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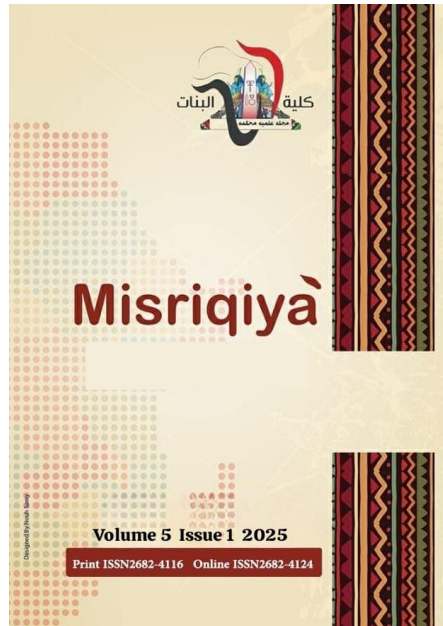


Miṣriqiyā

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Afrocentrism in the Public Eye: An Appraisal-Corpus Based Analysis on Netflix's "Queen Cleopatra" Documentary

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Abstract

Netflix's "Queen Cleopatra", released in May 2023, is a documentary that has raised controversy as it represents Queen Cleopatra, who has Greek heritage, as black African, which supports the Afrocentric claims about the "Black" identity of ancient Egypt. Afrocentrism is a movement that not only believes in the rejection of the white race in Africa, it also sponsors claims that modern Egyptians have nothing to do with the ancient Egyptian civilization history. Moreover, they assert that light-skinned Egyptians are descendants of Arab and European intruders. Although filmmakers try to enforce the ideology of Afrocentrism by choosing an actress with African dark-skinned features, and by classifying it as a documentary, not a soap drama, it was poorly received by the mass audience and considered "rotten" as the series has an audience score of just 2%. The rationale of analyzing these comments stems from the importance of magnifying the power of popular sentiment, reflected in the audiences' comments; it serves as a crucial bridge between the filmmakers' intentions and the actual impact of the film on its target audience. Accordingly, this paper digs deeper in analyzing the vast majority of comments posted on the Rotten Tomatoes website from May to November 2023 quantitatively using KH Coder 3 program and qualitatively using Martin and White's Appraisal framework (2005). The results show that most of the audiences are aware of the inconsistencies between film portrayals and historical reality to the extent that Netflix restricted comments on the trailer and faced calls for boycotts.

Keywords: cultural identity, media discourse, history

1.1 Introduction

Social media platforms have revolutionized how people connect, share information, and express themselves; they have profoundly changed how various audiences communicate, consume information, and express themselves. They have become both creators and consumers of content, sharing their thoughts, experiences, and expertise. In fact, analyzing audience comments is essential for understanding and improving communication strategies; thus, measuring the success of any media outlet. This is a dynamic and interactive process which provides instant access to news and events, allowing users to be active participants in the information flow. Martin et al., 2023 state that “in the ever-evolving digital age, social media has played a pivotal role by providing a vast global platform for individuals to freely express their views and opinions” (p. 35)."

Overview of Afrocentrism

What is Afrocentrism, and where did it come from?" These questions have been perpetually raised as Afrocentrism has been a topic of debate for a while, and it frequently surfaces in arguments. Bay (2000) states that

Afrocentrism is a set of ideas that are rarely associated with any specific historical or cultural context." She adds that "many commentators, most notably Wilson Jeremiah Moses, have suggested that, since Afrocentric historical themes such as the belief that ancient Egypt was a Black civilization have been around since the eighteenth century, we ought to see Afrocentrism as a time-honored African-American tradition (p. 502).

This suggests that Afrocentrism has a long and esteemed history within African-American culture. In fact, it is a cultural and political movement whose primarily African-American members identify themselves and all other Black people as syncretic Africans and believe their worldview should positively reflect traditional African values. According to Asante (1991), "Afrocentrism is a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person.... It centers on placing people of African origin in control of their lives and attitudes about the world.

This means that we examine every aspect of the dislocation of African people: culture, economics, psychology, health, and religion.... As an intellectual theory, Afrocentricity is the study of ideas and events from the standpoint of Africans as key

players rather than victims. This theory becomes, by virtue of an authentic relationship to the centrality of our own reality, a fundamentally empirical project" (p. 172)

In the late 1960s, Black activists advocated for an educational approach that focused on African experiences and perspectives, leading to the development of Black and African American studies. According to Early (2023), the terms Afrocentrism, Africology, and Afrocentricity were coined in the 1980s by the prominent African-American scholar and activist Molefi Asante; Cheikh Anta Diop's work is also considered foundational to Afrocentricity (Saad, 2024). Therefore, the specific ideas and goals of Afrocentrism weren't fully established until the publication of Molefi Asante's book, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* (1980). This book is considered the foundation of Afrocentric thought. In it, Asante, a scholar who came to Black Studies from the Black Power movement, urged Black Americans to develop a worldview centered on African values and history following its initial emergence (Bay, 2000). According to Bay (2000), "Asante's notion of Afrocentrism is first and foremost a product of the Black Power culture of the 1970s... it draws on the Black cultural nationalist ideology that permeated the Black Arts Movement and the Organization US wing of the Black Power Movement" (p. 503).

Asante (1990, cited in Winters, 1994) states that the "Afrocentrist seeks to uncover and use codes, paradigms, symbols, motifs, myths, and circles of discussion that reinforce the centrality of African ideas and values as a valid frame of reference for acquiring and examining data" (p. 6). In a related vein, Bay (2000) states, "One problem with reading Afrocentrism backward is that the concept has not been around for a very long time. The word 'Afro-centric' was coined by Du Bois in the early 1960s to describe the subject matter of his projected *Encyclopedia Africana*, which was to center around Africa" (p. 502).

Consequently, it is clear that Afrocentrism is not monolithic; there are different approaches within the movement, with some researchers focusing more on cultural recovery and others on historical research. Afrocentrism isn't a single, unified idea. Within the movement, scholars take various paths, whether it's recovering cultural traditions or re-examining history. Bay (2000) explains that Afrocentric scholars from various disciplines (sociology, biology, healthcare) use their fields to develop Afrocentric theories. For instance, some Afrocentric

psychologists create therapy models based on the idea of a white racial inferiority complex. Afrocentric biologists study the influence of melanin on culture, and Afrocentric historians challenge traditional views of African history. Bay also stresses that “history plays no small role in Afrocentrism. From the outset, Afrocentric thinkers have claimed ancient Egypt as an African civilization” (p. 505-506)."

In a 2020 interview with Smith, Asante defined Afrocentrism as a paradigm that prioritizes African agency and centers African people within their own historical narratives, shifting them from the margins to the center of African discourse. This framework has fostered diverse Afrocentric theories across culture, spirituality, language, history, and psychology, contributing to a broad-based critical analysis (Smith, 2020, p. 212-213). Similarly, Mazama (2001) emphasizes that “the Afrocentric idea rests on the assertion of the primacy of the African experience for African people. Its aim is to give us our African, victorious consciousness back. In the process, it also means viewing the European voice as just one among many and not necessarily the wisest one” (p. 388).

Consequently, Afrocentrism directly challenges the traditional Eurocentric view of history, which often minimizes or ignores Africa's contributions to civilization. For people of African descent, Afrocentrism offers a means to contest the dominance of European perspectives and serves as a powerful instrument for combating racism and fostering Black pride globally. Asante (1991) articulates this as Africa's intellectual and psychological self-assertion, a liberation from Western mental domination, analogous to breaking free from other forms of subjugation (p. 172). Bay (2000) echoes this sentiment, noting that “Nineteenth-century Black thinkers responded to scientific racism's assault on their race by crafting their own version of ethnology” (p. 507).

