women and in rural areas drumming and other musical instruments, primarily to celebrate this rite of passage, but essentially to drown out the screams of pain from the young girls. Please see Gordon Chipembere, Natasha. “Carving the Body: Female Circumcision in African Women’s Memoirs.” *Esharp*. 6:2. (2006): 1-20. Within this context, El Saadawi says that “In many villages, this ritual ceremony in honor of virginity is performed by an ugly old crone, the daya who earns her living by amputating the clitoris of children, and tearing open the vagina of young brides. The father of the bride then holds up a white towel stained with blood, and waves it proudly above his head for the relatives assembled at the door to bear witness to the fact that the honor of his daughter and of the family is intact.”(1980: 29). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980.

12-Concerning the economic factors behind the practice of genital mutilation, El Saadawi argues that “the continued existence of such practices in our society today signifies that these economic interests are still operative. The thousands of dayas, nurses, para-medical staff and doctors, who make money out of female circumcision, naturally resist any change in these values and practices which are a source of gain to them. Economic factors and, concomitantly, political factors are the basis upon which such customs as female circumcision have grown up. It is important to understand the facts as they really are, and the reasons that lie behind them.” (1980: 41). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980. You can also see for further information, Khan, Fawzia “Introducing a New Course: Muslim Women in Twentieth-Century Literature.” NWSA.9:1 (1997): 88 and Lionnet, Françoise. “Feminisms and universalisms.” *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A reader*. Eds. Lewis, Reina and Sara Mills. New York: Routledge, 2003. 368-380.
13-For El Saadawi, religion “aims at truth, equality, justice, love and a healthy wholesome life for all people, whether men or women. There can be no true religion that aims at disease, mutilation of the bodies of female children, and amputation of an essential part of their reproductive organs.” (1980: 41-2). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal. The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980. In her interview with Stephanie McMillan, she says that my conception of god is that god is inside us, and if god is outside us, it is the collective power of people, when they act, when they revolt against injustice. So god to me is justice. The revolution of people is divine. Please see McMillan, Stephanie. “A Conversation with Dr. Nawalel Saadawi.” (1999). <home.earthlink.net/~twoeyesmagazine/issue1/nes.htm >.


15- “It is necessary that women unite everywhere to strengthen and broaden their movement towards liberation. Solidarity between women can be a powerful force of change, and can influence future development in ways favorable not only to women but also to men.” (1980:14). She contends further “It is necessary at all the times to see the close links between women’s struggles for emancipation and the battles for national and social liberation waged by people in all parts of the ‘third world’ against foreign domination and the exploitation exercised by international capitalism over human and natural resources.” (1980:8). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal. The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980. Chandra Mohanty says “I was committed, both politically and personally, to building non colonizing feminist solidarity across borders.” (2004:224). She contends further that “I want to speak of feminism without silences and exclusions in order to draw attention to the tension between the simultaneous plurality and narrowness of borders and the emancipatory potential of crossing through, with, and over these borders in our everyday lives. (2004:2). See Mohanty, Chandra. Feminism without Borders. USA: Duke University Press, 2004.

Works Cited


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**ASSIMILATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS IN ALA AL ASWANY’S CHICAGO**

**ABSTRACT**

In this paper, I would like to examine the issue of immigration, cultural assimilation and its discontents, religious discrimination in America and political oppression in Egypt in Ala Al Aswany’s Chicago. The researcher argues that Al Aswany’s Chicago can be seen as an awakening call to address the problems such as demonization and marginalization faced by immigrant groups to avoid any backlash or any acts of violence seen all over the world today. The paper concludes that by creating a diverse pluralistic society and seriously getting engaged based on a universal notion of justice in which no single community’s righteousness, prosperity and dignity comes at the expense of another, we may see that immigrants keep their own identities, embrace successfully the values of their new society and become easily integrated. KEYWORDS: Multiculturalism, Assimilation, Immigration, Persecution INTRODUCTION Alaa al Aswany’s novel, Chicago1 sheds light on many important issues like immigration, the question of cultural assimilation, religious discrimination in America and political oppression in Egypt. For Al Aswany, he sees literature — as an expanse of freedom that should examine the areas that people don’t
talk about, to show us things we could be feeling but not seeing. 2 In Chicago, we find that the majority of its characters are Egyptian students and faculty members of the University of Illinois Medical Centre in Chicago. By selecting America as the setting of his characters, Alaa al Aswany raises very urgent questions which need an answer especially in the post-9/11 America like, to what extent the immigrant should be loyal to his old country and can people ever adjust their identities and values sufficiently to become fully assimilated members of the new society. In Chicago 4 Alaa al Aswany’s tackles Egyptian migrants’ predicament, their hopes, expectations, frustrations, cultural conflict, struggles to adapt and keep one’s cultural and religious identity and their stories of success in fulfilling their dreams. For example, when people from different communities migrate abroad, they try to keep their culture, language, values and identity. For that reason, you find each community living together, preserving their own educational institutions, schools, mosques, churches and temples. They cling together out of fear of assimilation to the new culture which may create cultural interference. For instance, conflict may emerge between the older generation which represents the values of their former home and the younger generation which assimilates itself more easily through systemization and


Schooling. One may contend this conflict raises serious questions as to whether migration is a worthy endeavor or there is a price one should pay in return for success. This leads us to question whether multiculturalism is a success or a failure.

MULTICULTURALISM AND ITS DICONTENTS

One may argue that the topic Alaa Al Aswany tackles is very timely taking into account the growing debate over the benefits to society that multiculturalism can bring. Multiculturalism can be defined as a society which is —at ease with the rich tapestry of human life and the desire amongst people to express their own identity in the manner they see fit. 6 It is related to communities having multiple cultures. It is closely associated with the politics of identity, difference and recognition.

One may say that cultural isolation can preserve the uniqueness of the local culture of a nation, contribute to global cultural diversity and avoid singling out any cultural community values as central. 7
For supporters of multiculturalism like Anne-Marie Mooney Cotter, C. James Trotman, Tariq Modood and Bhikhu Parekh, it is just a valuable experience since diversity and difference can be a creative experience. To elaborate further, for Anne-Marie Mooney, multiculturalism is a just system that grants an opportunity for people to truly express who they are within a society. For C. James Trotman, multiculturalism is valuable because it —uses several disciplines to highlight neglected aspects of our social history, particularly the histories of women and minorities [...] promotes respect for the dignity of the lives and voices of the forgotten. While for Tariq Modoo, it is, —most timely and necessary, and [...] we need more not less, since it is, —the form of integration that best fits the ideal of egalitarianism, it has —the best chance of succeeding in the —post-9/11, post 7/7 world and has remained —moderate and pragmatic .10

Put differently, they base their argument on the fact that culture is not a fixed thing based on the ethnicity or religion but it is evolving as result of several factors that change as the world changes.


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Historically speaking, the importance of multiculturalism stems from the —human rights revolution11 after the changes that followed the end of WWII where crimes against humanity can no longer be taken for granted like the Holocaust12, the ethnic cleansing of Palestine13, the end of the era of colonization in Africa and Asia14. In the United States, we have witnessed the rise of the Civil Rights Movement 15 which —criticized ideals of assimilation that often led to prejudices against those who did not act according to Anglo-American standards and which led to the development of academic ethnic studies programs as a way to counteract the neglect of contributions by racial minorities in classrooms.

However, critics of multiculturalism voice their concerns that —antion states, which are synonymous with a cultural identity of their own, lose out to enforced multiculturalism which leads ultimately to erode the host nations' distinct culture. For example, Robert D. Putnam has come to conclude after conducting a survey in American communities that —multiculturalism affects social trust. 16. One of his findings is that people in diverse communities —don’t trust the local mayor, they don’t trust the local
paper, they don’t trust other people and they don’t trust institutions. Putnam concludes his study that in the presence of ethnic diversity, —[W]e hunker down. We act like turtles. The effect of diversity is worse than had been imagined. To elaborate further, Roi Simyoini in his article, —Has multiculturalism failed? argues that Western Europe’s immigration policy has backfired citing incidents which have occurred in Boston, London, France, and Sweden. He goes on to elaborate that in spite of all benefits Muslim immigrants receive in Sweden, they still prefer to entrench themselves in their own culture and refuse to be assimilated. The Swedish immigration policy has completely collapsed. The Swedes thought they were assisting persecuted

11 Steven Vertovec and Susanne Wessendorf, eds. The multiculturalism backlash: European discourses, policies and practices (London: Routledge, 2010)


21 A British soldier was hacked to death in London by a Muslim convert of Nigerian decent 22 A French soldier was stabbed in the throat in a busy commercial district outside Paris. 23 In Sweden, riots continue to plague the capital, with cars being set ablaze and uprisings spreading out from mainly poor immigrant areas in Stockholm. 24 For more information on Muslims in Sweden, see please, Goran Larsson and Ake Sander, *Islam and Muslims in Sweden: Integration or Fragmentation? A Contextual Study* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2008) 192

This does not mean that all Muslim immigrants have failed to integrate into Swedish society since there are many who have found jobs and integrated successfully but the majority prefer to stay entrenched in their own culture. Commenting on the large Muslim community living in France, Nickolas Sarkozy says that multiculturalism is a failure. —The truth is that, in all our democracies, we’ve been too concerned about the identity of the new arrivals and not enough about the identity of the country receiving them. This raises the issue of Islam and our Muslim compatriots. David Cameron has also remarked on the same issue. —We won’t defeat terrorism simply by the actions we take outside our borders. Europe needs to wake up to what is happening in our own countries. We have tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run counter to our values. We have encouraged different
cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and the mainstream. 30 For David Cameron, a
culture of tolerance has allowed radical elements, either Islamic or far-right extremists, to muster
support for their radical agendas. However, the discussion of multiculturalism and its discontents leads
us to explore the concept of assimilation and its manifestation in Al Aswany’s Chicago.

ASSIMILATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS IN ALA AL ASWANY’S CHICAGO

Assimilation31 can be defined as the blending of minority groups into the dominant society or the
process whereby a minority group gradually adapts to the customs of the prevailing culture. In Chicago,
Al Aswany tries to tackle the issue of cultural assimilation. For instance, most of Chicago’s action takes
place in America, a nation which is founded by immigrants and on the belief that —old attachments can
be transcended. 32 All the different cultures are melted in one pot. Coined as the Melting Pot33, it was
based on the idea that, —each individual immigrant, and each group of immigrants, assimilated into
American society at their own pace..34 The philosophy of the Melting Pot in America has potential for conflict, for instance, with Islamic
communities which prefer to keep their religious values and identity even when they move to live in
America. For example, we find that Aswany’s characters struggle with notions of nationality and identity
to cope with the challenges in their new society, America. In other words, they must decide, —ohw
much of their past they can bear to or are able to throw. 35

25 Roi Simonyi, —Has multiculturalism failed? —/1

26 For more information on Muslims in France, please see, e.g, Jonathan Laurence. Integrating Islam:
Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France (Washington, DC: New Brookings
Institution Press, 2006); Elaine R. Thomas. Immigration, Islam, and the Politics of Belonging in France: A
Comparative Framework (Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011)

27 Nicolas Sarkozy is a French politician who served as the 23rd President of France from 16 May 2007
until 15 May 2012.

28 Roi Simonyi, —Has multiculturalism failed?

29 David Cameron is the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

30 Roi Simonyi, —Has multiculturalism failed?

31 For more information on assimilation, please see, Peter D. Salinas, Assimilation, American Style (New
September 2008 33 The melting pot is a metaphor for a heterogeneous society becoming more
homogeneous and it is particularly used to describe the assimilation of immigrants to the USA. 34
Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco and Carola Suárez-Orozco, The new immigration: an interdisciplinary reader
Accessed June 11, 2013 http://www.newstatesman.com/books/2008/10/aswany-chicago-cairo-
american/1 193
In *Chicago*, we find characters try to make a balance between their old ways of life in Egypt and their new life in America. For example, we find that Shaymaa Muhammadi suffers from identity crisis and cultural shock. She is a pious student who comes from the provincial town of Tanta, falls in love with an Egyptian student, Tariq Haseeb at Illinios University and abandons the strict conservative sexual codes of her Egyptian society.

When it comes to Nagi Abdul Samad, we observe that he embraces the values of the sexual freedom in America but he does not forget to take every opportunity to protest against the corruption of the Egyptian government and muster support for its downfall. He is determined to change Egypt into a democratic country. —The regime in Egypt is despotic and corrupt and it persecutes all Egyptians,
Muslims and Copts... All Egyptians are suffering from discrimination so long as they are not members of the ruling party. 36 Hence, he poses a threat to the Egyptian regime back home since he becomes involved with expatriate opposition groups in Chicago led by Karam Doss.

However, one may argue that none of characters in Chicago has achieved a satisfactory balance between their Egyptian and American identities. On the one hand, we find that those who try to abandon their roots pay a very heavy price as happened with Ra’fat Thabit’s only daughter who lives with an American drug addict, Jeff. Shaymaa loses her virginity to a boyfriend and Tariq Haseeb has no intention of marrying her. —I am the son of General Abd al-Qadir Haseeb, assistant director of Cairo Security; I grew up in Roxy and went to the Heliopolis Club and turned down daughters of notables. Do you expect me to end up marrying a peasant? Let her get as mad as she wants to be! To hell with her! 37 On the other hand, we notice that those who cling to their Egyptian identities do not fare well too. For instance, Danana’s pretension that he is a diligent student is embarrassingly exposed and he is consequently dismissed when his professor discovers his plagiarism and cheating on a research project.

He looked at Danana as if he didn’t understand then went over to the cabinet himself and took two other slides that he put through a similar examination, and then looked at Danana, who bowed his head slowly. For a few moments, a silence, charged with an unknown energy, prevailed so quietly that the soft hum made by the lab’s fridge sounded like destiny. Suddenly Dr. Baker threw the slides on the floor and they broke into shiny shards. Then he roared with an angry resounding voice that no one had heard from him before. —What a scumbag! The results you submitted are fabricated. Where is your honor? I will revoke your dissertation and expel you from the department at once. 38 In Chicago, Al Aswany sheds light on fact that immigration can be a painful experience. We find he isolates his characters in an alien culture where they experience cultural traumas variably. He also examines the difficulty of transcending cultural barriers and losing one’s identity. This can be seen through the characters’ various experiences that any Egyptian who tries to become an American and abandons his roots will be condemned to a miserable life like in the case of Ra’fat Thabit and Muhammad Salah whose lives end in tragedy. For instance, Ra’fat Thabit, an Egyptian American professor who boasts of being an American and who despises his culture and yet continues to carry it within him, which makes matters worse. He cannot accept his daughter Sarah’s independence when she decides to move out of the family home to live with her boyfriend, Jeff, an artist who introduces Sarah to drugs. This can be seen through his conversation with his longtime friend Dr. Muhammad Salah.