In sum, Afrocentrism represents a multifaceted intellectual and cultural movement that seeks to retrieve and center African standpoints, challenging dominant Eurocentric narratives and promoting a sense of action and pride among people of African descent.

Afrocentrism vs. Egyptology

The core of the debate surrounding Afrocentrism lies in its approach to history, particularly Egyptian history, which is the focus of this study. Kelly (1992) notes, “Kemet is the term Afrocentrists prefer for Egypt, though Egyptologists insist that

Kemet, 'the Black Land,' refers to the color of the alluvial soil in Egypt, not to the skin color of the inhabitants... but a fundamental dogma of Afrocentrism is that the ancient Egyptians were Black” (p. 155). Bay (2000) cites examples, including Afrocentrist Runoko Rashidi, who posits that ancient Egypt (KMT) was the epicenter of African civilization and that examining its achievements illuminates the greatness of African people. Bay also highlights that prominent abolitionists David Walker and Frederick Douglass emphasized the connection between African Americans and their ancient heritage, particularly in Egypt. Walker lamented the lack of awareness among African Americans of their shared ancestry with Egyptians, noting that some held negative views of Egyptians, associating them with American slavery. In contrast, Frederick Douglass countered racist ideologies by underscoring the African origins of Egypt, Abyssinia, and Nubia. In fact, this focus on Egypt as a central point of African history exemplifies the Afrocentric project of reinterpreting history through an African-centered angle, directly challenging prevailing Eurocentric interpretations.

Building upon the assertion of ancient Egypt's centrality to African heritage, as discussed previously, the Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop (1974) also claimed that "ancient Egypt was a Negro civilization" (p. xiv). However, Diop's argument extends further, asserting that the ancient Egyptians were Black Africans, similar to modern Black populations. According to Diop, the "Anu" were the original Black inhabitants of Egypt and the architects of Egyptian civilization, credited with developing agriculture, irrigation, dams, advanced knowledge, arts, writing, and the calendar, moreover, Diop even attributed the writing of ancient Egyptian texts like the Book of the Dead and pyramid texts to the Anu. This emphasis on linking African culture to a sophisticated civilization like Egypt appears to be a direct response to Eurocentrism, aiming to provide a source of pride and identity for people of African descent. As Aidi (2022) demonstrates, some contemporary expressions of Afrocentrism have even focused on DNA analysis, advocating for DNA testing of mummies to definitively prove the Black African origins of the ancient Egyptians.

As for the current study and based on the Afrocentric focus on ancient Egypt and the ongoing debate surrounding the ethnicity of its rulers, as previously discussed, Netflix's "Queen Cleopatra," released in May 2023, exploded significant controversy, particularly in Egypt. This production represents another attempt by the Afrocentric movement to publicize its ideology through the soft power of mass media

to promote its historical interpretations, which directly reflects Diop's earlier assertions and sparks similar debates about the accuracy and cultural implications of these claims. The documentary focuses on the life and reign of Cleopatra VII, the last pharaoh of Ancient Egypt, with biracial British actress Adele James portraying the queen and Jada Pinkett Smith serving as a producer. While Cleopatra belonged to the Ptolemaic dynasty, a lineage of Greek origin, the film's portrayal of her as a Black woman directly challenged the traditional understanding of her ethnicity. This casting decision was interpreted by some as reinforcing the Afrocentric belief that ancient Egyptians were Black Africans. However, this interpretation remains disputed among scholars, and Egyptians themselves powerfully objected to what they perceived as a pragmatic portrayal of their historical figures.

For instance, Saad (2024) states, "What many Pan-Africanist Egyptians like me are opposing is not the association of ancient Egypt with Blackness, but the Afrocentrist movement's insistence that ancient Egypt was originally and exclusively a Black civilization." (p. 203). Furthermore, Egypt's antiquities ministry stated that Cleopatra had "white skin and Hellenistic features". Mostafa Waziri, the secretary general of the Supreme Council of Archaeology, elaborated that the depiction of Cleopatra as black is a "falsification of Egyptian history and a blatant historical misconception", especially as the film is classified as a documentary. Waziri added that the view that Cleopatra was not black is not motivated by racism and discrimination. The main aim is to save and protect the historical record of the queen as a weighty symbol in ancient Egyptian history. (Middle East Eye, May, 2023). They assert that Cleopatra had Hellenistic features and white skin, emphasizing that their opposition is based on historical accuracy, not racism, and aims to protect the integrity of Egyptian history.

1.2 Objective of the Study

This study aims at measuring the film's effectiveness on different audience segments by analyzing, thoroughly and comprehensively, most of the comments written on the Rotten Tomatoes website from May 10th, 2023, to November 6th, 2023. The comments are critical in revealing the public's perspective concerning Afrocentric interpretation of ancient Egyptian identity which is the core of this study. Moreover, this website is considered a valuable resource for gathering reviews from a wide range of critics and viewers around the world. Accordingly, a mixed-methods approach is employed, utilizing KH Coder 3 for quantitative pattern identification

and Martin and White's Appraisal framework (2005) for a nuanced qualitative exploration of audience sentiment.

1.3 Study Questions

The research aims at answering the following question;

- 1- How do viewers construct appraisals of the film and its Afrocentric claims through language, focusing on the expression of judgment, affect, and engagement?
- 2- How do these choices reproduce and form cultural perceptions of the historical and cultural representations in the movie?
- 3-How far the controversy around this film lead to more diverse and comprehensive understanding of the origin of this debate?

1.4 Collecting & Refining Data

The compiled corpus consists primarily of most of the comments posted on the Rotten Tomatoes website during the period from May 10th, 2023, to November 6th, 2023. The corpus, as a whole, consists of 28,761 tokens. The researcher named the corpus 'Rotten Tomatoes Comments,' referred to hereafter as RTC, to be used in the analysis. The corpus in this study has gone through two stages. The first stage involved collecting and copying the comments from the website. The second stage involved refining the data by removing commenter names and publication dates, preparing it for use with the software program, namely KH Coder. The final step is to perform frequency analysis, generating lists of the most frequent words and visualizing these results through charts to identify prominent themes.

It is worth mentioning that in order to uphold the principles of objectivity and transparency, all comments, in the previous mentioned period, were included in the analysis; no selection was made. The reason behind choosing "Rotten Tomatoes" as a source stems from the systematic collection and analysis of reviews from a varied range of expert critics and ordinary audience, then they are collected in the widely recognized "Tomatometer" score. It is the metric that represents the percentage of positive assessments. Finally, it provides a fast and accessible scale of overall critical sentiment, effectively categorizing productions as either "Fresh" (generally favorable) or "Rotten" (mainly negative).

1.5 Koichi Higuchi's Coder: KH Coder

According to Higuchi (2016), KH Coder is a valuable tool for textual data analysis. KH Coder offers a more comprehensive approach than other software programs as Antconc. It combines qualitative and quantitative methods with a strong emphasis on text mining and statistical analysis. One of the most important features is providing advanced visualization tools and cross-language capabilities, making it suitable for multifaceted research projects that require in-depth thematic analysis and pattern discovery.

KH Coder's main benefit lies in its capability to bridge the gap between qualitative and quantitative text analysis, offering a powerful group of tools for researchers that allow them to deal with complex textual data. Besides, it provides advanced text analysis available to a wider audience. It saves time by performing tasks like content analysis, allowing researchers to focus on interpretation. Finally, being open-source, there are available tutorials, which can help users get started.

2. Literature Review of Previous Studies

This study adopts appraisal theory that is essential in understanding emotions. It hypothesizes that a person's subjective evaluation or "appraisal" of a situation is the primary driver of their emotional response. This perception deviates from earlier theories that viewed emotions as straight and automatic reactions to stimuli. In fact, the theory suggests, that the method an individual use in order to understand any situation involves many factors like personal goals, ethical standards, and personal and universal views which play an important role in forming any experience. So, the central principle of appraisal theory is the cognitive processes, which refer to how an individual assesses events and produces emotions. This idea emphasizes that sentiments are not simply submissive reactions but an active mental appraisal, which is the core of this study. It is worth mentioning that a same situation can arouse diverse emotional responses to different individuals based on their unique appraisals. In fact, this is the core of this study that investigates how diverse segments of audiences judge the movie, and those "judgments" create attitudes. Thus, emotions are viewed as the product of active cognitive process that shape emotional products.

In fact, the theory is drawn from the principles of Systemic Functional Linguistics SFL which explores how language expresses attitudes and relationships. Afterwards, J.R. Martin's starts his studies and research in the 1990s. He focuses on

how language can be used to evaluate, express emotions, and participate with others. His work becomes a mile stone in influencing and developing appraisal theory. The collaborative work between Martin and White in the late 1990s and early 2000s has resulted in the final formation of the theory as they published, *The Language of Evaluation* (2005), which digs deeper in analyzing three main components in the theory. They divide it into “attitude”, “engagement”, and “graduation” which are explained in detail in the coming section.

In fact, this outline has become a basis for linguistic analysis, enabling researchers to investigate evaluative language across diverse genres, such as academic writing (Hyland, 2005; Hood, 2006), news reports (White, 2003; Martin & White, 2000), and political discourse (O'Donnell, 2008). Moreover, Appraisal theory's influence extends beyond these areas, as it has been integrated with other linguistic frameworks like critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003). In fact, Appraisal theory is a dynamic and evolving field as it expands through research into cultural differences in emotional expression, computer-aided analysis, and its application in areas like education, healthcare, and any situation that triggers emotion.

Many studies have been conducted using Appraisal Theory. Muhammed Taghian (2020) employed the Appraisal model to investigate Trump's ideology in selected political speeches and TV interviews, using Martin and White's Appraisal model (2005). He investigated the linguistic aspects employed in those speeches to comprehend Trump's attitudinal stances and political dogma towards Arabs.

Jeong Han and Hye Gyeong (2024) conducted a detailed linguistic analysis of the television series "What is Love?" employing Appraisal Theory and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to identify the "signature" linguistic patterns of 11 key characters within a complete episode script. The study quantified the emotional and evaluative content of characters' dialogue by analyzing the frequency and types of words and grammar used to express feelings, judgments, aesthetic evaluations, and intensity.

Samir Hassanvandi and Mohammad taghi (2014) applied Appraisal Theory to analyze the performance of professional interpreters, specifically within the setting of the United Nations General Assembly. The study sought to pinpoint potential difficulties for interpreters by comparing how evaluative language was expressed in the source (Persian) speech and its target (English) translation.

The researcher Badar Fahad, in his paper “Students' Perceptions about Course Evaluation: A Discourse Analysis from the Perspective of the Appraisal System” (2023), explores how university students use language to evaluate a course in which they are enrolled. He focuses on the specific linguistic choices they make. Using a qualitative approach, the study analyzes student responses to evaluative questions, utilizing Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Appraisal Theory as its theoretical framework. He studied the responses of 24 students to show their feelings and opinions about a course, highlighting the key linguistic patterns that emerge in their appraisals.

Another study carried out by Krizan 2016 who investigates how attitudes are conveyed in 200 modern print advertisements targeted at women in British magazines. Using Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory, the research analyzes how these ads use language to express emotions (affect), evaluations (judgment), and aesthetic assessments (appreciation). The investigation focuses on both directly stated and implied attitudes, exploring how these linguistic choices shape the reader's perception and social understanding.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 The Qualitative Analysis: Appraisal Framework

The appraisal framework, founded by Martin, White, and their colleagues in the late 20th century (Iedema et al., 1993; Martin & White, 2005), offers a methodology for dissecting the nuances of evaluative meaning in text. It examines two aspects of languages, firstly, how language bears positive or negative judgments. Secondly, how language intensifies or softens the force of these opinions, and allows speakers/writers to engage in a dialogue with both past and potential interlocutors. In fact, these tools for constructing meaning are collectively termed the "language of evaluation" because they reveal the speaker's/writer's subjective investment in the text.

According to Martin and White (2005)

The framework's orientation is towards meanings in context and towards rhetorical effects, rather than towards grammatical forms. As a consequence, it brings together a lexically and grammatically diverse selection of locutions on the basis that they all operate to locate the writer/speaker with respect to the value positions being referenced in the text and with respect to, in

Bakhtin's terms, the backdrop of alternative opinions, points of view and value judgments against which all texts operate. (p. 94)

In the same realm, Otieza (20217) explains that the appraisal framework "aims to provide a comprehensive theoretical and descriptive systematization of the linguistic resources that can be used to construe the value of social experience, and thereby to achieve a richer understanding of the patterns of interpersonal meaning beyond the manifestation of only emotionality across discourse". She adds that "this model maintains that intersubjectivity is built by writers and readers who have certain social roles, and who act in determinate social and cultural realms that shape and institutionalize the way in which emotions and opinions are codified through language" (p. 458).

Consequently, the framework builds on the idea that language serves three main purposes; **representing the world:** Language helps us describe experiences and ideas; **building relationships as** Language allows us to connect with others by shaping our social roles and interactions, **creating texts;** Language helps us organize ideas into clear and coherent messages. According to (Martin and Rose, 2003) appraisal is a discourse analytic frame that allows the analysis of these linguistically manifested stances by uncovering and evaluating prosodic meaning across whole texts.

The framework adheres to the systemic functional linguistic theory developed by Halliday (1994, 2004, 2014). This theory posits that meaning-making can be broadly categorized into three metafunctions: (1) the "ideational" metafunction, where language constructs our experience of the world; (2) the "interpersonal" metafunction, where speakers/writers enact social roles and relationships; and (3) the "textual" metafunction, where these meanings are organized into a coherent text suitable for the communicative context. The evaluative meanings described by the appraisal framework contribute to the interpersonal metafunction. They reveal speakers'/writers' feelings, preferences, and opinions with varying degrees of intensity and directness. They also allow the construction of propositions as more or less debatable or verifiable, ultimately aligning or disaligning with the value positions present in the communicative context.

The appraisal framework (Martin and White, 2005) is a sophisticated one that operates through three interconnected semantic systems: engagement, attitude and graduation. These systems offer a structured way to understand the "semantic

resources" that shape how we express emotions, judgments, and valuations in language. Significantly, the framework goes beyond simply identifying these evaluations. It also examines how language strengthens and interacts with these evaluations, creating a nuanced overall evaluative tone within a text. This is constructed through various linguistic choices at the word and grammar level, highlighting the complicated relationship between language and the expression of values. The following sections elaborate each of these three core semantic systems within the appraisal framework.