37 Ibid,128
38 Ibid,119

—Don’t you find it strange, Salah? That you father a little girl and you grow attached to her and you love her more than any other person on the face of the earth and you do your utmost to provide her with a happy life. And as soon as your little girl grows up, she turns against you and leaves with her boyfriend at the earliest opportunity.

—This is natural

—I don’t find it natural at all.

—Sarah is an American girl, Ra’fat. Girls in America leave their family home to live independently with their boyfriends. You know that better than me. In this country you cannot control your children’s personal lives.
—Even you say that? You are talking exactly like my wife. You both really irritate me. What can I do to convince you both that I accept the idea that my daughter has a boyfriend? Please believe, just once and forever, this fact: I am American. I have raised my daughter with American values. I have got rid of, for good, Eastern backwardness. I no longer make a connection between a person and their genitals.39

Though Dr. Thabit maintains that he does not interfere in Sarah’s personal life, he is very concerned about the future of his daughter with Jeff, —but I don’t trust this creep with her, not for a single moment. 40 For Salah, Sarah will discover herself one day if Jeff is a bad person or not since, —she’s entitled to have her own experiences, by herself. 41 Thabit’s concern about his daughter, Sarah, reveals a deep-seated struggle within him that he cannot get rid of his Eastern roots though he claims he is fully assimilated to American culture and values. Thabit’s inner torment is shared by Muhammad Salah who understands the psychology of the cultural struggle of his friend which represents generally the psychological torment of many Egyptians and other communities living in America, to maintain a balance between the two cultures:

Suddenly he felt pity for Ra’fat. He understood him well. Ra’fat couldn’t stand the idea that his daughter was in love with another man. He was in the grips of deathly jealousy toward Jeff.... Ra’fat’s problem, however, was much more complicated: he couldn’t bear the idea of his daughter having a relationship outside marriage, for despite his harangues in defense of Western culture, he still had the mentality of the Eastern man which he attacked and mocked.42

The cultural struggle is also shared by Muhammad Salah who feels that he is lucky to have no children and wishes not to be in Thabit’s shoes now. —Maybe I’m lucky I didn’t have any children. To be barren is better than to be in Ra’fat’s shoes right now.43

This does not condone Salah from having his own struggle himself. In spite of living in America for many years, marrying an American woman, having a successful career, Salah still yearns for the past, feels nostalgic towards Egypt and regrets his decision to immigrate to America. —This might sound ridiculous, but I now believe that my decision to emigrate was not the right thing to do. 44 Salah feels that he has betrayed everyone back home, especially his beloved Egyptian woman, Zeinab Radwan who said to him on the day of his immigration to America —I regret to say that you’re a coward 45, leaving me and your friends who are fighting for democracy and justice in Egypt.46

39 Ibid,53
40 Ibid,54
41 Ibid,54
42 Ibid,55
43 Ibid,55
44 Ibid,127
45 Ibid,125

In America, new immigrants generally try to get married to American ladies in order to get American citizenships and the benefits associated with them. For example, we find Salah getting married to Chris, an American woman, to get an American citizenship, —Yes, indeed. He had used Chris sexually, got her
addicted to him while he was implementing his plan of marrying her to get an American passport. 47 It has been a loveless marriage which ends in separation. —You know very well what you mean to me. But I’m going through a crisis that will not be over in the near future. I don’t want to cause you any more pain. I suggest that we separate, if only temporarily. Sorry, Chris, but I think it’s best for both of us. 48

Separation has tormented Chris mentally and she starts wondering if Salah ever loved her, if he lost interest in her and if he used her all these years to get an American citizenship to enhance his career:

Did Arab men always need younger women and was that why they had more than one wife? Had Salah kept an Oriental man’s mentality in spite of the years he’d spent in America? Or was the truth that he had never loved her? Had he deceived her all those years? Had he married her to get an American passport? To enhance his social status? To be the successful immigrant university professor married to an American woman? If that was true, why had he stayed with her all those years? Had he left her after getting his American citizenship, it would have been easier. She would’ve been able to forget, even forgive him. She was young then and could’ve started all over again. But now it was as if he had used her all those years then decided to throw her in the garbage. How could he bring himself to hurt her so much? Even if he didn’t love her. They had lived together a whole lifetime and he couldn’t undo that in just one moment. He had no right to do that. Those thoughts kept boring into her like bouts of chronic pain.49

But what Chris cannot fathom and grasp is the fact that Muhammad Salah is only physically living in America but his mind and thoughts are on his beloved Zeinab and Egypt. This can be evident in his behavior after separation with Chris where he chooses to live in the basement of his house which chronicles his feelings of nostalgia. —At midnight he would begin his trip: he would take a bath and wear cologne as if going on a date. Then he would go downstairs to the basement and put on his 1970s clothes. 50 In the basement, we find him open an old suitcase that is full of his clothes that the he had brought to America from Egypt thirty years ago:

Before starting his nightly journey, he locked himself in, perhaps to feel completely isolated from the outside world or perhaps for fear that Chris might open the door; if she did, she would be certain that he had gone crazy. He wouldn’t be able to explain what he was doing. He himself did not understand it. His overpowering desire was stronger than understanding or resistance. The clothes carried within their folds his history, the scent of his real days. Every piece of clothing brought back a different memory: those were the light cotton Shurbagi shirts that he used to buy from the Swailam store in downtown Cairo; the white sharkskin suit that he wore during summer evening special occasions; the blue suit for Thursday outings; and that was the striped black suit that he had bought especially to celebrate Zeinab’s birthday. They had dinner at Le Restaurant Union in front of the High Court building then went to the Cinema Rivoli, where they watched the movie My Father Is up the Tree. In the inner jacket pocket he found a folded piece of paper that had been in the same place for thirty years: the stub of a ticket for an Umm Kulthum concert that he had attended in 1969. An idea occurred to him, so

46 For more information on the oppressive regime in Egypt, please see e.g, Tarek Osman, Egypt on the Brink: From Nasser to Mubarak (Connecticut: Yale University Press,2011); Galal Amin, Egypt in the Era of Hosni Mubarak (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press,2011) 47 Ibid,123

48 Ibid,127
49 Ibid,253
50 Ibid, 254
he left the basement and came back carrying a tape recorder. He put on the song — al-Atlal — and sat listening to it wearing the same suit that he was wearing when he heard it for the first time.51

Salah starts listening to Umm Kulthum every night and when it gets close to nine a.m. Cairo time, he begins calling his old friends and relatives in Cairo. He has to lie about the reason of his sudden calls after thirty years of absence by inventing fictional stories like, —talking of a fictitious reunion of the Class of 1970 of the College of Medicine at
Cairo University, or claim that there was a cooperative project between doctors in Illinois and Egypt. 52 He does not want them to find out that he yearns madly for Egypt and, —taht nostalgia had crushed him, that he had discovered, after turning sixty, that he had made a mistake leaving his country, that he regretted emigration to death. He should not show them his weakness and sorrows. All that he wanted was for them to talk to him a little about the past, to remember with them his real life. 53

Salah has been haunted all these years by the thought that he betrayed his people who are fighting for dignity and equality against the oppressive regime in Egypt. He remembers Zeinab and her beautiful revolutionary spirit and he can no longer keep memories from flooding:

The old pictures were appearing in his mind with amazing clarity. The floodgates of memory opened, came over and swept him away, as if the past were a gigantic genie let out of the bottle. There she was, standing before him, with her petite figure, her beautiful face, and her long black hair that she gathered in a ponytail. Her eyes were gleaming with enthusiasm as she talked to him in that dreamy voice of hers, as if she were reciting a love poem,

—Our country is great, Salah, but it has been oppressed for a long time. Our people have tremendous abilities. If we have democracy, Egypt will become a strong, advanced country in less than ten years.54

Salah recalls the farewell scene with Zeinab several times when he decides to immigrate to America leaving her and his people behind. For Zeinab, his decision of immigration is an escape from reality and a cowardly one he should not have taken.

But the dreams would soon come to an end. He would recall that final scene a thousand times, pausing and dwelling on every word, every glance, and every moment of silence. They were at their favorite spot in the garden when he told her of his decision to emigrate. He tried to be calm, to have a logical discussion, but she told him right away, —Yuo are running away.55

When we come to Shaymaa Muhammadi, we find her also struggle with the issue of assimilation and integration in USA especially after 9/11. She comments on the difficulties she faces in terms of language, adjustment to the new culture and she also observes how Muslims are treated miserably which makes her homesick. This can be noticed in her conversation with her colleague and lover, Tariq Haseeb:

She spoke in a soft voice, as if talking to herself, —I am completely alone here, Dr. Tariq. I have no friends or acquaintances. I don’t know how to deal with the Americans. I don’t understand them. All my life I had a perfect score in my English language classes, but here they speak another kind of English. They speak so fast and they swallow some of the letters so I don’t understand what they say.

51 Ibid, 254-5
52 Ibid,257
53 Ibid,257
54Ibid,83
55 Ibid,204

Tariq interrupted her, —You’re feeling homesick, and being out of place here is quite natural. As for the language problem, we’ve all faced it at the beginning. I advise you to watch television a lot so you’ll get used to the American accent.
—Even if my language improves, that won’t change anything. I feel I am an outcast in this country. Americans shy away from me because I am Arab and because I am veiled. At the airport they interrogated me as if I were a criminal. At school the students make fun of me when they see me. Did you see how that policeman treated me?

—That’s not your problem alone. We all face unpleasant situations. The image of Muslims here suffered a lot after 9/11.

—What have I done wrong?

Her statement reflects how Arabs are treated with suspicion after the tragic incident of 9/11 and how Muslims are interrogated at the airports and how they are linked with violence and terrorism. Taking Shaymaa’s case as a veiled Muslim woman, we can see how Americans avoid talking to her besides the prevalent stereotypes which link the veil with the image of the oppressed Muslim woman.

For Tariq, he shares similar feelings with Shaymaa explaining that it is hard to adjust to a new culture in the beginning, the time it takes for integration and he attributes the mistreatment of Americans to Muslims due to their lack of knowledge of Islam which calls for tolerance, peace, diversity and justice. —Put yourself in their place. Ordinary Americans know almost nothing about Islam. In their minds, Islam is associated with terrorism and killing. 60

In Chicago, Al Aswany continues to portray the struggle of creating a balance between being loyal to home and to the new society you live in. For example, if we examine the case of Dr. Karam Doss. He is an Egyptian Copt and a very popular surgeon. He is persecuted in Egypt due to his ethnicity. He is not allowed to work in the field of medicine back home. Escaping from persecution he immigrated to USA where he leads a very successful professional life. Yet we find him surprisingly still connected to Egypt and very concerned about the issue of the persecution of Copts in particular and

56 Ibid, 56–7


59 For more information on the coexistence among Muslims, Jews, and Christians throughout history, see Maria Menocal, The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of


61 For more information on persecution of Copts, please see, Ramy Tadros, The War of the Words: Oppression, Egypt’s Copts, and the State (Australia: Proton Writing Consultants Pty, 2013) 198
the miserable record of human rights violations in Egypt in general. Karam shares his story with Nagi Abd al-Samad, an Egyptian student studying in Chicago.

—Did you learn medicine in America?

—I am a graduate of Ayn Shams Medical School. But I fled to America to escape persecution.

—Persecution?

—Yes. In my day the chairman of the general surgery department,

Dr. Abd al-Fatah Balbaa, was a fanatic Muslim who didn’t make a secret of his hatred for Copts. He believed that teaching surgery to Copts was not permissible in Islam because it enabled infidels to control the lives of Muslims. 2

Karam Doss continues to dwell on how Copts are persecuted and marginalized in Egypt. —Copts are passed over in all key posts in the state. Copts are persecuted and they also get killed. Have you heard of what happened in the village of al-Kushh? Twenty Copts were slaughtered right before the eyes of the police and no one lifted a finger to save them. 63 But for Nagi, it is not only the issue of Copts being persecuted since they are part of the Egyptian people but the problem is between the people and the regime: —The problem, in my opinion, is not between Muslims and Copts; rather it is between the regime and the Egyptians. —Do you deny that there is a Coptic problem? There is an Egyptian problem, and the suffering of the Copts is part of it. 64 In a reply to a question posed by Karam Doss, —Weren’t Copts massacred to convert to Islam? 65 For Nagi, this is not accurate since the real reason behind the persecution of Copts is political rather than religious since Islam advocates diversity, tolerance and respect for all religions. —That’s not true. If Arabs had wanted to exterminate the Copts, no one could’ve prevented them. But Islam commands its followers to respect the faiths of others. You cannot be a Muslim unless you recognize the other religions. 66 Nagi goes on diagnosing the political situation in Egypt and its impact on the people:

All Egyptians are persecuted. The regime in Egypt is despotic and corrupt and it persecutes all Egyptians, Muslims and Copts. Of course, there are incidents of fanaticism here and there, but they don’t constitute a phenomenon in my opinion. Religious persecution is a direct result of political repression. All Egyptians are suffering from discrimination so long as they are not members of the ruling party. I, for instance, am a Muslim, but they refused to appoint me to Cairo University because of my political activity. 67 However, one may argue that both Karam and Nagi are seriously involved in thinking of the political situation at home and we find them emotionally connected to their roots in spite of living physically in USA. This is clearly shown when Nagi taunts him that he escaped from Egypt rather than staying to serve his own people who need him more than the Americans do. You left your poor, miserable country for your comfortable life in America. Remember, you got a free education at the expense of those Egyptians you now despise. Egypt gave you this education so that one day you’d be useful to it. But you turned your back on the Egyptian patients who needed you. You left them to die over there and came here to work for the Americans, who don’t need you. 68

62 Ibid,118.

63 Ibid,120.

64 Ibid,119
65 Ibid, 119
66 Ibid, 119
67 Ibid, 120
68 Ibid, 121
In turn, we find out how Karam retorts angrily, —I’ve never heard anything more stupid in my whole life! and after he calms down, he starts explaining to Nagi how loyal he is to Egypt though he is living in USA and he never forgets it for one minute, only for Egypt to reject him:

I just want you to know me as I really am. For the last thirty years that I’ve lived in America, I haven’t forgotten Egypt for a single day.

—Aren’t you happy with your life here?

He looked at me as if trying to find the right words, and then he smiled and said, —Have you had any American fruits?

—Not yet.

—Here they use genetic engineering to make the fruit much larger and yet it doesn’t taste so good. Life in America, Nagi, is like American fruit: shiny and appetizing on the outside, but tasteless.

—You’re saying that after all you’ve achieved?

—All success outside one’s homeland is deficient. Why don’t you go back to Egypt?

—It’s difficult to erase thirty years of your life. It’s a difficult decision, but I’ve thought about it. The proposal I submitted was my first step toward going back, but they turned it down.

He said the last few words bitterly, and I said, —It’s really sad for Egypt to lose people like you.

—Perhaps you find this hard to understand because you’re still young. It’s like when a man loves a woman and gets very attached to her and then discovers that she is cheating on him: do you understand this kind of agony? To curse the woman and at the same time to love her and never be able to forget her—that’s how I feel toward Egypt. I love her and I wish to offer her all I’ve got, but she rejects me. I saw that his eyes were welling up with tears, so I leaned over and put my arm around him and bent over to kiss his head, but he gently pushed me away, saying as he tried to smile, —How about ending this melodrama? 69

Finally, we find both Karam and Nagi on the same page uniting all efforts to change the regime in Egypt if Egyptians want to live in freedom and dignity. They start planning and organizing events to create awareness among students and Egyptians living in Chicago, of the despotic nature of the regime back in Egypt and the urgency for the democratic transition of power that had taken place in democratic countries. 70

One may notice that both Nagi and Karam are more concerned about the problems faced by their people in Egypt rather than what they face in USA though they are given an opportunity to succeed in USA economically, though such opportunity is denied at home due to nepotism and corruption. They are also able to express their views freely and build their life in USA far away from persecution and political detention. For example, we see how they organize a protest against the visit of the president of the Egyptian regime to Chicago. The protest is led —by Nagi Abd al-Samad and Karam

69 Ibid, 157

Doss together .... who kept shouting slogans and waving signs in English and Arabic: free the detainees, stop the torture, stop persecuting the Copts, down with the tyrant, and democracy for Egyptians. 71

Finally, there are many claims that USA has served as a platform for many dissident voices to express their ideas freely and enlist support for their causes back home.72 In fact, dissidents see the bitter reality of oppression in their home countries and refuse to live longer in hypocrisy, degradation and humiliation. There are also voices which see that immigrants have failed America and used the American values of freedom and the right to choose, resources available to them and privileges granted to them by the American society to harm American interests at home and abroad. There has been a bitter sense of betrayal felt by Americans, especially after the tragic incidents of 9/11 which unfortunately had disastrous impact on Muslim communities living in USA. Consequently, Muslims have become subject to racial profiling, strict monitoring, humiliating interrogation at airports, phone tapping, suspicious persons are detained or deported and the image of Islam has been tarnished and circulated as a religion of violence and intolerance which fosters terrorism.73

But what Americans fail to understand is the fact that their foreign policy which is usually biased and their blind support for Israel in their occupation of Palestine and oppressing Palestinian people is responsible for acts of vengeance and violence perpetrated by their fellow Muslim brothers and sympathizers within USA or abroad. Biased American foreign policy which is based on domination and exploitation may skew why we see immigrants connected to their homes and concerned about problems faced by their own people though they live in USA. Sometimes, they are too engaged in a way that they might commit defensive acts to protect their own people from colonial invasion and exploitation of resources by foreign powers. One may argue that the solution lies in defusing the tension by creating a diverse and pluralistic society without demonization and nullification of the others. In fact, we must work hard towards -- a universal notion of justice in which no single community’s prosperity, righteousness and dignity comes at the expense of another. 74 It is not enough that different communities live together but they must engage with one another. Once it is achieved, we may see that immigrants keep their own identities, embrace successfully the values of their new society and integrate easily.

CONCLUSION

One may conclude that Alaa Al Aswany’s Chicago has tackled vital issues like immigration abroad, the question of cultural assimilation and its discontents. Light has also been shed on the question of religious discrimination and political oppression in Egypt. In an answer to the timely question posed in Chicago of the extent to which the immigrant should be loyal to his old country and whether people can become fully assimilated members of the new society, we find that characters struggle to make a balance between their old ways of life in Egypt and their new life in America. The paper concludes that in order to defuse the tension lurking among expatriate groups, we must strive towards creating a diverse and pluralistic society without demonization and nullification of the others. In fact, we must work hard towards, -- a universal notion of justice in which no single community’s prosperity, righteousness and dignity comes at the expense of another.

71Alaa Al Aswany,Chicago,315

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74 Safi Omid (ed.), *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003),4 201

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4. Alaa Al Aswany’s Chicago is the second significant Arab novel that introduces us to the world of Arab expatriates living in the West after Hannah al-Shaykh’s Only in London.


75 Safi Omid (ed.), *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism* (Oxford: One world, 2003),4 202


17. Putnam, Robert D., "E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century


21. A British soldier was hacked to death in London by a Muslim convert of Nigerian decent

22. A French soldier was stabbed in the throat in a busy commercial district outside Paris.

23. In Sweden, riots continue to plague the capital, with cars being set ablaze and uprisings spreading out from mainly poor immigrant areas in Stockholm.

24. For more information on Muslims in Sweden, see please, Goran Larsson and Ake Sander, Islam and Muslims in Sweden: Integration or Fragmentation? A Contextual Study (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2008)

25. Roi Simyoni, —Has multiculturalism failed? —/1


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31. For more information on assimilation, please see, Peter D. Salinas, Assimilation, American Style (New York: Basic Books, 1997)


33. The melting pot is a metaphor for a heterogeneous society becoming more homogeneous and it is particularly used to describe the assimilation of immigrants to the USA.


37. Ibid, 128

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62. Ibid, 118.
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71. Alaa Al Aswany,Chicago,315


75. Safi Omid (ed.), Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003),4
Patriarchy and War in Liana’s Badr’s The Eye of the Mirror.

The truth sometimes shocks, or shakes the tranquility of set ideas. But sometimes a good shake can awaken minds that rest in slumber, and open eyes to see what is really happening around them. (El Saadawi :1980: 3)

This paper examines, through women’s literature, the impact of patriarchy and war on women, their traumatic experiences, their roles during the war, and how war can blur the gender-specific boundaries by creating a space for women to negotiate their survival and participate more actively in society. In Liana Badr’s The Eye of the Mirror, the heroine is victimized by both patriarchy and war. Badr’s novel can be read as a deconstruction of the dominant national male narrative by rendering a counter discourse which empowers women and chronicles their experiences during war which would, otherwise, have been forgotten. In other words, by inscribing their experiences and roles in war into a war story, women writers counter those who try to marginalize their war experiences (Cooke : 1994).

In The Eye of the Mirror, we find Aisha struggling to assert her own identity by negating her own body as a form of resistance against the social traditions and oppressive mores which tend to suppress her as a woman. Simultaneously she strives to survive and preserve her own life and the lives of others around her during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), where her husband, Hassan, is killed and her home is shelled during the siege of camp Tal Ezza’tar.2 According to Claire Buck, Liana Badr’s fictional works revolve around “women and war, women and exile and the plight of women facing not only the national enemy but a massed weight of inhuman traditions and a heritage of male oppression.” (1992: 311). Put differently, Badr’s literary corpus is concerned with the mutual struggles of Palestinian women and men in exile for survival against the ravages of war portraying how fighting for survival bolsters not only their unity but also transforms gender relationships (Shaaban: 1988). Here, one may say that Badr has been keen to situate women’s experiences at the centre of the nationalist struggle not only to record and chronicle the survival of Palestinian people but to keep their identity from disintegration.

However, Liana Badr’s The Eye of the Mirror specifically sheds light on the plight of thousands of Palestinian women living in exile in refugee camps in Lebanon after being expelled from their historical homeland, in pre-1948 Palestine (Pappe:2006).3 For example, Aisha symbolizes the trauma of Palestinian women living in exile marginalized by society and displaced nationally. Within this context, Fadia Faqir states in her introduction to Badr’s The Eye of the Mirror that Aisha is marginalized as a young girl in a society “with very fixed definitions of what womanhood entails, and also as a Palestinian who is homeless and whose entire nation has been displaced.” (1994:7)

Since early childhood, Aisha has been confined to a Christian convent where she receives her education in return for working as a servant there and later on in her father’s house where she is not allowed to move freely due to patriarchal social restrictions imposed by her obsessive and abusive father, Assayed. Nevertheless, we see Aisha develop a kind of self control mechanism to resist patriarchal and political submission. She creates an imaginative space for herself where she can protect herself from her own
dual social and political alienation. Her own self protection is motivated by divorcing reality from the imaginative world where she seeks for her own self a protective shelter.

As long as suppressive patriarchal culture and social mores remain in place, the transformed individual woman will be alienated. (Cooke: 1994) . This can be noticed in Aisha’s emotional tension and bodily reactions in her endeavor to survive her own dual alienation in a patriarchal society which tends to erase her own identity and rob her of her human freedom, patriarchal attitudes and practices “which privilege men, continue to permeate African societies from the level of the family up to the state” (Gordon 1996:7) 5, and a political situation which perceives her as a Palestinian refugee who may pose a political threat to the sectarian political system in Lebanon, a threat which has to be confined and finally eliminated.6

Being a daughter of a Palestinian refugee who belongs to the working class, Aisha, consequently, does not enjoy similar rights like her other Lebanese sisters who are considered to be natural citizens of Lebanon. For instance, her work as a child in the convent in exchange for her education sheds the light on the dilemma of child labor and class discrimination motivated by political and economic reasons.7 Hence, she must earn her education through hard work, “she would take the cleaning implements and roam the rooms and corners.” (Badr : 1994 :6) 8 to compensate for her status of being the “Other,” since the convent doesn’t give Aisha a social space where she can enjoy equal human rights of sisterhood but adopts the policy of confinement and racial segregation through silencing and intimidation. “The nuns had taught her that it was best for her not to talk and not to try to mix with the daughters of the influential families” (6). This intimidating policy prompts Aisha to distance herself from the others, making sure that she doesn’t talk to anyone during her seven year schooling at the convent where she has become used to her surroundings. Furthermore, Aisha’s work as a child deprives her even of the opportunity to live and enjoy her innocent childhood by playing with the other girls. “Over there, games would stretch across the red arc of the aurora at sunset, running with the sound of the girls’ laughter in the playground. There she would do her chores” (5). Aisha’s classmates at the convent would wonder how she could “sweep lightly and daintily without twisting the discs in her back as she bent. Oh! How could she touch the ice-cold after that could cut like a saw without shivering?” (6). Here, one may contend that Aisha’s labor reflects on the hard working conditions of Palestinian women in Lebanon as the only means left for them to survive after the loss of their homeland, and their will to live in spite of all odds, supporting themselves and sustaining their own communities. But Aisha’s work and her hopes of becoming a teacher are dashed by the incident of the bus where many Palestinians are killed while going back to Tal Ezza’tar camp, signaling the beginning of the Lebanese civil war.9 Consequently, her mother, Um Jalal, has to take her out of the convent expressing panic at the extent of the catastrophe which will befall the lives of the Palestinians. “We have become refugees, without a country, without dignity, without a home. Our honor was lost long ago and now our children are dying. The bus. The bus. Woe is me. We have such ill- fortune”( 8). Consequently, Aisha has to go back to camp Tal Ezza’tar where she used to visit home “only three times a year” (8) but this time she is confined at home and struck by the miserable conditions of the lives of the people and their stark poverty aggravated by the blow of the bus incident and its political consequences.
She heard the moaning of women and the crying of children as she walked along the roads. She saw the faces of women who had not caught her attention before, struggling under the burden of a heavy blow which had changed their features and mutilated their bones. Their misshapen faces overflowed with grief and anger. (9)

However, at home, Aisha falls in love silently with George, a Palestinian fighter and a family friend. Fighters have been a source of attraction for girls and that sheds the light on the image of the Palestinian fighters respected and adored among their people who view them as freedom fighters (Peteet :1991), defending their lives and honor during the inhuman siege of Tal Ezza’tar camp. “Old men considered him as an heir to their wisdom, women treated him as the most intelligent son, and men looked up to him as their ideal because he was a fighter” (75). For instance, Aisha’s adoration for George can be observed in her physical reaction when she sees him, forgetting everything around her, “she sees nothing but him. She hears him only, and feels him alone” (21), though, on the other hand, he fails to reciprocate these emotions. Aisha’s spiritual love for George cannot be expressed because of the limitations placed by patriarchal culture which leaves her in a state of mute longing: “All she had left was the longing alone, manifesting itself in long mute waiting” (49). Here, longing and silence for Aisha become means of silent forms of communication which has left its painful psychological and physical toll on her body as she walks, “the pain moves from her heels to her spine, and she is unable to lift her body, as though her joints are being pulverized by stone weights” (47). Aisha’s silent love cannot only be construed as a resisting act to survive in a destructive warring situation which denies life but also as a rejection of suppressive patriarchal traditions, in the guise of societal and parental authority, imposed on women where they are not allowed to speak, feel, act and dream like human beings. In other words, this is a male dominated culture which promotes submission and identity nullification for the sake of pleasing societal expectations, at the expense of one’s own individuality. Within this context, Sherifa Zuhur states that the Arab society clings to “a patriarchal system in which women’s position within and duties toward the family precede their rights as individuals” (2003:17).

War and national dispossession have also contributed to the patriarchal imperative to impose social restrictions on women in the face of communal displacement where women have been looked upon with high esteem when they keep their chastity intact. One can observe the connection between the concept of female virginity and national dispossession which facilitates the migration of large groups of Palestinian refugees and the consequent territorial occupation of theirlands by Israel. In this regard, Halim Barakt shows how Israel took advantage of the ‘sexual sensitivities’ of traditional Palestinian Arabs to stir up the waves of emigration during the successive wars, 1948 and 1967 and their desire to protect the “honor” of their womenfolk. (El Saadawi :1980).10 Hence, chastity is considered essential for women where family and community honor is associated with female virtue which, henceforth, leas the patriarchal society to resort to different means from gossip to honor killing to enforce the honor code to avoid the collective communal and national shame (Rubenberg 2001).

The patriarchal emphasis on the honor code is reflected through Aisha’s embarrassing reaction to her bodily changes by hating her own body and seeing it as an embarrassing burden.

Her body spoke, and she became agitated. She shivered before her mother’s inquisitive gaze as it searched her body inch by inch, and the intrusive stare of her father, who would never stop gaping at her. She was forced to hunch her back when she walked to hide her growing bosom. (14).