2.1.1.2 Appraisal Attitude system

Within the framework of Appraisal, the concept of attitude refers to the way feelings are built as a structure of meaning. Martin and White (2005) propose that this system is comprised of three interrelated domains; **Affect** is the main area that deals with the expression of positive and negative emotions, covering a major human experience, it expresses emotions such (happy/sad, excited/bored). **Judgment** is the second domain, it is based on affect, representing the institutionalization; normalizing or regulating some concepts, norms, beliefs or emotions into proposals for guiding behavior. It reflects social norms and values, influencing how actions are perceived as positive or negative. As for the third domain; it is **appreciation**. Actually, emotions are converted into propositions for running taste. It reveals cultural values and aesthetics, shaping how we perceive things as valuable or worthless within a specific domain. Martin explains this idea showing that is not only that appraisal allows the researcher to examine 'how speakers can exploit different ranges of appraisal to construct particular personae for themselves', but also that: the expression of attitude is not, as is often claimed, simply a personal matter – the speaker "commenting" on the world – but a truly interpersonal matter, in that the basic reason for advancing an opinion is to elicit a response of solidarity from the addressee. (Martin 2000, p.143)

Consequently, it is essential to note that "affect" comes first as a foundational layer. More complex ideas like "judgment" and "appreciation" build on top of this foundation. These more advanced concepts help us fit into certain social groups. They act as ways of socializing individuals into specific communities. As for Judgment, it acts like a kind of social pressure, using emotions to show what's considered good or bad behavior. Appreciation, on the other hand, shapes our tastes, influencing what we value based on what's considered beautiful or culturally

important. Oteiza (2017) elaborates that “The systems of affect, judgment and appreciation not only follow the distinction between positive and negative polarity, but also can be classified as direct or implied appraisals. This latter distinction is treated in the appraisal model as inscribed and evoked appraisal (tokens). (p.462). As a result, it is worth mentioning that the appraisal model differentiates between two types of evaluation: explicit and implicit. Explicit evaluation, called "inscribed appraisal," uses specific words and their intensity to directly express an opinion. Implicit evaluation, known as "evoked appraisal," relies on references and suggestions to create an emotional response in the reader without directly stating it.

2.1.1.3 Appraisal Engagement System

This domain focuses on how people influence each other's viewpoints in any discourse. Moreover, it helps the audience understand where opinions come from in a text. It can tell us if the author/ presenter introduces his ideas as the only truth (monoglossic) or allows for other perspectives and viewpoints (heteroglossic). This classification aims to pinpoint the specific dialogic arranging associated with each meaning. Moreover, it seeks to clarify the impact of choosing one resource over another. It discovers the impact of specific linguistic choices over other ones on a specific discourse. This depends on how the author acknowledges or ignores opposing viewpoints. (Martin & White 2005)

They also elaborate that engagement mechanisms create a backdrop of former utterances, divergent viewpoints, and predictable responses. In fact, this system evaluates how open a text is to other perspectives and how powerfully the author believes in their own evaluation. Finally, the author stresses that when analyzing evaluations in a text, it's essential to study the analyst's own ideology as different viewpoint can be positively or negatively affected by our background and position.

2.1.1.4 Appraisal Graduation System

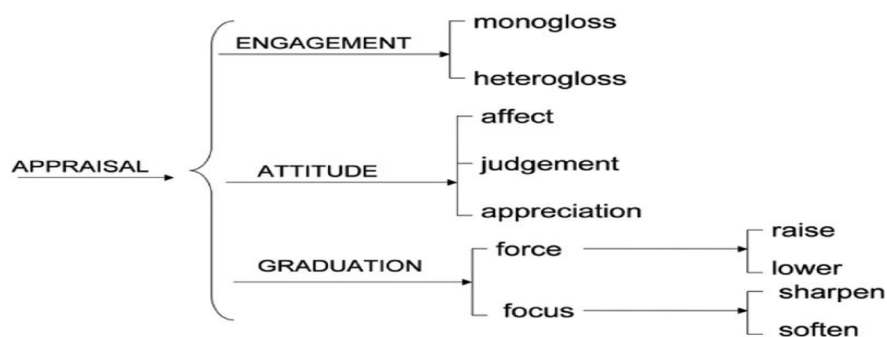
This subsystem, known as graduation, offers a potent tool for shaping the value and intensity for any discourse or communication. Martin & White elaborate that “The semantics of graduation, therefore, is central to the appraisal system. It might be said that attitude and engagement are domains of graduation which differ according to the nature of the meanings being scaled” (2005, p. 136). They add that “graduation operates across two axes of scalability – that of grading according to

intensity or amount, and that of grading according to prototypicality and the preciseness by which category boundaries are drawn” (p. 137).

In fact, it affects how strongly the ideas are expressed as it allows the speaker/writer to modulate the **force** and **focus** of our messages. Oteiza (2017, p.463) explains that “force” deals with intensifying or diminishing the overall meaning. This is about how intense or weak the meaning is received. Strong words can be used to intensify the message as ("absolutely must") or weaker ones to tone down the meaning ("should be taken into account").

“Focus”, on the other hand, refines the boundaries of our meaning. It's like adjusting the zoom lens on a camera. Words like "sort of" or "kind of" blur the limits, creating a vague picture. Conversely, the use of certain words such as "precisely" or "exactly" sharpens the focus, making the meaning crystal clear. For instance, saying "a real doctor" emphasizes the core category of a medical professional, while "a kind of" generates a more marginal, uncertain image.

The theory is summarized in this diagram by Oteiza (2017, p.464)



Appraisal framework: Basic semantic systems

To sum up, Cognitive Appraisal Theory offers a valuable framework for understanding the complex relationship between situations, explanations, and emotions. The theory sheds light on the role of individuals in shaping his/her ideological stance through emotional responses, thus it explains why people could react differently to the same situation. This has significant implications and effects on various fields and topics including the main interest in this paper “Afrocentrism” as it seeks to illuminate the complex relation between facts and feeling which is a multifaceted process influenced by individual interpretations and ideological backgrounds. The theory also acknowledges that people can appraise the same situation differently, leading to diverse emotional reactions.

3. Comments' Analysis

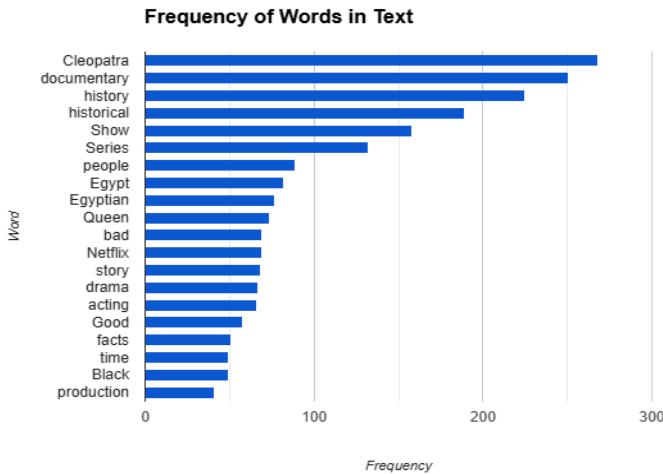
The analysis aims to identify the core thematic areas that reviewers emphasized when expressing their sentiments toward the film. To achieve this, a focused lexical approach was employed, listing nouns and adjectives as key indicators of meaning. The focus on sentiment is related to the "Affect" system, as adjectives are key lexical indicators of emotional appraisals, while thematic areas topics that include broader topics, are related to "Judgment" and "Appreciation".

Verbs and function words (demonstratives, adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions) were analytically excluded from the macro-level analysis to isolate the practical lexical choices that shape reviewers' overall evaluations. Using KH Coder, the most frequently occurring nouns and adjectives within the reviewer texts were then identified, providing a quantitative basis for understanding the dominant topics and sentiments. The table below shows the top twenty frequent words within the corpus of this study;

Rank	Frequency	Word
1	268	Cleopatra
2	251	Documentary
3	225	History
4	189	Historical
5	158	Show
6	132	Series
7	89	People
8	82	Egypt
9	77	Egyptian
10	74	Queen
11	69	Bad
12	69	Netflix
13	68	Story
14	67	Drama
15	66	Acting
16	58	Good
17	51	Facts
18	49	Time

19	49	Black
20	41	Production

Top Frequent Words in Audiences' comments



The provided table offers and pin points the key terms and their relative prominence associated with Queen Cleopatra documentary discussion which is analyzed in this section. The clear presence of terms like "Documentary," "History," and "Historical" indicates that much of the discussion revolves around factual or historically-based portrayals of her life. Besides, the appearance of "Show" and "Series," coupled with "Netflix," shows that a noteworthy part of their discussion stems from reactions to a visual production available on that platform. "Acting" is also a point of discussion. Another core subject is emphasized by "People," "Egypt," "Egyptian," and "Queen," highlighting the key figures and setting. Finally, the relatively high frequency of "Black" suggests controversy surrounding the casting or depiction of Cleopatra's ethnicity.