Aisha’s self-loathing of her body can be seen as an internalization of how patriarchal society looks down upon female sexuality as a threat and a source of fitna (a religious concept denoting social disorder or
chaos). According to Nawal El Saadawi, woman was considered by the Arabs as “a menace to man and society, and the only way to avoid the harm she could do was to isolate her in the home, where she could have no contact with either one or the other” (1980:136). Her self-loathing also portrays Aisha’s consciousness of her new heavy responsibility to keep her virtue from being violated. In this regard, Fatima Mernissi argues that the preoccupation with female virginity and chastity becomes a major obsession for men who do not hesitate to subject women to violence and abuse in an attempt to keep them in their place. Like honor, virginity is the manifestation of a purely male preoccupation in societies where inequality, scarcity, and the degrading subjection of some people to others deprive the community as a whole of the only true human strength: self confidence. The concept of honor and virginity locate the prestige of a man between the legs of a woman (1992: 183).

To control female sexuality, the male menacing gaze is used by Aisha’s father, Assayed, whose threatening gaze is meant to control the movement of Aisha’s body while she is sweeping the house, cleaning the dishes, and serving tea: “he follows her with his eyes, casting an invisible chord that traces her movement between the kitchen, the room and the roof” (21). Her father’s abusive behavior persists when he asks her:

“Why are you always wearing that pink dress?” “That’s my dress, Yaba... I haven’t got another one.” “Why d’you say Yaba the way spoilt kids do?” “...” You think you’re one of the nuns’ girls, don’t you?” “...” “What a catastrophe this is. What am I to do with you in future.” (22)

This statement highlights how keeping female sexuality under surveillance constrains women to certain social roles, drawing well articulated spatial boundaries which women cannot trespass out of fear that they will bring shame to the family and the community, respectively. For Cheryl Rubenberg, familial patriarchy, with its discourse of honor and shame, its relations of domination and subordination, and its myriad punishments, controls women’s bodies, minds and behaviors and their entire lives (Rubenberg: 2001).

What make things worse is when Assayed vents his own sufferings and loss as a humiliated Palestinian refugee on Aisha when he calls her one day and she replies,

“What is it, Papi?” (23). Her answer provokes him to scold and taunt her angrily, “You, shame on you. We’re Palestinians,” (23) as though he has nothing to do but to look for any flimsy excuse “to humiliate her.” (23)

For patriarchy to survive as an oppressive system its ideology must be instilled in society and force must be used when that ideology has not fully been imbibed. For example, Aisha has to flee to the kitchen fearing that Assayed would pull the belt and beat her as he did before when he took the golden chain given to her as a gift from the nuns at the convent, (“A small shining chain with a small cross on it. It had caused her enough kicks and slaps from her father to last her for a lifetime”) to sell it in order to buy “more bottles of arak, of which he couldn’t drink enough.” (23).11 Within this context, Brinda Mehta contends that “the father’s abusive behavior shows his political emasculation and helplessness as a castrated patriarch who loses his authority in the process of migration” (2007:45).

However Badr’s deconstruction of patriarchy continues by exposing how the concept of arranged marriage is seen as one of the salient manifestations of patriarchy where women become economic
goods for exchange in a way that consolidates patriarchal control over women. This can be evidently observed in the marriage contract concluded between parents on behalf of their children where control is transferred from father to the new husband. For instance, Assayed has concluded the marriage of Aisha without her consent and even slight knowledge. “He called to his wife in his usual noisy manner: 'Prepare her,

Um Jalal. Prepare your daughter because her fiancé is coming tonight!'” (83). A patriarchal action which propels Aisha to resist by fighting for her own rights, speaking to her mother angrily, “What is up? What is going on? Has that husband of yours gone mad? Who told him I want to get married?” (84). In return, her mother, Um Jalal, acting as patriarchal agent, tries to persuade her by reinforcing the patriarchal suppressive culture that it is a wish for every woman to get married, “All young girls wish for marriage....and that will make your father happy, Let him experience one happy day in his life. He has not had the pleasure of marrying off his son... so let him have the pleasure of marrying you off.” (84, 85). Here, we find women are discouraged from expressing their own ideas that contradict parents' admonitions where parents decide for them what they should do depriving them from the basic human right to decide and choose for themselves.12

Marriage for women is the only means of acceptance in the community and if they remain unmarried, “they are, socially viewed, so much wastage .This is why mothers have always eagerly sought to arrange marriages for them” ( Beauvoir 1989 :427). This may explain the behavior of Aisha’s mother, Um Jalal, in her confrontation with Aisha’s resistance. Um Jalal has sometimes tried to frustrate Aisha psychologically by telling her that the ultimate goal of any woman’s life is marriage, “what else would you do then, my dear? ...Become a university professor? or a teacher of French?” (84), or in other times by warning her that being unmarried will be a social stigma to the family and society: “I hope you are not intending to become an old maid and remain at home so that people will say my daughter could not get a husband” (84).

One can notice the painful psychological struggle women have to go through, either asserting their own subjectivities or living to meet the expected social roles imposed on them by a male-dominated society. “Aisha imagined that the whole thing was a punishment for her, while the others saw it as an honor and cause for joy”(85). We also see the role of the mother, Um Jalal, who upholds the patriarchal image of women and plays the role of the victimizer through reinforcing an oppressive male culture on her daughter, Aisha, who just wants to have a proper education and enjoy the right to choose her future husband as an equal human being. Failing to convince her mother, Aisha tries to speak to her father, Assayed, who in return, throws her back a threatening look which makes her speechless and shiver in fear.

With his honey-brown eyes, he looks like a wolf ready to pounce on its prey. He put out his cigarette as he watched her. He crushed the burning stub on the floor as he looked into her face. He began to undo his belt. He pulled it off and laid it on the floor next to him, determined to show her the hiding that she might get with the leather belt... Actually, she did not forget. It was her tongue that was unable to speak. Did one speak to a monster? And if she spoke. What would she tell him? Would she tell him that she did not wish it? But he did wish it. Her knees felt loose and her leg joints became shaky and unable to support her. Her vision clouds over, and she runs up to the roof. (85-6)
Feeling helpless after seeing that the option of escape where she can work as a servant on the western side of Beirut is impossible due to the fact that “the camp’s exits and entrances are blocked by barriers and fortifications” (90), and because there is “blood, war and clashes.” (90). Yet she wishes that “the clashes would end so that she could leave the Tal and take charge of her life” (87). To face injustice imposed on her, Aisha resorts to her own self mechanism of silence and indifference, alienating herself from all suppressive elements which try to rob her of her own will. “All of them had frightened her, and she could do nothing more than bow her head and say yes to her funeral.” (96) On the wedding night, Aisha resists by refusing to let her body be painted by Henna 13 as fingers “stretched out at her, making a sugary lemon paste, examining her body, intruding between her organs as though she were a doll made of dough available to every hand to sculpt and remodel her into something different.” (99) Painting the body with henna is a cultural ritual meant to decorate the female enhancing her sexual desirability to the male, perpetuating patriarchal social conventions that women are sexual objects who can be manipulated and penetrated. In an act of resistance and revolt against social conventions which degrade women and place them in an inferior position, Aisha hides in the bathroom inflicting pain on her body by making herself ugly, cutting her hair on her wedding night.14

In the bathroom... Her eyes fell on a pair of scissors that had been left on the window sill. She picked them up and began cutting off her hair in front of the broken mirror...She cut off her hair in terror as her sobbing rose, drowning out the ululating and chanting outside. (101)

We may argue that the scene of Aisha cutting her hair can be construed as a subversive act against patriarchal customs imposed on her in an attempt to assert her own identity, while, on the other hand, it is an act painfully viewed by her mother as an act of madness “her insanity had prompted her to do”(102).

Being married now, Aisha has to face the ugly face of patriarchy represented by males and senior females where she is expected to obey them, especially her mother in law, Um Hassan. For Suad Joseph, the structure of patriarchal familial culture means the privileging of the assertions of desire by males and female elders and the responsibility of girls to comply accordingly (Joseph 2005). Furthermore, it is only through the birth of a male heir that Aisha can gain respect in her own community. The need for children is strongly reinforced by the national loss and death of many males fighting defending their communities. For instance, Um Hassan’s son, Fayez, was killed during a raid of the Lebanese army on the camp.15 “Two years ago in May, the army came and began shelling the people in all the camps. Fayez was martyred.” (110). Since Fayez’s death, Um Hassan has been so keen to get her only remaining son, Hassan, married, and have children to compensate her loss of her late son, Fayez. This is manifested in Um Hassan’s speech to Aisha:

If one is ruined, broken-hearted and homeless, away from one’s brothers and sisters, can one be happy? I have put one young man under the ground. We were dragged around and made homeless. We’ve become nothing more than some flour and a bit of water that never runs out. Yes... those who are dead are dead. Things will inevitably calm down and you will have children. One’s grandchild gives more pleasure than one’s child.” (111)

This statement reflects on the culturally expected role of women during war to be productive mothers of the nation and preservers of cultural identity which unfortunately situates women in a passive position linked with childbirth (Shabban:1988).16 It also portrays the extent of how essential issues like
pregnancy and mothering are for the Palestinian community to survive nationally and politically, and how essential reproduction is as a means of compensation for the loss of the people and land.

However, Aisha’s political consciousness reaches its climax after the death of her husband, Hassan. “The news seeped through her being. It reached her consciousness. Breathing became difficult, and she leant back onto the floor where she had been sitting. Then she collapsed in a faint.” (177) Later, we find her reflect on her personal tragedy of losing her husband, Hassan, who has been killed during the war on the camp.

So what was left to her? All that was left her was the black dress she would wear for the rest of her life, and those weak pulses against the wall of her abdomen of a foetus which meant nothing to her now that its father was dead. (182)

Her initial indifference to what is going around her has been transformed by her ultimate acceptance of an unwanted pregnancy and her role in helping her community during the days of war. “Despite the difficult circumstances, she accepted her condition with an indifferent resignation akin to the resignation with which the people of the camp faced the successive disasters befalling them.” (154) The death of Aisha’s husband can be seen as a moment of realization that her struggle for her own identity cannot be separated from the national struggle of her own people who are seeking to survive and live freely as human beings too.

The camp was being turned upside down. People were being forced to leave their homes, cramming themselves into already overcrowded shelters. The hospital was unable to cope with the phenomenal pressure of casualties. There was almost no water to be had. The medical centre was unable to offer first aid unless patients brought water from their own houses. No anti-tetanus vaccines were available. Nothing was available. (155)

We find Aisha think of “the flimsiness of the tile-covered metal roof of her parents’ house. She had only become aware of this as the clashes had escalated.” (115) In this regard, Brinda Mehta argues that “Aisha’s survival locates itself within the politics of the home front represented by the search for more dynamic roles for women within restrictive patriarchal codes of conduct” (2007:54).

Aisha’s role during the war is manifested through helping her community, taking care of children living in bomb shelters and looking for sources of survival like food and water for her family during the siege, thus exposing her life to danger. “The thrifty women, who had cooked the frozen meat and preserved it in glass jars for bad times, had roamed around in groups looking for new sources of food.” (138)

Commenting on how war affects women and temporarily suspends patriarchal structures, Nadine Puechguirbal argues that “between 60 and 80 percent of women are single heads of households. Shortages of food, wood, water, and health care have created great burdens for them. Women and girls often have to travel long distances to find resources” (2003: 1273). This can be seen through the words of Amneh revealing the great dangers she faces every time she goes to fetch water under the shelling and sniping:

She would ask herself at length, every time she had to go and get water, whether or not she would complete the mission. One died a thousand deaths in seconds. Every time would pass that spot, she would stop there for more than twenty minutes and think: would she be able to finish her journey without dying. (151)

Furthermore, for Julie Peteet, war and nationalist struggle may operate as “catalysts for change, breaking down traditional barriers between men and women and “undermining the operation of extant
asymmetrical gender relations and exposing them to scrutiny” (1991, 6). One may also argue that war suspends and destroys the patriarchal structures of society that confine and degrade women. “In the very breakdown of morals, traditions, customs, and community, war also opens up and creates new beginnings” (Turshen 1998: 20). For instance, it has been a shock for Aisha to see the deconstructive impact of war on her father, Assayed, whose abusive and patriarchal role has receded into the background. “The overpowering, capable man had turned into a rag… He resembled a blind man, and the grand awesomeness based on his physical strength and cruelty had disappeared from his features... It was hard to believe that this man was Assayed”(181).

Within this context, war has created a space for women like Aisha, helping people in bomb shelters, “Aisha, who had never before visited a shelter, experienced everything imaginable and unimaginable” (155). While Um Jalal sold candles, “During that period, Um Jalal began making candles at home to augment her livelihood”(144) and Hana worked as a wireless operator and Um Hassan, baked bread: “Her work for the young men, baking tens of bread loaves for them, helped her to forget half her problems and to ignore the sound of half of the shells raining down on the camp as she worked.” (149).

Meanwhile Khazneh nursed with the Red Cross. We may contend here that women are seeking work outside home as a means to survive and simultaneously assert their own identities taking into account that many Palestinian men are not allowed to work, in some cases, they are either jailed or killed during the war which has created a new situation where women take the responsibility to feed their families and help them sustain themselves during hard times.17 For example, we find Aisha helping Georgette, a Lebanese woman married to a Palestinian fighter, give birth and take care of her newly born child, who suffer from weakness and dehydration due to lack of milk during their stay in the bomb shelter with other women and children protecting themselves from the deadly daily shelling. “Aisha tried as hard as she could with the child, who had calmed down, and was no longer screaming as he had been during his first days... His mouth remained closed, his eyelashes hanging over his eyes as though he had gone into a coma” (187). The child’s worsening health condition makes Aisha’s pray to God for help.

She would not have asked that God give her a long life and bring back her husband, Hassan. She would just have asked for one moment to go out onto the beach with this baby, expose him to some fresh air, put him in the breeze, and offer him a dose of the air which was so absent in this place.” (188)

Watching the torturous slow death of Georgette’s infant, “the baby was frozen, his limbs rigid, keeping a silence that none but the dead knew...” (195) and the ensuing madness of Georgette after losing her son brings Aisha closer to finding her own place within the struggle to resist the siege imposed on the camp (Rastegar : 2006).

Witnessing the death of Georgette’s child and the massacres which are committed by the phalangists against women, children and the elderly after the camp’s fall makes her reject the painful logic of war: “Rancid smells were still rising from the piles of corpses she had passed on the road behind her” (259), and wonder why all this takes place. “Why are we here? Why death? Why don’t we live normally like other people? Why won’t they leave us alone?” (260). For Julie Peteet, the logic behind this gruesome strategy is “to sow panic in the refugee community and precipitate a Palestinian flight to neighboring Arab countries, as well as to demoralize men ...by revealing in stark grotesqueness their inability to protect their families and homes” (1991: 37).
Here, Aisha’s reflections on the cruelty of war pose serious questions about the futility of war.19 Aisha’s feelings towards the child’s death can, furthermore, be viewed as a symbol of her solidarity and collective political consciousness of her Palestinian community as she thinks of the unabated sufferings of her own people.

If death were death, why had her parents not accepted dying there, and why had they not committed suicide where they were? Why had they been driven by their fear to what they had imagined would be life outside? Why had they not known that they would face what they were facing now, at the end of the bitter, wearying journey. They had destroyed their lives to build the lives of their children. And now it had caught up with them! (258)

After Tal Ezza’tar’s fall to the Phalangists, Aisha is driven along with her people out of the camp. “Everyone fleeing like prey. Everyone? No. Only the women. The only men left were a few old men. The only boys left are a few children. Out of each family, only half or less is left.” (257) As Aisha looks at the families, mainly women, gathered, she remembers what Um Hassan told her once:

My child, we shall all become strong women. Have they left us any other choice? They take everything from us. Marriage, children, homes, stories, old people...everything. So, all of the time, we defend ourselves as though we were not women, but standing in the trenches. (260)

This statement deconstructs the concept that war is only a male story and suggests that women also have their own stories of participation, sufferings and survival too. Put differently, Aisha’s story gives voice to the voiceless majority of women whose stories are either ignored or neglected and also personalizes the suffering and trauma of her own Palestinian people in exile. Aisha accepts her dual role as a mother and as a participant in the national struggles of her Palestinian community for survival and freedom. “Her hand touched her belly in a movement of spontaneous recognition. Staring at her mother with an unaccustomed boldness, she said: ‘That is my responsibility ...I don’t want any one else to take it instead of me.” (264) .The boldness of these final words marks Aisha’s potential for a transformed community with herself having a new role. The trauma of suppressive male culture, war and dispossession, narrated by Aisha, results in a liberating potential for Aisha to rethink her relationship to her world and accept the challenge of changing it. Though her life is represented through sufferings and resistance to patriarchal social restrictions symbolized by feelings of alienation, her pregnancy can be viewed as an assertion of the continuation of life and her own will to survive despite the destructive war. “She owned nothing anymore, except for what was within her.” (259) Aisha’s pregnancy, under siege, is not only defiance of death but also a political testimony for the rights of human beings for creation and self-preservation. “The siege had destroyed her confidence in everyone around her except for herself.” (261)

**Conclusion**

To conclude, Aisha is victimized by both patriarchy and war and is left with no option except resisting the patriarchal oppressive male culture which seeks to erase her own identity and simultaneously fighting for her own survival as a human being who has the right to live in dignity and peace. Yet, The Eye of the Mirror ends with a sense of empowerment and hope for women who survive the painful and horrific terrors of the siege and ensuing massacre. This is seen with Aisha’s eventual acceptance of her role as a mother which the coming birth of her daughter symbolizes - a promising hope for a creation of a Palestinian society where women and men can have equal roles, rights and opportunities based on respect and understanding. It also deconstructs the male war narrative by giving the platform for women to share their own experiences, feelings and roles during the war, an important role which gives
a voice to the voiceless majority. The traumatic experience of war and destruction can be, furthermore, seen as a warning bell that societies cannot be built by excluding women and survival has no meaning without the active participation of women. For example, Aisha, Hana, Um Jalal, Um Hassan, Amneh, and Khazen respectively have shown their effective leading roles in the processes of survival and self-preservation in their defense of their community, children and lives in spite of all haunting destructive forces in the guise of patriarchal domination, the misuse of religion and blind nationalism. Within this context, Liana Badr states “my struggle for emancipation as a Palestinian is inseparable from my struggle for genuine liberation as a woman; neither of them is valid without the other.” (Shaaban 1988, 164).20

Notes:


10. Concerning national dispossession and female honor, Bouthaina Shaaban argues that men “were obsessed with protecting their honor (women) from the Israelis. Even when they fought they fought to protect their women rather than their land; land did not matter to them at all. It was all a plot meticulously woven by the Israelis who understood the Arab way of thinking and made terrible use of it.” (1988:152). See Shaaban, Bouthaina. *Both Right and Left Handed: Arab women Talk about Their Lives*. London: The Women’s Press, 1988. For Peteet, honor was lost because the community was unable to defend itself, lost autonomy, and ended up dependent on International charity and as strangers in a

11. Arak is an alcoholic drink made out of Anise.


13. Henna is the oldest and most widely used vegetable dye utilized in hair and hand coloring.


18. In 1976 during the Lebanese civil war, “the Phalangist militia launched a military campaign to clear East Beirut of Muslim-inhabited slums and Palestinian refugee camps. During the ensuing nine-month siege of Tal Ezza’tar camp, hundreds of women were killed attempting to bring water to their dehydrated children under heavy artillery fire and sniping. Hundreds more were indiscriminately
slaughtered when the camp was overrun.” (Peteet: 1991: 37). Please see Peteet, Julie M. *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press,

1991 . The camp fell on August 12 ... Entire families were killed. There was hardly a male between the ages of ten and fifty among those who managed to reach West Beirut. Boys of eight and ten were summarily executed. Girls no older than that were raped before being dispatched. All sixty camp nurses, women and men were lined up two by two, marched out , and machine- gunned (Tabithat: 1987). see Petran, Tabitha. The Struggle over Lebanon. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987.

19. In her protest against war, Virginia Woolf says, "(w)e daughters of educated men are between the devil and the deep sea... The question we put to you, lives of the dead, is how can we enter the professions and yet remain civilized human beings; human beings that is, who wish to prevent war?” (1966: 39) . Please see Woolf, Virginia. Three Guineas. London, New York and San Diego: Harcourt, 1966.


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Engendering War in Hanan Al Shaykh’s The Story of Zahra

1. Introduction

The urgency to retrieve memory in many Arab women’s writings becomes the impetus to retell the stories of women silenced, marginalized, and excluded by their own communities. Here is no doubt that with the retrieval of memory comes the resituating of the body from its condition as an object of male desire, and “its transformation into a desiring force that rejects its subjugation to a narrative of erasure” (Fayad 148). 1 Hanan Al Shaykh’s The Story of Zahra 2 is divided into two books. The first book is entitled “The Scars of Peace”. In it we find the central female character, Zahra, is silently victimized by the patriarchal structure through its variously ugly manifestations. The second book is subtitled “The Torrents of War”. Here we find a completely different character, one who is ready to do anything to stop the war, even if it takes a relationship with a sniper – a symbol of patriarchal war – which ends in her tragic death.

2. Engendering War in Hanan Al Shaykh’s The Story of Zahra

My argument is that women are victimized by both patriarchy and war, and the futility of deconstructing the concept of war from within the isolation of patriarchy. For example, Zahra’s father is portrayed as a patriarchal tyrant to his wife, Fatme and daughter Zahra, who is ever fearful of him: “(a)ll I knew was that I was afraid of my father, as afraid of the blows he dealt her as I was of those he dealt me; while she continued to tremble and wail in his grip”(15). The attention lavished on Zahra’s brother Ahmad as a child reflects the masculine ideals of the patriarchy and the strength of its grip on society. Zahra remembers the behavior of her mother towards her brother. Everyday, as we sat in the kitchen to eat, her love would be declared: having filled my plate with soup she serves my brother Ahmad, taking all her time, searching carefully for the best pieces of meat. She dips the ladle into the pot and salvages meat fragments. There they go into Ahmad’s dish. (11)
Such a masculine mentality continues to manifest itself later in the book, in Ahmad’s addiction to hashish, masturbation, and goods stripped from the bodies of the dead. Zahra recounts how her own face and her inner psyche become scarred as a result of her society’s descent into the abyss of war. In Zahra’s early years, we also observe that her brutal father rejected her because she had acne, a symbol of her inner scars. Within this context, Ann Adams elaborates further how the conflicts in Zahra’s home truly register on her body: "Zahra’s abject and acne-filled face not only makes visible the emotional scars this upbringing has had on the sensitive young girl, but also literalizes the ever increasing gender conflict carried on in society – the ‘battle’ between men and women for the control and regulation of female bodies" (201). It is a problem that Zahra’s father thinks might make of her a spinster with no marriage prospects. This drives him to beat and abuse her mercilessly every time he sees her fingering her pimples.

He would scold me severely whenever he caught me playing with my pimples...My father would go raving mad every time he noticed my face and its problems. He would nag my mother sarcastically: “That will be the day when Zahra married. What a day of joy for her and her pock-marked face! (24-5)

Zahra’s father’s cruel behavior succeeds only in intensifying Zahra’s sense of isolation in a patriarchal society in which she feels discriminated against, unwanted and unloved by the people closest to her. It also reinforces to some degree the patriarchally constructed notions of beauty and idealised femininity. 3 Resisting these patriarchal notions of beauty, Zahra starts a process of self-mutilation, a symbol of her rejection of her society and its conventions. With her nails, Zahra intentionally disfigures her face until the blood starts to ooze from her pimples to such extent that it has become her only reason for waking up early each morning: "[m]y pimples were my only reason for waking each morning. I would hurry to the mirror to inspect in the calm light of day the ravages of the latest onslaught" (24). Within this context, John Knowles comments that Zahra’s face is no longer part of her but is metonymic of society, "In aggressing her skin, she is, in effect, indirectly repudiating all the unrealistic and procrustean molds in which commodified women are forced to fit." (15). In other words, through her silent resistance, Zahra rejects the criteria by means of which women’s value is measured and assessed as only sexual objects. Al Shaykh portrays how Zahra continues resisting the oppressive patriarchal system through sheltering in silence, as seen in the first part of the novel. The bathroom becomes her only safe haven from the suffocating society she lives in. For example, Zahra locks herself in bathrooms either in Beirut or Africa whenever she encounters the psychological and mental pressures imposed on her by her tyrannical father, her uncle, and her husband. Concerning her uncle who lives in exile in Africa, his idealistic notion of his homeland, Lebanon, has come to him in the form of Zahra.4 We find that Zahra’s arrival in the country of her uncle’s exile represents “a direct contact with that which he misses the most, and from the outset he clings to it with all his being.” (Allen 245). This is seen in the way he gives Zahra his bed while sleeping on the couch, and how he comes every morning to awaken her. He is desperate for her attention and often hugs her in away that makes Zahra feel very uncomfortable, bringing back all the painful memories of her past. Zahra wishes she could break her own silence and tell him how she truly feels.

Uncle, please tell me why you have stretched out by my side. ‘Oh, how I wish could have said those words! ‘Uncle, if you could hear the beat of my heart, if you could only see the disgust and fury gathered in my soul. If only you know what my true feelings were. I am at my wits’ end, and am annoyed with myself and hate myself because I stay silent. When will my soul cry out like a woman surrendering to a redeeming love? (34)
These words reveal Zahra’s inner self and her desperate search for her own identity. But instead of voicing her anger against her uncle, Zahra retreats silently to the bathroom. “I went into the bathroom and heard myself thinking ‘There is no parting from you, bathroom. You are the only thing I have loved in Africa. You, and the electrical appliances stacked on the shelves’” (27). While locking herself in the bathroom, Zahra remembers her first, ungratifying sexual experience with Malek, a married colleague in the government tobacco factory. Haunted by her painful past from which, she thought, that Africa could be her haven, Zahra narrates: “(n)ow I am in Africa because I want to be far from Beirut” (29). But unfortunately, she encounters the harsh reality again when faced with Majed’s marriage proposal, which leads her to another psychological break down, and an inability to face her husband-to-be as a non-virgin. “What was I to do with my life after Africa? Where would I go? The day must come when I marry and my husband discovers that I am no longer a virgin, that I have undergone two abortions” (29).

Zahra’s husband turns out to be a crude man who marries Zahra in order to be "the owner of a woman’s body that I could make love to whenever I wished ... I have married Hashem’s niece and so fulfilled the dream I’ve had ever since being in the South ... of marrying the daughter of an illustrious family" (83). He is completely oblivious to the fact that Zahra craves to assert her own identity and freedom: "I wanted to live for myself. I wanted my body to be mine alone. I wanted the place on which I stood and the air surrounding me to be mine alone and no one else’s" (93). When her husband finds out that Zahra is no longer a virgin, he goes into a fit, feeling his honor and pride deeply wounded: "I thanked God that my mother was far away, far from this mess, and couldn’t ask to see these stained sheets so that she might display them to Zahra’s mother, to the neighbors and relatives. I thanked God for my mother’s absence, and with it her stinging tongue" (86). It is apparent that he sees Zahra merely as a sexual commodity of which he is the sole proprietor. He does not even care about creating a true exchange of love and true, genuine feelings that could have saved her from breaking down again (Accad :1990). Furthermore, Africa may be a political haven for Hashem and other dissidents who live in exile, and may represent economic opportunities for youths like Majed, but there is no refuge for women who try to escape their oppressive, patriarchal families and their painful pasts. For Zahra, Africa becomes Lebanon since the patriarchal values that are meant to oppress women have been transported there intact. Both her uncle and husband "fail to acknowledge Zahra as an individual with her own personal needs"(Adams 201).

Once Zahra is back to Beirut – in the second part of the novel, “TheTorrents of War” – she falls into a severe depression manifested in her withdrawal symptoms and overeating, which develops into a form of complete despair and sickness:

My deep sleeping was sickness, my increasing weight, my wearing only my housecoat for two months on end were sickness. The scabs on my face that spread to my neck, to my shoulders, and my not caring about them were a sickness. My silence was a sickness .My mother would launch into a tirade whenever she saw me in my housecoat during those two months, but I stayed completely silent. (126)

But with the advent of the war, her attitude changes drastically as she begins to follow the news of the war.

Reading nervously but eagerly between the lines in the newspapers, searching for the truth. Then I would overflow with despair and disbelief. All those figures which listed the numbers killed, could they be possible? Were there truly these kidnappings? Did they actually check your identity card and then, on the basis of your religion,
either kill you or set you free? Were the young people who fought in the war receiving orders from their leaders, and were they wearing combat clothes? Was it true that the Rivoli Cinema had been burnt down? Was it true bout the fire in the Souk Sursock? And the one in Souk Al-Tawile? Had George, the hairdresser, our neighbor, turned against me? Had I turned against him? (129)

Al Shaykh tries to subvert the patriarchal idea of war by throwing light on women’s participation in putting an end to it.7 For example, we see that Zahra is no longer confined to the safety of the bathroom but instead "finds that she can inhabit other spaces and move beyond the narrow life-style of her mother. While others cower in fear, Zahra rushes into the midst of the turmoil."(Adams 201). War jolts her back to life and forces her to act; she volunteers for a short time at a casualty ward, which gives her a deeper insight into the gruesome realities of war.