3.1 Documentary Historical Inaccuracy

By examining the top twenty frequent words revealed by the program, the researcher finds that one of the most frequent lexical items that revealed a dominant negative appraisal is the phrase 'historical inaccuracies.' By exploring the terms within their textual context, a strong pervasiveness of negative evaluative language is shown. For example, the word 'documentary,' which appears 251 times, is linked to terms like 'inaccurate,' 'misleading,' 'insightful' and 'awful.' Reviewers express negative affect to convey their dissatisfaction and disappointment.

Reviewers used the word 'harshly' to make their criticism of the film stronger, showing a high level of negative judgment. When discussing the 'documentary' aspect, they frequently pointed out that the film lacks factual and realistic accuracy and presents deceptive information. This indicates a clear difference between what the filmmakers intended and what the audience perceived. This widespread negative feedback suggests the film did not meet audience expectations for historical accuracy and effective filmmaking. The coming examples clarify this idea;

- “Calling this a documentary is a bad joke”. (RTC, Concordance hit, 1).
- “Depicting Cleopatra as a sub-Saharan African in a documentary is historically inaccurate” (RTC, Concordance hit, 2).
- “It is exactly what the producer and Director said it was, A political act, not a documentary.” (RTC, Concordance hit, 3)
- “This show claims to be a "documentary" but the only thing historically accurate about this series is it is set in Egypt”. (RTC, Concordance hit, 8)
- “Really boring, and a completely fantasy show not a documentary as Netflix want to sell”. (RTC, Concordance hit, 10)
- “Terrible - It says it’s a Documentary it looks like a cheap soap opera”. (RTC, Concordance hit, 11).

This table shows the top collocates to the noun “documentary” and its frequency

Collocate	Main word	Frequency
Awful	Documentary	15
Inaccurate	Documentary	15
Insightful	Documentary	15
Not	Documentary	15

Table 2 the top collocates to the word “documentary” according to the KH coder software

By digging deeper in the comments, it becomes clear that the central mode of evaluation is ‘judgment’. The viewers judge the production's accuracy and honesty. In doing so, they employ terms like "bad joke" and "historically inaccurate". Terms of negative affect, such as "really boring" and "terrible," emphasize their emotional dissatisfaction, while negative appreciation is evident in evaluations of the production's quality and value, as shown in “cheap soap opera”.

Phrases such as 'grossly inaccurate,' 'deliberately misleading,' and 'a complete fabrication' are repeated. This focuses on the strong expression of 'judgment', where reviewers evaluate the film's credibility and ethical standards. Commentators' pervasive sentiment reflects their belief that the film has purposely misrepresented historical events, demonstrating a strong negative 'judgment' on the film's creators' intentions and actions. This negative appraisal is evident in the repeated use of emotionally highly charged language. This was shown in many examples as in;

- "A falsification of Egyptian history and a blatant historical fallacy" (RTC, Concordance hit, 1).
- "A distorted view of history pushing a post modern narrative (RTC, Concordance hit, 2).
- "Hopelessly inaccurate and a complete failure to understand Egyptian culture and history" (RTC, Concordance hit, 4).

Some audiences also used the words "Colonize" to show how the political agenda of Afrocentric is similar to colonization in imposing foreign cultural and political ideology to an authentic deeply rooted one. Actually, this could be considered a kind of exaggeration by some groups, however, within the framework of appraisal theory, this accusation of 'colonization' covers several key aspects. It expresses a strong negative judgment of the filmmakers' ideological agenda. The term 'colonize' infers a planned cultural invasion. It can be understood as a conscious attempt to dominate another culture. Moreover, the word induces strong negative emotions, such as anger and abuse. Furthermore, by using the term 'colonize,' reviewers actively engage in defending the history as they reject the film's interpretation of the Egyptian culture and assert their own reliable viewpoint. In fact, this use of the 'colonize' as a metaphor highlights the deep sensitivity of historical and cultural depiction. It shows the important effect of language which can summarize a ethical stance against the fabrication of history. This is clear in these examples;

- "This show is an American colonization of Egyptian history. (RTC, Concordance hit, 7)
- Blackwashing, colonizing the Egyptian history. Rewriting history removing the Egyptians from their own heritage. (RTC, Concordance hit, 9)

- For a real person from history whose origins are Macedonian (Ptolemaic Dynasty) and considered herself as a real Egyptian I don't understand why an American view was needed. (RTC, Concordance hit, 11).

3.2 Casting Choices

Another main theme in reviewers' comments is the casting choices. Mainly choosing a black actress to act the main role of Cleopatra has been a chief point of debate. Most of the audiences have found it historically wrong and disrespectful to Egyptian culture and heritage. This casting decision has become a focal point for negative appraisal. Many reviewers powerfully objected to the depiction of Cleopatra as a black woman, viewing it as "blackwashing" and an alteration of history.

The term "blackwashing", which is a emotionally -loaded term, is used by those who oppose this reinterpretation of history to describe their negative judgement. They argue that it is an attempt to impose a modern political agenda onto the past. In fact, the producers exploit the allure magic of cinema to reshape perceptions by attempting to reimagine Cleopatra as a black African queen, regardless of the traditional Western and Egyptian observations of her as a Greek-Egyptian ruler. This is clear in many examples as in:

- "Its a **black** woman completely "Blackwashing" Egyptian culture and actual, physical history. (RTC, Concordance hit, 1).
- One of the most stupid things ever, a **black** cleopatra just because your grandma told you, the most stupid argument ever (RTC, Concordance hit, 2).

The use of the word "black" in the context of the Cleopatra casting controversy has many ideological sensitive implications within appraisal theory, particularly concerning 'judgment, affect, and engagement'. The use of "black" in this context is not only for describing a skin color. It evokes strong emotional responses as it is a connotationally-loaded term that functions as a powerful tool for expressing negative judgment, it is a very powerful word, that has been used to exceed the negative judgement of the film makers. it has negative evaluations, going beyond a simple comment of skin color. Although the word "black" focuses on the connection to African culture and heritage, in these examples, it has been used in a racist offensive way.

- Dear Americans, Africa is not a country. It's a content with 54 countries each with it's own history. And not all Africans are black. We come in all skin shades

and we are all proud of our skin colour and civilization. (RTC, Concordance hit, 8).

In this comment, the reviewer addresses American audience. He /she employs appraisal theory to face predominant misconceptions about Africa. Through judgment, he/she highlights the lack of understanding and knowledge of film maker showing that Africa is not a single country but a diverse geography and cultures. The comment demonstrates affect through a tone of anger and frustration, in addition to a strong announcement of pride in African diversity. As for engagement, the speaker vigorously counters the delusion, declaring factual information and announcing their viewpoint as the factual one. The speaker uses graduation to intensify the message of diversity, by highlighting the number of countries in Africa, accusing the Americans of being ignorant and set a stereotyping image of Africa.

3.3 Production and Artistic Value

One of the main themes that has been a center of negative comments is the quality of production and the artistic values of the show. There has been negative appreciation as some reviewers expressed disapproval of the series' artistic value, such as its poor production quality, the dialogue and the costumes. Moreover, some viewers were confused about the category of the show and its genre; whether it is a docudrama or a drama or a documentary. For them, it is “lack of credibility” They accused Netflix of misleading the audience, which is disrespectful to history. These ideas can be shown in many examples as in

- This entire production is offensively racist, but not in the way people might initially think. It is no doubt offensive to indigenous Egyptians but it, and the entire premise of its creation, is offensive to Black people. (RTC, Concordance hit, 1).
- With weak character development, inconsistent pacing, historical inaccuracies, and lackluster production values, it left me feeling unsatisfied as a viewer. (RTC, Concordance hit, 4).
- The cinematography, an integral element of any epic production, failed to rise above the ordinary. (RTC, Concordance hit, 5).
- It is a completely unoriginal, patchy, low-quality production (RTC, Concordance hit, 8).
- The production, writing, and acting is all very badly done. (RTC, Concordance hit, 9).

- Beside historical errors, the actors and acting was bad, production wasn't good and the dialog was really on a low level.(RTC, Concordance hit, 10).

The continuous use of negative affect, judgment, and appreciation across these comments creates a powerful and unified evaluation. The comments stress not only the manufacture's technical and artistic deficiencies but also its ethical and social faults. As for negative affect, the comments are loaded with expression such as "offensively racist," "unsatisfied," "very badly done," and "really on a low level" highlights the reviewers' negative emotional responses. The use of highly charges adjective as in "unoriginal", "patchy" and "low quality" reflects the audiences' judgement towards the movie. For them it is not only a violation of ethics but also an abuse of social esteem.

In fact, the series and its producers are accused of prioritizing dramatic storytelling over historical accuracy and prestigious and rich production. Actually, it is worth mentioning that the comments are reinforced by an online petition signed by 40,000 people, which accused the production of altering and mispresenting history.

3.4 Netflix

Finally, the last point of criticism is directed toward Netflix. The word "Netflix" is used 69 times by the viewers. This has many ideological manifestations. Netflix, as a global platform, should reach a massive audience and potentially influence consumer behavior; undoubtedly, it is driven by some political agendas. There is disappointment in how a potentially fascinating subject was poorly handled by Netflix. In fact, the frequency of these remarks has an important influence on Netflix's brand image. Negative sentiment associated with the platform can affect harmfully public trust and affect viewership.

These claims are reinforced by the viewers' comments as in;

- Netflix is not learning their lessons! (RTC, Concordance hit, 10).
- Netflix what were you thinking? Is this were my \$14.95 a month subscription fee goes? (RTC, Concordance hit, 11).
- I don't understand what Netflix was expecting publishing this "documentary" (RTC, Concordance hit, 12).

- The best thing I can say about this documentary is that other similar ancient history Netflix documentaries also suck. This show is an American colonization of Egyptian history. ((RTC, Concordance hit,13)
- Fictional or not, keep black characters black, white characters white, etc, etc, etc. It's that simple. Netflix, do yourself a favor: get better writers and hire historic fact checkers (RTC, Concordance hit 16).
- Shame on you Netflix for not overseeing the content of your broadcast; highly is misleading for younger viewers or indeed, anyone who is not adept with history. (RTC, Concordance hit 19).

Viewers are making a clear judgment of Netflix as the responsible agent. The repetition of the name indicates a strong negative judgment of Netflix's choices and actions. In fact, it is essential to focus on the importance of the soft power of mass media and more precisely the ability to influence and affect others through coercion rather than power and force. It counts on cultural and political values in order to reshape the comprehensive opinion which is the case of this study. It is a collective engagement against Netflix. The repetition of "Netflix" is not a neutral remark; it's a controlling expression of negative judgment, sentimental response, and engagement.

3.5 Egypt and Egyptian History

On the other hand, there has been a positive appraisal concerning the Egyptian culture, and history. While history and heritage are mentioned in many examples, the producers' absence of esteem for this attractive combination of ancient heritage is obvious. Positive appreciation and attitude are reflected by the audience in the collocates of the word “Egypt” and “Egyptian”. The following table shows the top collocates of these words:

Frequency	Words	Collocate
12	Ancient	Egypt
29	History	Egyptian
9	Culture	Egyptian

Table 3 the top collocates to the word “Egypt and Egyptian” according to the KH coder software

A juxtaposition of negative and positive appraisals is once more evident. This positive sentiment is evident in the strong collocations observed between 'Egypt' and

words such as 'ancient,' 'mysterious,' 'pharaonic,' 'civilization,' and 'treasures.' These collocates not only convey appreciation for Egypt's past but also criticize the production for failing to represent this attractive heritage. The negative judgment criticizes the film's historical accuracy, cultural understanding, and respect for Egyptian heritage. The affective tone is mainly of disappointment, frustration, and outrage. These comments highlight the significance of cultural sensitivity when historical figures are depicted in mass media. This idea is expressed in many examples as in:

- Hopelessly inaccurate and a complete failure to understand Egyptian culture and history. No depth or atmosphere of the time. Just a poor attempt to Americanize Egyptian history by changing it to suit American Culture. (RTC, Concordance hit, 1 and 2).
- The conclusion, after watching, I find no respect for Egyptian history. (RTC, Concordance hit, 10).
- This is not a documentary, it is a fallacy about a real person and it is disrespectful to all Egyptian culture. RTC, Concordance hit, 13).

The previously observed pattern of mixed negative and positive sentiment reemerges. Some audiences use the adjective “good” to express their satisfaction and approval of the movie. For them, the movie expresses a different perspective that must be respected. For them, despite these inaccuracies, they enjoyed the movie for its performing value, dramatic storytelling, and visual show. However, they recognize that the movie is not a firmly a factual representation of history. Regarding judgment, viewers positively evaluate the costumes, narrative simplicity, audio-visual excellence, and informational content, using terms like "pretty good," "good watch," and "pleasant". As for affect, the comments express a sense of approval in example such as "good watch". viewers' readiness to accept the film's advantages is a clear example of engagement. This is clear in many examples as in:

- A pretty good documentary with great costuming. (RTC, Concordance hit, 1).
- I think it explains complex conflicts well and is overall a good watch. (RTC, Concordance hit, 2).
- It was a pleasant watch, good audio and visual quality. (RTC, Concordance hit, 3).
- I found the information interesting, the production good even if the acting was a bit over the top. (RTC, Concordance hit, 4).

- The only good thing are costumes and the work of the camera crew. (RTC, Concordance hit, 5).

It is worth mentioning that the use of the adjective “good” could be seen as more neutral term, especially when compared to another positive adjective like “wonderful” or “amazing”. It is not a strong positive sentiment to rely or depend on.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Years ago, audiences were passive receivers of information, they didn’t play any role in shaping the public opinion. This results from the nature of traditional media, such as printed or radio and television broadcast. Lack of interaction and communication meant that audiences did not have any chance and role to shape the public judgement of various events. They could choose only which media outlet they can listen or read, however, they had limited opportunities to challenge prevailing narratives. Media institutions with its planned ideological agenda controlled the flow of information, so consumers of information have limited opportunities for feedback or interaction. Their voices were marginalized, with inadequate platforms for expression. In a plain contrast to the traditional media, the contemporary digital world and the internet connection with every person worldwide, allow audiences to produce and share information. It empowers individuals to be the creators of events through social media, blogs, and online platforms. They became active participants as they engage in discussions, and actively shape narratives, which is the case of this study.

Public opinion in this study plays a vital role in the study of the Afrocentrism controversy surrounding the movie. They actively engaged in discussion to understand how historical figures and events are represented in the movie. This change is a significant illustration of how Appraisal Theory functions in a modern digital media environment. As for this study, the overall sentiment towards the Cleopatra documentary is devastatingly negative. In the lens of the Appraisal theory, **judgment** is the primary driver of the discourse in these comments. In fact, the mainstream of reviewers expresses robust dissatisfaction regarding its historical precision, casting varieties, and storytelling quality. They accused film maker of “**historical inaccuracy**”, “**falsification**”, and “**cultural colonization**”. Viewers consistently judge the production as a “**bad joke**,” a “**fallacy**,” and a “**falsification**,”.