I wondered whether the leaders of the factions ever visited hospitals, and if they did, even for an hour, how they could live an ordinary day again? Could they stop themselves thinking of an amputated leg? Or of an eye that had turned to liquid? Or of a severed hand lying there in resignation and helplessness? Why did none of those leaders, as they stood listening to the groans, pledge to put a stop to the war and cry out, "This war shall end! I shall finish it! No cause can be won until the war is stopped. No cause comes before the cause of humanity and safety. The war ends here and now!" (135)

Zahra tries to understand the real reasons behind the cruel war and its validity, and the urgent necessity of acting to stop the complete madness. Undoubtedly, her reflections on the cruelty of war pose serious questions about the role of women in stopping war and what strategies should be adopted in this regard.8 In her continuous attempts to stop the war, Zahra tries to prevent the shooting of prisoners taken from the Christian side by asking the militant she knows to let them go free. But her parents, afraid for her life, drag her back home where she sits weeping: "I sat on, punishing myself, feeling guilty for all the times when I had felt uncomfortable before the war, and for all the misery which I had thought was misery before the war, and the pain I had thought was pain before the war" (114). In this context, Wafa Stephen has commented on the constructive role of women during war: "women have tried to appease the fighters by paying visits to refugee camps and military headquarters and putting flowers in the nozzles of guns" (3).

War puts every fact of life into question. Zahra and her mother clutch one another during successive bouts of street fighting among Lebanese factions, which makes Zahra close to her mother again like "the orange and navel."

My mother and I shouted out together as if we were once again as close as orange and navel, as we had been when we stood trembling behind the door, back in my earliest memories. Now she moved across from one corner to the other room as the room was lit up by explosions. We crawled down to the basement, the noise all the while moving closer until it was as though it had its source inside my head. Before I could cry out, an explosion had burst near-by and my heart had dropped between my feet. I was left completely empty, except for my voice, but even this I could not control any more. I lifted my head and saw my mother crying like a child, hiding her face in her hands, unable to move an inch. (136)

War has drawn them closer than before since they are horrified by its barbaric face. For instance, both shout upon seeing a newspaper photograph of a whole family killed while playing cards, "still clutching the cards in their hands, the shrapnel mingling with parts of their bodies, everything else looking normal, children’s underwear still hanging in the room" (136). These days make Zahra remember her childhood relationship with her mother and how "she wanted to draw her towards me, to draw myself close to her, to touch her face and have her eyes peering into mine. I wanted to disappear into the hem
of her dress and become even closer to her than the navel is to the orange!" (8). But in spite of Zahra's
closeness to her mother, her feelings towards her are contradictory. Zahra, in her early childhood, was
constantly hurt by her mother’s abandonment of her every time a man came along: "(t)he man became
the centre of her life, and around him was nothing but flying embers" (8-9). Zahra also remembers how
her mother used to take her along to conceal her love affairs, resenting the fact that she had been used
to deceiving her father, leading to her mixed feelings of love and hatred toward her mother – "I no
longer knew what my feelings were, to whom I owed loyalty"(15). Within this context, Roger Allen
comments "(w)hen a young girl growing up in a thoroughly traditional, male-dominated society is
presented with a model of maternal love that is so fraught with conflicting ideals and emotions, it is
hardly surprising that she should be somewhat disturbed" (332). And this may account for Zahra's
inability to build trust in her mother and belief in women's togetherness where men "seem to matter
much more than women. This could be what leads her to madness and death in the end" (Accad 45-6).

Al-Shaykh deconstructs the masculine idea of war by exposing its ugly side and how it affects the social
fabric in a disastrous way. For example, we see that war has transformed Ahmad from the time he was
a boy whose father wanted to send him to America – “(m)y father’s one dream was to save enough
money to send my brother Ahmad to the United States to study electrical engineering” (25) – into an
uncivilized

militiaman who feels tremendous pride in raiding people’s homes to loot, desecrate and destroy.
"Ahmad had begun to return with other things apart from his rifle and his joints of hashish. He would
try to conceal these objects behind his back as he went across the living room and into our parent’s
bedroom."(169). For Ahmad, killing means masculinity 9 – at least he is not like a woman, sitting at
home. Ahmad comes to symbolize "the petulant and domineering attitudes within the society that,
having helped engender the war, now sustain it" (Allen 1995: 239). War has given him power over the
others and a way to gain money by robbing and looting. He is even worried about the end of the war,
which would mean an end to the twisted identity that the war has bestowed on him.

I don’t wish for the war to end. I don’t want to have to worry about what to do next. The war has structured my
days and nights, my financial status, my very self. It has given me a task that suits me, especially since those first
months when I was so nervous and afraid. Once those first months were over I became like the cock of the roost
(168).

Ahmad’s words reflect the way in which war has given him and his comrades an occupation "that they
did not have before and without which they would not know what to do" (Accad 1990: 53). He is proud
to belong to the patriarchal system and embraces its masculine values. Al-Shaykh also portrays how war
has brought out the disintegration of Lebanese society, which motif is manifested in the use of drugs,
the loss of moral values, and the disruption of traditional institutions. In regard to drugs, Ahmad talks
proudly about the legitimacy of using drugs during the war.

Drugs have given the war on a new dimension. I can’t really explain it. They help you see the war through a filter
that screens the eyes…it cancels out the guns, the rockets, the firing, even though we go on fighting, and if I asked
myself what I have accomplished, I answer that I have obeyed my commander’s orders and achieved much. I have
not stayed at home with the women. (168)

Concerning loss of moral values, Zahra is shaken by Ahmad’s audacity in masturbating in her presence.
She wonders how war could have changed moral values to such an extent that everything has become
permissible during the war.
I looked up to see him touching himself. I could not say why I should be so upset. How was it that the war had changed things to this extent: that Ahmad could sit and fondle himself without a thought for my presence as if he were on his own. Oh, war! ... Ahmad, you sit in the next room, fondle your genitals and inhale hashish. You smoke grass and fondle your groin, and can only come back to being yourself after you have killed and robbed, hated and fled. (164)

Zahra is able to criticize the decay of moral values and hold herself apart from the patriarchal system so that she can develop values of peace, tolerance and equality. She is also aware that war is a male activity and that women are the ultimate victims of its horror. Within this context, Virginia Woolf argues,

women’s exclusion from patriarchal traditions makes them uniquely free of the greed and egotism fostered by those traditions and more willing to criticize them; denied the economic and social rewards for aggression and greed granted to men, women are freer to develop values necessary for peace such as cooperation, equality, and creativity. (1966: 56)

War also suspends Zahra’s father’s oppressive, patriarchal role, which has receded into the background.10 He leaves the wounded Beirut, returning with his wife to their ancestral village, apparently still untouched by the war. They leave behind Zahra, who would not otherwise have been allowed to live on her own, without the oppression of patriarchal convention: "(m)y father turned to face us, and I had never seen him so feeble. He could hardly speak for weakness as his head went on shaking and he tried to persuade Ahmad to leave everything and go with us to the village" (139). Even her father’s belt no longer carries any threat for Zahra as the war has made it completely powerless (173). It is the same belt that had beaten her mother and instilled fear in Zahra.

War disrupts traditional institutions. Such disruption of the entrenched moral order affords Zahra some breathing space. Zahra moves into a house of her own and is able to channel her energy into her own survival. Within this new space created by war, Zahra’s formidable energies are channeled into affirming a new set of humanistic values that enable her to resist the law of the jungle, represented by Ahmad and his generation. Her deep indignation with her brother’s speech and his stolen goods is clearly expressed: “I covered my ears with my hands and screamed, ‘Stop telling me any of these things!’ and took refuge, crying in my room” (170). Zahra’s complex relationship with the sniper is meant to stop the war even as it makes use of the language of seduction. For Zahra, if she is unable to stop war and death, at least she can defer it by creating new values of love, mutual coexistence and tolerance. Every time she sees the sniper, she wonders

What could possibly divert the sniper from aiming his rifle and startle him to the point where he might open his mouth instead? Perhaps a troupe of dancers would do it? Or Perhaps a gipsy with a performing monkey? Or perhaps a naked woman, passing across his field of fire? May be if such a sight crossed his vision he would pause for just one moment and wonder whether the world had indeed gone mad in the midst of this war. (157)

Walking topless in front of the sniper is Zahra’s attempt to distract him from his fatal job. Put differently, Zahra makes it her moral duty to come to the sniper and communicate with him sexually and verbally, hoping that such forms of communication might alleviate some of the gruesome facts of the war and heal the wounds of her shattered and wounded country. In her relationship with the sniper, we find Zahra using her body language to humanize this "monster" – "I had given him my body, my chance of life or death" (152) asking herself endless questions, trying to understand what makes a sniper a sniper,
to such extent that it becomes the meaning she craves to find in her life. "What had made him into a sniper? Who had given him orders to kill anonymous passers-by? " (154).

Zahra’s body, ravaged by her painful past, is now used creatively for a meaningful purpose. She experiences ecstasy for the first time, something that she lacked in her previous, traditional relationships with Malek and her husband Majed: " What, now, had become of me? Crying out, lying on dusty floor tiles in an abandoned building, breathing the air’s fear and sadness, my lord and master a god of death who had succeeded in making my body tremble with ecstasy for the first time in thirty years” (154). Here, a new purpose has rejuvenated her, and peace has descended on Zahra for the first time, even to the extent of contemplating marriage with the sniper, the only man who has accepted her as an equal. "My one wish is for the war to end so we can make our bed elsewhere. I wish to marry and take this sniper for my husband. I wish to stay with him for ever, but cannot live with him unless we are married." (173).

The bodily exchange between Zahra and the sniper is a symbol of Zahra’s faith in peace and the values of humanity. Her desperate attempt to stop the war by giving her body and soul to the sniper is seen as instrument of empowerment. Through it, Zahra is able to advocate a more humane, peaceful and less barbaric society than that governed by the oppressive patriarchal ideology that destroys any hope for a better future for women. She contemplates meeting the sniper to discuss their future marriage once the war is over:

Tomorrow, when I see him again, I will speak frankly. We will discuss everything concerning sniping and marriage. Tomorrow will decide my future. There is nothing I don’t want to know. I am impatient to know everything. Tomorrow will decide my future. There is nothing I don’t want to know. I am impatient to know everything. Tomorrow will decide my life. (174)

At the end of the novel, Zahra informs the sniper that she is pregnant, which generates a masculine response from him – "My God, Zahra. You must get an abortion!" (203). Her lover shortly changes his stance and assures her that that he will marry her. “Tomorrow morning. I’ll call at your home and bring my family” (210). The thought of legitimacy and hope makes Zahra believe that the war has ended and it is time to build a new future: “It begins to occur to me that the war with its miseries and destructiveness, has been necessary for me to start to return to being normal and human” (161).11 But it seems that her feeling is not meant to last. She feels an excruciating pain and finds herself lying in the street with blood draining from her body.

The pain is terrible, but I grow accustomed to it, and to the darkness. As I close my eyes for an instant, I see the stars of pain. Then there are rainbows arching across white skies. He kills me. He kills me with bullets that lay at his elbow as he made love to me. He kills me, and the white sheets that covered me a little while ago are still crumpled from my presence. Does he kill me because I’m pregnant? Or is it because I asked him whether he was a sniper? It’s as if someone tugs at my limbs. Should I call out one more time, ‘Please help!’ (214)

Zahra’s tragic death at the end of the book can be seen as proof that war has not swept clear the traditional, patriarchal forces that legitimate all that oppresses women: "(t)he war has swept everything away, for the rich and for the poor, for the beautiful and for the ugly. It has kneaded everything together into a common dough” (184). This may be why Al Shaykh has to situate the sexual encounters between Zahra and the sniper on the stairs of an abandoned building, haunted by the smell of death – "lying on dusty floor tiles in an abandoned building” (154) – which indicates the futility of this relationship, which is doomed, killing any hope for new life.
3. Conclusion

To conclude, Zahra is victimized both by patriarchy and by war. Zahra falls to the same patriarchal structures, now in a form of the sniper, which had caused her pain in her youth. She had falsely thought that war, in spite of its ugly side, could be a new beginning, the start of a healthy and normal life. In The Story of Zahra, Al Shaykh has articulated an empowering discourse for women. That is seen through Zahra’s life from her silence to her determined pursuit of meaningful action, far away from any limited political affiliation, to put an end to this barbaric war. The story of Zahra registers women’s rejection of the discourse of war and the patriarchy that engenders it. Zahra, a silenced, oppressed woman, casts off these constraints and asserts her right to speak out against the dominant patriarchal order. In this regard, Accad says, "both women and men should work together towards a reformed nationalism striped of its male chauvinism, war and violence" (1990:26). Hence, without the deconstruction of patriarchy and its ugly manifestations, any attempt to stop it will be a feeble endeavor, done within the oppressive patriarchy, as seen in Zahra’s final tragic death.12 Finally, Zahra’s actions on behalf of humanity and civilized values symbolize a humanistic statement in advocacy of peace, love, and tolerance.13

Notes.

1. Mona Fayad observes that, "aware that such a process of mythification places Woman outside the movement of history, Arab women writers have developed a number of strategies to produce a counter-discourse to such a historical representation. One such strategy is a move to reclaim history and specificity."(147. Nawal al-Saadawi also stresses this point when she calls for a re-reading of Arab history from the viewpoint of Arab women so they can be aware that the struggle of Arab women against sexual, national, and class oppression is not newly born, and that the Arab women’s movement doesn't come from the void, and is not modeled on women’s movements in the West, but is evident throughout the course of Arab and Islamic history, extending over fourteen centuries. See Saadawi,, Towards a Strategy for Incorporating and Integrating Arab Women in the Arab Nationalist Movement 471-91.


3. Within this context, Evelyne Accad says that The Story of Zahra’s "explicit sexual descriptions, its exploration of taboo subjects such as family cruelty and women’s sexuality and its relation to the war, caused such a scandal that the book was banned in several Arab countries."(1990: 44-5:). Larson adds that Hanan Al Shaykh’s bold depiction of a Muslim family with no "sense of cohesiveness" (14) is the primary reason for the novel having been banned in several Islamic countries.

5. Radhakrishnan presents the dichotomy of nationalist rhetoric as based on an inside/outside opposition that is translated into gendered terms, in which nationalist rhetoric makes “woman the pure and a historical signifier of 'interiority'”, with interiority assuming an essential identity that constitutes "tradition" (77-95). Partha Chatterjee also critiques the notion of scientific rationalism as reinforcing the dichotomy traditional/modern, and thereby placing the discourse of nationalism within the Western Enlightenment discourse. See Chatterjee, Partha. Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse. London: Zed, 1986.

6. Evelyne Accad observes that "(o)ne of the codes of Arab tribes is sharaf (honor), which also means the preservation of girls' virginity to ensure that the women are kept exclusively for the men of their tribe." (29).

7. Several West African nations house very large Lebanese communities. In the Ivory Coast, for example, "80 per cent of the buildings belong to Lebanese, as well as more than 70 per cent of the wholesale and 50 per cent of the retail trade." Even more significantly, in the context of this novel, "since large-scale fighting broke out in Lebanon in 1975, 'other' Lebanese have arrived here ... Some of them give the impression of coming here for a rest between spells of fighting in Beirut. They're terribly arrogant." See "The Ivory Coast's Lebanese Scapegoats Face Hostility", Manchester Guardian Weekly, 25 Mar. 1990.

8. In her protest against war, Virginia Woolf says, "(w)e daughters of educated men are between the devil and the deep sea. Behind us lies the patriarchal system; the private house, with its nullity, its immorality, its hypocrisy, its servility. Before us lies the public world, the professional system, with its possessiveness, its jealousy, its pugnacity, its greed. The one shuts us up like slaves in a harem, the other forces us to circle, like caterpillars head to tail, round and round the mulberry tree, the sacred tree, of property. The question we put to you, lives of the dead, is how can we enter the professions and yet remain civilized human beings; human beings that is, who wish to prevent war?" (1966: 39).

9. Judith Stiehm notes that "too often peace activists find themselves protesting wars already in progress or peace agreements already signed. The reports describe efforts to institutionalize women’s role in international peacemaking and building. Insuring presence is preemptive and almost certainly advantageous. Unfortunately, women have not yet developed the kind of strategic thinking about peace that men daily and at great expense devote to war (2003: 1232 ).

10. Cynthia Enloe observes that the military has a special role in the ideological construction of patriarchy because of the significance of combat in the construction of masculine identities and in the justification of masculine superiority. Paul Higate says that militaries are perceived as masculine institutions not only because they are populated mostly with men but also because they constitute a major arena for the construction of masculine identities. See Military Masculinities: Identity and the State. To read more about masculinity and the men who wage war, please see Carol Cohen, "A Conversation with Cynthia Enloe: Feminists Look at Masculinity and the Men Who Wage War." Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society .28:4 2003. 1188-1207.

11. Nadine Puechguirbal comments on how war affect women and temporarily suspend patriarchal structures. She writes, "(t)oday between 60 and 80 percent of women are single heads of households
Shortages of food, wood, water, and health care have created great burdens for them. Women and girls often have to travel long distances to find resources, inadvertently exposing themselves to violence by thugs roaming the countryside.” (2003: 1273).

12. Meredith Turshen writes that “(w)ar also destroys the patriarchal structures of society that confine and degrade women. In the very breakdown of morals, traditions, customs, and community, war also opens up and creates new beginnings” (1998: 20).

13-In this regard, Miriam Cooke says that the war had opened up new vistas, but within its own logic. It could not yet be used to transcend it. Sherrill Whittington argues that it is essential that the principle of gender equality and nondiscrimination be mainstreamed into all policies and programs. United Nations peacekeeping operations must guarantee that the protection of women’s human rights is central to allocations that promote peace, implement peace agreements, resolve conflict and reconstruct war-torn societies.

Works Cited


Politics of Desire in Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun*

In Ahdaf Soueif’s *The Eye of the Sun*, the protagonist Asya’s emotional journey sheds light upon many sensitive and complicated issues, such as desire, sexuality, love and mutual understanding, all of which constitute the basis for a healthy relationship and a solid viable marriage. Furthermore, this article focuses on serious questions posed by Asya’s story. Do married Arab women have the right to speak out about sexual needs? Can marriage based only on love ensure happiness? Should or can the married woman feel only for her husband even if she feels lonely and sexually unsatisfied or should she suffer in silence to uphold a socially sanctioned marriage? The patriarchal Egyptian society from where Asya comes, holds certain views concerning marriage, fidelity, infidelity, love and feelings rooted in economic, legal, and political structures, as well as social and cultural institutions that oppress women through the assertion of male power, dominance and hierarchy. In other words, Aysa’s journey moves through the complex process of unfolding desires, sexual, social, economic, and political and how this is shaped by the character herself and all that surrounds her.

In *The Eye of the Sun* examines the politics of Asya’s quest to combine love and desire with the entanglement of patriarchal domesticity, family and religion. Within this context, Suad Joseph defines
desire as the broad range of experiences of wanting, erotic and non erotic (Joseph 2005). In this study, we would like to use the broader term of desire which covers the erotic and non erotic since desire in the Eye of the Sun always "exists in a context of politics, history and geography all of which are intermeshed." (Massad 1999:74)

For Suad Joseph, the patriarchal organization of familial culture means the privileging of the assertions of desire by males and elders and a sense of responsibility by females and juniors to assimilate and act upon the assertions of desire by males and elders (Joseph 2005). For example, Asya’s desire to marry Saif Madi is met with her father’s objection, who insists that she should not marry until she finishes college. “For these grave things it is best to wait” (Soueif 1992: 146).2 Her decision to marry Saif at the age of eighteen is also challenged by her mother, Lateefa Mursi, who is supposed to have more faith in her daughter’s decisions rather than playing a conformist role.

But you can’t make such an important decision just like that. You can’t determine the rest of your life suddenly one night when you are not yet eighteen. And I felt suddenly and for the first time in my life that I was wiser and stronger than she was, and I kissed her and said, 'Don’t worry, Mummy. I know what I am doing.' (108)

It is worthy to note that women in many parts of the Middle East continue to be staunch supporters of traditions and social relations that constrain and limit women’s lives (Kandiyyot 1988).3 The most critical role of the mother is to uphold the patriarchal image of women. Since it is the mother’s explicit role to bring up her daughters according to the values and standards of society, she herself must not adopt any constructively critical attitudes toward those standards. In other words, women are not encouraged to think independently. Parents rather decide for them what “they will eat, when they will eat, what they will wear, how they can plan.”(Rubenberg 2001:82) depriving them from the right to decide and choose for themselves.

Moreover, Asya’s quest to combine both desire and love is resisted by her future husband, Saif, who refuses to consummate their sexual desires before marriage despite Asya’s insistent requests.

Please, Saif, I want you so-’ I want you too, Princess, but- ‘No. Please. Please I want you inside me- One day I’ll come inside you- No. Not one day, Saif. Now. Please. You want me. I know you do. And I want you so much. And it’s right, I know it’s right-’ No, it isn’t.’ She sat back. ‘Why? Why isn’t it?’ ‘Because we are not married.’ (190).

Interestingly enough, the moment their passionate love receives patriarchal social sanction, it has stopped to be the organizing principle of their relationship. That is seen through the failure of sexual consummation on the wedding night as narrated through the conscience of Saif.

I braced myself and gave two strong shoves, and I felt her tremble all over, and she started pushing with her heels against the bed to try and unhook herself, and she was whispering frantically that she couldn’t bear it and she couldn’t breathe and could I please stop just for a moment for one moment - and I lifted myself off and let her go and she rolled over on her side away from me and curled up into a little ball and pulled the sheet over herself and lay there trembling. I lit a cigarette and lay on my back smoking and a after a bit she uncurled herself and came to lie against my side and I knew that she was crying so I stroked her hair and she said she was sorry oh she was so sorry. And after a bit, with her face against my arm, she asked do you want to - do you think we - I just really did not know - and I said hush, it doesn’t matter, it does not have to be tonight. (258)

This scene reflects both the fear and the psychological pressure Asya undergoes, taking into account that Asya as an Arab woman has been taught nothing about sexuality since it is a taboo subject not
allowed to be discussed. In this regard, Simone De Beauvoir argues that the wedding night changes the erotic act “into a test that both parties fear their inability to meet, each being too worried by his or her own problems to be able to think generously of the other. This gives the occasion a formidable air of solemnity.” (443) 4. To add further, the subject of the patriarchal concepts of sexuality takes us to Asya’s memories of her childhood and the restrictions imposed on her by her patriarchal father who dictates how she should act, move, and dress. For instance, one can observe Asya’s father’s furious reaction when he sees her dancing and shaking her head in front of the mirror. Daddy would freak out if I just shook my head in front of the mirror. Remember the day he saw me tossing my hair around when I was ten and I had to go the same day and have it cut? And I had to wear it short for seven years after that until I went to university? And how he came home one day and heard me practicing the zaghrouda and almost sacked Dada Zeina on the spot? (351) This scene highlights the patriarchal views towards women’s sexuality, seen as an extension which is to be controlled and kept under surveillance, since women are seen as a menace to the social order and that they may bring shame to the family.

However, for Asya, the failure to consummate the relationship functions as "an indefinite detriment of the combining of love and desire" (Massad 1999 :76). In other words, the unconsummated relationship signals Asya’s journey toward loneliness, toward questioning the validity of marriage, toward wanting and desire out of wedlock which has been aggravated by the indifferent attitude of her husband, Saif, who travels all the time leaving her for long periods without at least caring about her emotional and sexual needs in spite of her pleading. This is presented in the scene when Saif calls Asya to tell her, “I am leaving Damascus tomorrow”(341). He calls her and hangs up the phone before Asya can finish her sentence and express her acute loneliness. “Oh, Saif, it’s horrid. I can’t begin- Saif? Hello? Hello? Oh-.” (341)

Asya’s feelings of loneliness acutely intensify when they are together after long periods of separation and loneliness, shivering under a thin blanket in a small room waiting for her husband to finish his reading. “She would be patient while he read, and she would count her blessings, for here he is with her. No longer alone.”(392). She waits. Saif throws the magazine to the floor, switches off the light and whispers “Good night, Princess.”(392). An indifferent behavior which makes Asya, out of loneliness, want to touch his back with her finger tips and say, Could you? Please? Turn round and hold me? ‘ Oh, sweetie, sweetie. Go to sleep.’ ‘ Please ? Just for a minute?’ And he would turn round, and big and solid and sweet-smelling, would hold her close for maybe five minutes, then he’d ask lightly, 'Is that enough? Can I go to sleep now?’ And patting her hip or arm or whatever was nearest he would murmur,' Good night, Princess,' and he would turn over, and in minutes he would be a sleep. And she would lie awake and hold down the loneliness that threatened to turn into a full-blown panic. (392)

Here, Souief sheds the light upon the psychological pain and feelings of despair and loneliness felt by Asya in a marriage which is supposed to liquidate such feelings and assure an emotional and sexual satisfaction.6 To add more, we observe the psychological confusion and pain Asya feels to the extent that she starts questioning whether Saif loves her or not. “Now she watches him. I know you love me. But you don’t want me. You did once, but you don’t any more. But stop. Stop, she tells herself. Be grateful. You are grateful. Grateful that he loves you enough to come and live here with you. Think what it was like just four months ago and be grateful.” (392-3) She goes to question further why Saif stops loving her, why he should be here with her, why nothing really happens when he is really here but to be repulsed by him many times.
But to be repulsed, turned away so many times – but that is what he thinks you did to him- at first. But she wants to want him. She badly wants to want him. She wants him to make her want him; make her want him like she used to. But he won"t. He will have nothing to do with it at all. So what"s the answer, then –what? Wait. There will be an answer, of course there will. Just wait. One thing at a time. (393)

Here, we find the psychologically tormented Asya waits to find an answer to her question. Aysa"s word "Wait" poses tangible questions for every woman. Is marriage a trap which is hard for women to extricate themselves from? Do feelings die once they are licensed and socially sanctioned by a patriarchal society? In other words, Asya finds herself in a frustrating situation where she feels that she has painfully been trapped. Within this context, De Beauvoir argues that

the husband respects his wife too much to take an interest in his wife"s psychological well being that " would be to recognize in her a secret autonomy that could prove disturbing, dangerous; does she really find pleasure in the marriage bed? Does she truly love her husband? Is she actually happy to obey him? He prefers not to ask; to him these questions even seem shocking."(473) . These questions indicate the unspoken sufferings of many married women like Asya.