This judgment includes Netflix, which is criticized as “**mis leading**” for disregarding for authenticity of Egyptian history.

Negative **affect** of the comments is also dominant. It is graded from merely dissatisfaction and disappointment as in “**unsatisfied**,” “**boring**” to outrage and offense “**offensively racist**,” “**terrible**”. This emotive strength is high graded by the use of strong lexical choices like “**blackwashing**,” “**colonizing**,” and “**fictional**.”

Regarding **engagement**, most of the audiences were very active and powerful in refusing the claims of being a “**documentary**” and calling it a “**cheap soap opera**” or “**fantasy show**.” Moreover, they were aware enough to hold **Netflix** the complete responsibility for this flaw. The comments also show great respect and estimation to the Egyptian history and culture; and they express their dissatisfaction when these values are perceived to be violated. “**Egypt**” and “**Egyptian**” are mainly connected in the comments to words with positive connotation as in “**ancient**”, “**history**” and “**culture**”.

However, a small number of comments use the adjective “good” express their satisfaction and approval of the movie which lacks evaluative force in judging. It is a standard level of approval that contrasts sharply with the severity and specificity of negative comments mentioned in the analysis as in “**good documentary**” , “**good watch**” and “**the good production**”.

In answering the research questions, it becomes clear that the Appraisal theory has succeeded in reflecting the public opinion regarding a sensitive topic such as Afrocentrism. The three main elements of the theory were present; judgment, affect and engagement, however, judgement is the main driver and contributor in the comments. Affect and engagement have empowered the viewers’ judgment serving as a powerful tool to surge the control of the judgement.

In fact, this has a practical and direct feedback that reflects and shapes cultural perceptions of the film. Firstly, the negative audience ratings on platforms like Rotten Tomatoes was one major reason of the movie deficiency. In addition, Netflix met noteworthy criticism for its handling of the controversy to the extent that it had to disable comment sections on some of their media related to the production. As for the positive impact of this controversy, it motivated not only scholars but also ordinary people to re-examine Cleopatra's historical background and sparked renewed interest in ancient Egyptian history. The controversy has brought the debate about Afrocentrism and historical representation into the public eye, raising

awareness of these complex problems. It highlights the critical role of mass media in handling history. Although some could see it as freedom of opinion in presenting history, others argue it is misrepresentation of facts. Accordingly, this kind of controversy could open new sources for understanding history away from biases. It can encourage communication with various scholars, academic and professionals to consider different viewpoint of complex historical and cultural issues.

5. Recommendation for Further Research

A comparative corpus analysis of online comments and discussions from different platforms can be conducted to reveal how language is used to shape perceptions of historical truth and cultural identity. Critical discourse analysis, more specifically, Van Dijk (1990), the "us versus them" dichotomy, and the related "ideological square can be applied in the analysis of these comments.

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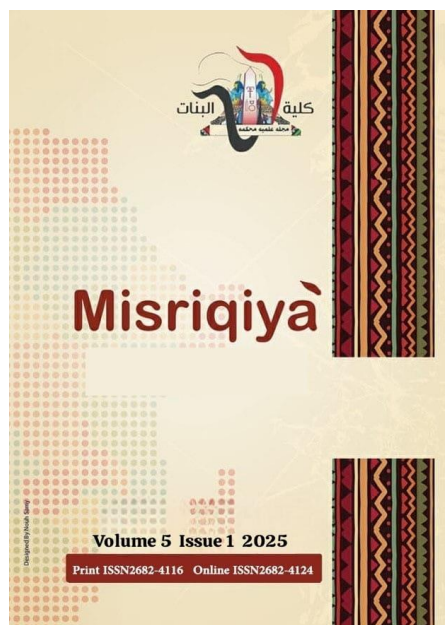
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Appendix 1

[Queen Cleopatra | Rotten Tomatoes](#)

KH Coder Official Website: <http://kncoder.net/en/>



Gender-Based Violence and Trauma Recovery in Tosin Jobi Tume's *Not That Woman*

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Abstract

Male-perpetrated violence against women remains a pervasive crisis, particularly in Africa, where women are subjected to various forms of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. This paper examines the representation of gender-based violence in *Not That Woman* (2019) by the Nigerian playwright Tosin Jobi Tume (1980-), highlighting the traumatic experiences of Nigerian women and their struggle for healing and autonomy. The play exposes multiple forms of victimization, including incest, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence, offering a critique of societal complicity in sustaining these oppressive structures. The study explores how the play portrays the journey of female survivors as they navigate their pain and reclaim their agency. This journey is analyzed through Judith Herman's three stages of trauma recovery: the establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection. By tracing the psychological and emotional progression of the female characters, the research underscores how storytelling and the act of retelling trauma serve as essential mechanisms for healing. By centering the voices of female survivors, *Not That Woman* challenges patriarchal norms and affirms the transformative power of narrative in overcoming trauma and restoring selfhood.

Keywords: gender-based violence, trauma recovery, Judith Herman, women's autonomy, narrative healing

Gender-based violence against women is a persistent epidemic worldwide particularly in Africa. In many nations in Africa, including Nigeria, female victims are subjugated to various forms of violent acts including physical, sexual and emotional abuse. These different types of abuse include incest, child sexual abuse and battering. These abusive forms of gender-based violence are depicted in the selected play, *Not That Woman* (2019) by the Nigerian playwright Tosin Jobi Tume. The play mirrors the traumatic experiences that Nigerian females endure in most of their lives. The paper explores the journey of these traumatized females in overcoming their pains and reclaiming power over themselves. This journey is analyzed through Judith Herman's three stages of recovery represented in: the establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection. The paper concludes with affirming the role of retelling the traumatic experiences in healing the pain.

According to the United Nations Population Fund (2020), in Nigeria, women face multifaceted oppression that manifests in various harmful forms of abuse. As the United Nations Population Fund highlights, these include domestic violence, physical and verbal abuse, and extreme acts such as acid attacks and outright killings. Sexual violence, encompassing rape, sexual assault, and incest, is disturbingly widespread, further perpetuating the cycle of trauma among women. Harmful cultural practices, such as early and forced marriages and circumcision, strip women of their autonomy and expose them to enduring physical and mental trauma. These severe gender inequalities stem from deep-rooted cultural and structural barriers that violate human rights and perpetuate harm.

The term gender-based violence refers to harmful actions that are perpetuated against individuals based on their gender. It encompasses a wide range of abusive behaviors, including physical, sexual, emotional, or even economical abuse. It is considered as a severe type of trauma that females suffer from; it is a violation of human rights that can cause threats, injuries, and trauma to survivors.

The term gender-based violence impacts both males and females, but it disproportionately affects females. So, the term gender violence is commonly defined as "violent acts (real or threat-ended) perpetrated on females because they are females" (Green, 1999, P.1). In Geraldine Terry and Hoare Joanna's *Gender-Based Violence* (2007) it is mentioned that the term "gender-based violence" (GBV) and "violence against women (VAW)" are often used interchangeably (2).

GBV is violence directed against a person because of his/her gender. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993 as cited in Terry and Hoare, 2007, P. 2), defines VAW as a sub-category of GBV that includes:

[a]ny act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

Therefore, gender-based violence includes any violation to women's integrity; it is a serious crime that is committed against women and girls.

Gender-based violence includes a host of abusive behaviors that are directed to women and girls because of their gender. This includes: “wife abuse, sexual assault, dowry-related murder, marital rape, selective malnourishment of female children, forced prostitution, female genital mutilation, and sexual abuse of female children” (Heise, 2002, P.56).