In addition to Asya"s suffering is her unexpected pregnancy “You are pregnant. You”re a married woman and you are pregnant. Yes, but we"ve hardly - I mean nothing much has really – I mean it can“t possibly be” (261). Asya"s reaction reflects her desire not to have a child now since things are not going well with Saif as they hardly sleep with each other and, at the same time, she doesn"t want to accumulate her problems by living on pretence that she is the happily perfect wife when she is not. That is clearly highlighted through her sober consciousness. “It is fraudulent. And the worst sham of all is how they pretend they"re normal people with nothing at all odd about their marriage. Not how they pretend to the world- that is necessary- but how they pretend to each other. This is the worst bit. He is living this lie and forcing her to live it too. That's what he is doing – continually." (444)

Accordingly, the struggle between what the patriarchal societies expect of women to do and what women want continues. For instance, Asya"s desire not to have a child has been challenged by the patriarchal culture surrounding her which glorifies the role of the married woman as a mother.7 That is observed in the conversation between Tante Soraya and Dada Sayyida and Asya,

You"ve always been clever and sweet," Tante Soraya said , „and now you will give us a beautiful clever sweet little girl just like you and she will be the first grand child in the family just as you were the first child." Asya had shrugged. Asya had known there was no more to be said. Dada Sayyida filled the little silence. “Children are the ornament of life,” truly it was said. Dada Sayyida had seven children, two of them blind. Tante Sorya glanced at Asya”s face , Smooth it out now and stop frowning. This is the greatest gift God can give a human being, and you receive it like this? (267)

However, Asya"s resistance not to be complacent or silent about her painful, distressing situation has been manifested in facing her husband with the reality of their stalemate marriage. An attitude which informs arguably of Asya”s feminist consciousness of her needs. “I think if we made sure that when we are together we”re really really together. That we’d –do things, and- talk, and stuff- you know, we should be all right, really." „Of course we will be all right." Because it would be such a shame....” (397-8)

In spite of facing him, Saif takes Asya”s feelings and the painful situation she lives in for granted. He is ignorant of her dreams, nostalgic yearnings and the emotional climate in which she passes her days. “Man fails to realize that his wife is no character from some pious and conventional treatise, but a real individual of flesh and blood; he takes for granted her fidelity to the strict regimen she assumes, not
taking into account that she has temptations to vanquish, that she may yield to them.” (Beauvoir : 473) . Here, we may say that Saif is a symbol of the patriarchal man who just thinks of himself and his work and what ever progress he has is just a blessing for his wife. That is seen through his continuous and cold behavior in bed which has left its deep impact on Asya’s inner psyche “When he switches off the light, she turns back to the view outside. She knows that if she goes to bed nothing will happen.” (409). Hence, she wouldn’t wait for him anymore in despair to be touched or loved and “whisper to him to hold her, „just for a moment.” She will never do that again.”( 409)

Resisting her own painful situation, Asya has stopped blaming herself for the frigidity in their relationship. “She isn’t the reason they are not sleeping together anymore. Not any more. She can’t be blamed for that anymore. She’s done everything she could possibly do to show that she wants towanted to – and she’s stopped because he doesn’t want to know.” (420). But Saif’s arrogant and cold behavior towards Asya drives her to speak out about her real deep suffering without fear asserting her own desire and resilience not to accept her painful situation. “But you don’t care. You don’t care about me one bit as long as I don’t bug you. I could drop dead or take a lover or anything and you wouldn’t care.” (424) but he provokingly assures her that will never happen. She retorts back “And that is something else you know, is it? Why should you assume you know everything about me? Everything about how I will react on anything? Particularly given the –given that it is not something we have ever talked about-.” (424) All feelings of hopelessness and despair has led Asya to think of the meaning of both her married life and the real purpose behind waiting itself, to live on hope that something might happen. In other words, it is a moment of truth or revelation to her manifested in one question: “All of life reduced to this?” (352). She waits for attention, emotional care, love and a husband who respects and communicates with her. A husband who turns his back on her every night, who speaks of looking forward to the day when, in the courtesy of advancing years, they will address each other as 'Asya Hanım' and 'Saif Bey' and take gentle strolls round the garden of the house he will build for them in the desert- and wait to die. And what about life? What about all the years that still has to pass? Emptiness. And then age, and then the only end of age .How will she bear it? What can she do? She cannot claim coercion. No one forced her to do anything .She chose. She chose English Literature, she chose Saif Madi, she chose the north of England. ( 353 ).

We can observe that something substantial is missing in Asya’s married life. She questions what is the meaning of living in pain and suffering. Undoubtedly, her thoughts shed the light upon the unspoken sufferings of many women who suffer within the confines of marriage and accept their painful destiny silently. Souief’s In the Eye of the Sun stands as an example where desire is taught and practiced in the context of intimate patriarchal relationships. Religion also serves as a critical component of women’s identity as well as providing highly significant legitimating for the subordination, oppression and positioning of women. (Hale 1997). For instance, Souief takes us deeper into Asya’s psychological struggle as a lonely married woman. She wonders whether it is fair to desire and think of another man other than her husband. Within this context, Nawal el Saadawi argues that Islam made marriage the only institution within which sexual intercourse could be morally practiced between men and women. “Sexual relations, if practiced outside this framework, were immediately transformed into an act of sin and corruption.” (1980 : 139) 8. Asya’s tormented soul is revealed when she imagines another man in her bathroom and struggles to dismiss these thoughts. “In the candle –lit bathroom she talks to the face she sees in the mirror; the face whose eyes have grown bigger and darker, whose lips have grown fuller and softer, whose whole aspect is more flushed and curved and smooth than she has seen it for a long,
long time. She says 'Why?' and she says, 'It is not fair,' and she whispers, 'Stop it, oh, stop it.'” (390). A struggle between recognizing her own desire and how the patriarchal society and its oppressive culture, symbolized by her mother and relatives, shape for her the concept of desire and sexuality. “All your life they tell you – that a woman's sexuality is responsive, a woman’s sexuality is tied up with her emotions. Her mother says she has never thought of any man that way except her father. Dada Zeina claims she had never desired any man but her husband – and then only because he had taught her.” (390)

For Rubenberg, women attain honor primarily through passive conformity and dishonor falls exclusively on women. The discourse of honor functions to reinforce and reproduce the hierarchical structure of the family, while the dialectic between the individual and society functions quasi-automatically to maintain the institutions of the social order. Society has a variety of means from gossip (namima) to honor killing to enforce the honor code. (Rubenberg 2001) Asya’s words portray the inner psychological struggle between her own authentic desire as an individual and the patriarchal concepts of desire which dictate how a married woman should desire, feel, and think. To elaborate further, it brings to the surface the concept of sexuality10 and desire11 in the Middle East where desire is organized in a patriarchal family culture that values the family above the person. Joseph states that “desire often became invested as a property of relationships rather than singularly the property of a person in a society in which the most important asset of ownership was not one’s self but one’s web of relationships.” (2005: 79). In this regard, both girls and boys are explicitly taught to put the interests of the family before the interests of the individual. Most girls “are discouraged from having independent opinions or expressing ideas that contradict parents’ admonitions.” (Rubenberg 2001:79-80)

However, in an act of resistance of her painful situation, we find Asya think of Mario, one of Saif’s friends, which indicates her quest to look for desire out of wedlock which she lacks miserably in her own marriage. “Look at her : in Italy she is friends with Umberto but desires some unknown man with a broken nose who is handling a blonde in a corner – even while she is in love, in love, with Saif; and tonight, to want to press up against Mario, to want his hand to slide down from her waist-oh.”(391). After thinking of more than one man other than her husband, she has met Gerald Stone, an English man, with whom she has a complicated affair. An affair which has a sweet taste at the beginning but ends in frustration due to the absence of genuine love. Here, one may take a closer look at Asya’s inner feelings after sleeping with Gerald. When she wakes up, she surprises herself of how well she has felt all night without any single feeling of guilt, confusion and fear. “expecting to wake up to the cold finger on the heart; to the weight of the rock of doom settling on her chest: guilt, fear- confusion would surely coalesce into one mass that would settle inside her and prevent her from even breathing – but there is nothing: she surprises herself by how well and how peacefully she has slept.” (550). One may argue that Asya’s inner feelings may reflect not only a sexual satisfaction which she has never experienced before with Saif but also a defiance of what is traditionally expected of a married woman. For a woman to be moral that means “she must incarnate a being of superhuman qualities: the “virtuous woman” of Proverbs, the “perfect mother,” the honest woman”…Let her think, dream, sleep, desire, breathe without permission and she betrays the masculine ideal.” (Beauvoir 474)12

It is also important to contend that Asya’s experience with Gerald, though sexually liberating, has helped her discover that those feelings of desire only can’t make her so happy without love. Therefore, she has come finally to face the bitter truth which is to choose between a hopeless love with Saif or unsatisfying relationship with Gerald, an inner struggle which has left its heavy toll on her physical and
mental health. “I just want this to stop. I am so tired, and there is not a single night when we go to sleep before four, and I am just exhausted, and I don’t want this to be happening here any more.” (560)

Asya’s courage and stark honesty by being always true to her pulse and inner feelings in her constant resistance of the patriarchal culture’s suffocating culture is also manifested when she has confessed to her mother about her own affair with Gerald Stone. When her mother, Lateefa Mursi, asks her if she doesn’t feel worse or guilty sleeping with this man, Asya surprises her by saying that it is her business and something which is private that belongs to her only. Besides that, she doesn’t feel guilty since Saif doesn’t care about her in this way anymore. “No. I don’t .... It’s as if sleeping with him is – private- it’s my business. ‘What do you mean it’s your business? Isn’t it a matter of concern to your husband if you sleep with another man?’” But Saif doesn’t care a bout me in that way – any more.” (568)

Here, this reply represents Asya’s resistance to the patriarchal culture imbibed by her mother’s teachings based on hypocrisy and pretence. In other words, a lie which is called marriage, as in Asya’s case, cannot be accepted silently to please society, at the expense of her own identity and individuality. Asya seeks to assert her own identity which the patriarchal society always tries to blur and takes it for granted by searching for self actualization through practice rather than theory having the agency and will to fulfill her needs without being afraid of how she will be viewed by society. Asya's life was tangibly beset by appalling patriarchal limitations which she has to resist continually. For example, with her husband Saif, we notice a long sequence of choked sexual impulses followed by a merciless torture and humiliating interrogation of Asya when he finds out about Gerald. ‘-You actually suggested –you suggested.-’ Asya is silent. “You asked him to fuck you?” ‘You asked him to fuck you?” Saif, all I meant was- ”You asked him?” Saif- “Just answer me straight: you invited him to fuck you? ”It was not like that-’ ”Just answer yes or no.” (page 666). Ironically enough, we find Saif expects from Asya to be a traditional, silent, obedient wife “ I expected my wife to be loyal. I expected my wife to have some sense of honor. I expected.”(623) but, at the same time, he is not ready or willing to give her the emotional companionship she needs. “This is not fair,” cries Asya. For years I begged you— I begged you – to make it happen-and you wouldn’t.” (623). In other words, he traps Asya in a painful situation where he can "neither be with her as a husband nor let her go as woman.” ( Said 2001: 409) Instead, he batters and shames her in a humiliating manner poignantly shown when Asya’s mother sees her battered daughter" face. “He did this to you?” she says. „ He did this to you.”... The bruise has faded to a sort of olive green shading off into yellow along the borders; the eye itself is almost completely open again with only one red splodge radiating out from the inner corner.” (667) . Asya's impasse and pathetic situation resolves when she decides to free herself from both Saif who “is no longer her friend or any part of her life.” (775) and Gerald for whom she makes it clear that she cannot live like this anymore "Gerald. I am not going with anyone. I don’t want to go with anyone. I want to go on my own.” (717).

One may say that certain values of escape are open to women but in practice they are not available to all.13 Asya’s story sheds the light upon the unspoken sufferings of married women who are silenced out of fear of divorce or the social stigma of the patriarchal society, in particular, the Arab societies, patriarchal societies which victimize women through blurring their identities and the necessity to fight against the patriarchy and its suppressive culture like Asya. Asya conveys a message to all women that self actualization is more important than living on pretence to please the patriarchal society at the expense of one”s own identity.
Conclusion

To conclude, one comes to understand that in spite of her failed marriage with Saïf and a disastrous affair with Gerald, Asya has eventually attained her own individuality and self-actualization of one’s self, a woman who is able to draw her own destiny and move forward to serve her community positively without the suffocating restraints of a frustrating and hopeless marriage. Asya eventually completes her doctorate and then returns to Egypt, not only to teach English literature at the American university in Cairo, but to work in a program offering help to the Egyptian village women. A step is courageously taken by her in spite of the domestic pressures in a patriarchal Arab society where marriage is seen as a fundamental foundation of society and where divorced or separated woman are looked upon with little respect. In other words, a price Asya has to pay to assert her own identity rather than suffer in silence even if it implies facing the menaces and aggression of society since for a woman to regain her self respect is much more worthwhile than pleasing the male dominated society.

Notes .

1. Ahdaf Soueif’s honesty in exploring the sexuality of the Arab woman, a topic which has been rarely handled before with too much frankness, has led to the banning of her novel in many Arab countries. Please see Mehrez, Samia . “The Hybrid Literary Text: Arab Creative. Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics.20 (2000): 168-185. Edward Said has called Soueif as one of the most extraordinary chroniclers of sexual politics now writing. Please see Said, Edward . Times Literary Supplement. 3 (December, 1999) 7. Within this context too, Hanan Al Shaykh’s The Story of Zahra is also banned in several Arab countries for exploring taboo topics . Evelyne Accad says that The Story of Zahra’s “explicit sexual descriptions, its exploration of taboo subjects such as family cruelty and women’s sexuality and its relation to the war, caused such a scandal that the book was banned in several Arab countries.”(1990: 44-5). Please see Accad, Evelyne . Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East. New York : New York University Press, 1990.


3. All references will be henceforth taken from Soueif, Ahdaf . In the Eye of the Sun . UK : Bloomsbury , 1992 .


9. According to Nawal El Saadawi , woman was therefore considered by the Arabs as "a menace to man and society, and the only way to avoid the harm she could do was to isolate her in the home , where she could have no contact with either one or the other.” (1980:136) Please see El Saadawi, Nawal .*The Hidden Face of Eve : Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata . London : Zed Books , 1980. Within this context , Rubenberg argues that gossip is the primary process by which society enforces the honor code on the individual . What women fear most is being talked about ...a girl’s prospects are entirely dependent upon her reputation, the mere hint of dishonor can ruin a girl’s life. (2001). Please see Rubenberg . A. Cheryl . *Palestinian women : Patriarchy and resistance in the West bank*. USA : Lynne Rienner Publishers , Inc, 2001. You can also see Sandra , Hale . *Gender Politics in Islam : Islamism , Socialism , and the State*. Boulder : West view Press , 1997. Please see Badran , Margot .*Feminists*,


13. Patriarchy mandates that females be denied the possibility of an independent life experience outside the family confines. The more confined a woman can be kept, the less exposure she has, and the less she is able to think for herself, the less likely she is to challenge her husband’s authority and decisions. (Rubenberg 2001) . Please see Rubenberg . A. Cheryl. Palestinian women : Patriarchy and resistance in the West bank . USA: Lynne Riener Publishers, Inc, 2001. Kandiyoti , Deniz .”Bargaining with Patriarchy.” Gender and Society. 2. (1988) : 274-90.

14. For De Beauvoir, In the country, especially, the chains of marriage are heavy, and the wife must somehow accommodate herself to a situation from which she cannot escape. Some, full of importance, become tyrannical and shrewdish matrons; some become complaisant, masochistic victims and slaves of their families. (1989). She argues further that the celibate woman is to be explained and defined with

15. “For girls, marriage is the only means of integration in the community, and if they remain unwanted, they are, socially viewed, so much wastage. This is why mothers have always eagerly sought to arrange marriages for them.” (Beauvoir 1989:427). Please see De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. USA: Vantage: Books Edition, 1989. 16. For El Saadawi, freedom has a price, a price which a free woman pays out of her tranquility. A woman always pays a heavy price, in any case, even if she chooses to submit. She pays it out of her health, her happiness, her personality and her future. Therefore, since a price she has to pay, why not the price of freedom than that of slavery? I believe that the price paid in slavery even if accompanied by some security, and the peace of mind that comes from acceptance, is much higher than the price paid for freedom, even if it includes the menaces and aggression of society. (Saadawi 1980). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal> *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980.

**Works Cited.**


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