Likewise, Penn and Nardos identify various types of violence that women and girls experience such as: 'gender-based violence', 'sexual exploitation' and its consequences, 'trafficking in women', 'enforced marriage', 'mail order brides', 'forced prostitution', and 'forced labor' (2003, P.9). They also highlight the physical forms of violence like: “battering”, 'wife beating', beating during pregnancies leading to miscarriage, 'spousal violence', 'domestic violence', 'torture', 'anguish', 'house arrest', verbal assault, and threatening (P.8). There are also violent traditional practices such as: 'circumcision', 'dowry burning', 'honor killing', 'female infanticide', women as the property of men, and women as the 'standard bearers of a family honor')P. 9). The selected play contains various types of gender-based violence which are represented in: incest and child sexual abuse, and battering.

Gender-based violence and its lasting effects have remained ongoing challenges impacting people globally, especially within African communities. Okolo, N. C., & Okolo, C. (2018, November). highlight that gender-based violence is a prevalent social issue in Nigeria. However Babalola et al. note that it often goes unreported due to the culture of silence driven by fear of stigmatization from family and friends. This not only increases the cycle of harm but also intensifies the efforts to eradicate the problem.

Tosin Jubi Tume (1980-) is a contemporary Nigerian playwright. She holds BA and MA degrees in English and Theatre Arts from the University of Ilorin and

the University of Abuja, Nigeria, respectively. She is a playwright, dancer, director, choreographer, actor, singer, and a theatre scholar with over fifteen years of experience. Tume has shared in several theatrical productions, workshops, festivals, and conferences within and outside Nigeria (Hutchison & Jephta, 2019, P. 58). She is recognized as one of the pioneering African playwrights who has led the movement of self-actualization.

Although, Tume's name may be novel in the field, she managed to establish herself as a striking African writer. As an African female, Tume knows well what it means to be a black woman living in an African society. In an interview conducted by Hutchison, Tume says:

As a woman who lives and works in Nigeria where I practice my art as a playwright, theatre creator and scholar, theatre serves as a viable medium of expression for me as it offers an avenue to communicate my opinions, hopes, and aspirations especially for African women ... Theatre is the voice I use to address issues that I am passionate about. I particularly write about taboo topics, like the ongoing violence against women, to spark conversations that could lead to future positive actions. (2020, p.2)

As a Nigerian woman, Tume knows well the inherited trauma of what it means to exist as a woman in an African society. She uses theatre as a platform to express her views, particularly on taboo issues like gender-based violence in societies where male superiority is often enforced through physical, sexual or even emotional abuse. She challenges stereotypes that affect women and provoke them towards self-awareness through her works. In the same interview Tume adds "I want women to stop playing victims, to become aware of their power and explore their full potential, as suggested in *Not That Woman*, even if this is uncomfortable" (2020, p.3). In the play, Tume portrays Nigerian female victims who are violently abused, yet are still fighters and successfully recover from their traumatic pain.

In the play, *Not That Woman*, Tume delves into the painful experiences of women who have endured gender-based violence and their journey towards healing and empowerment. This research aims at exploring the theme of overcoming trauma in *Not That Woman*, highlighting the resilience, solidarity and collective strength demonstrated by the female characters. The play represents profound forms of gender-based violence, including physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. It also clarifies the harsh traditions faced by women within Nigeria as a patriarchal society, where violence against women is normal.

Despite being oppressed, the female characters in *Not That Woman* show resilience and strength. Through their testimonial stories, they refuse to be defined by their society. They go through transformative journey, as they move from oppression and victimhood to empowerment and strength. Through solidarity, female characters reach to healing, overcome trauma and inspire others to break free from societal norms.

In Tume's *Not That Woman*, all female characters are discriminated against only because of their gender. They are sexually exploited whether by their fathers, relatives or even their husbands. The play deals with child abuse and incest; the forbidden sexual relations between the family members through Folake, Nkechi, and Zainab.

Not That Woman takes place in a refuge, women's association in Nigeria, which is run by Madam B. The play revolves around stories of four women, Folake, Nkechi, Zainab and Joyce, who reflect the physical and psychological abuse that most women are subject to in the Nigerian society. The four women grapple with the devastating consequences of violence. For example, Folake was deprived of her education because she was a girl. She was abandoned by her family who let her work as a servant for her uncle. Instead of taking care of her, Folake's uncle abused her physically and sexually for ten years. This reflects the deep-rooted gender oppression of patriarchal society where girls are denied education, abandoned by their family and left vulnerable to exploitation. The long duration of abuse suggests the presence of a culture of silence, fear and perhaps societal denial, where female victims are discouraged to speak about their suffering. Folake's story reveals how cultural norms allows such trauma to persist, suppressing female potential and maintaining the cycle of violence and pain.

The second character is Nkechi who lost her virginity when she was thirteen by her father. He gave her to his friend in a drinking debate. She used to be beaten by her husband and a woman has taken her to a hospital, then into an orphanage that she ran. It was an illegal orphanage where girls were forced to bear children for adoption. She gave birth to a baby boy, and he was taken away from her. Nkechi's story reveals a vicious cycle of exploitation and gender-based violence. Firstly, she was violated by her father, and after that she was given to his friend to be like his property. This act stripes her of agency and autonomy. The suffering continues in her adult life as she endured physical abuse from her husband. Nkechi's brief rescue by a woman leads to further exploitation as she was coerced

into bearing children for adoption. The forced separation from her baby boy marks another moment of loss, reenforcing her lack of control over her body and her future. Her story exposes the nature of female victimization, where patriarchal, institutional, and familial structures work together to silence, exploit, and erase voices of the vulnerable.

Another story of abuse is represented through Zainab. She was only eleven years old when she was given in marriage to a sixty-three-years-old man. She was young, barely reaching puberty before her marriage. Immediately she became pregnant, but she had no ante-natal care. At the time of delivery, she did not get proper medical care and therefore she suffered for fifteen days without being medically attended. Then a stick was forced into her abdomen to expel her dead and decomposed baby. Due to this painful experience, Zainab suffered severe complications, including an inability to control her bladder and rectum, leading to involuntary urination and defecation. After that Zainab was divorced and abandoned by her family who felt embarrassed because of her unpleasant smell and the flies that followed her everywhere. This highlights the harmful effects of child marriage and reflects a gross violation of the female body, right, and autonomy.

Finally, Joyce is a friend to the members of the refuge. She suffered low self-esteem. She was beaten by her irresponsible husband during her pregnancy. She accepted his maltreatment in silence until she knew that her unfaithful husband was trying to poison her and then elope with his secretary. This reflects psychological and emotional abuse and betrayal within a toxic marital relationship.

At the end of the play, it is revealed that Madam B, who is supposed to be their rescuer, is herself a victim of abuse as she is rescued after her husband's attempt to slaughter her, and she appears on stage to tell her hidden story about the abusive relationship that she has been enduring for years. This revelation is very ironic and powerful because it highlights that even those who act as protectors are silent victims. By sharing her suffering, she breaks the silence around domestic abuse and reclaims her voice, showing that storytelling can be an effective means of recovery and empowerment. Finally, the female characters in the play unite and decide to speak against the oppression that they have been going through. They determine not to be that woman who suffers in silence. Hence the significance of the play's title becomes clear.

The play reveals deep social issues and the impact of societal pressures and struggle faced by women in the Nigerian society that is characterized by deeply entrenched patriarchal values and widespread gender inequality. It highlights crucial themes such as gender roles, female oppression, and violence. It also focuses on solidarity, autonomy, freedom, resilience and survival. Tume uses powerful storytelling to reflect the trauma that Nigerian women experience because of cultural traditions. She shows women's struggles to encounter their patriarchal society with its restrictive societal norms.

Tume's literary work, *Not That Women* echoes her feminist spirit, which criticizes the cultural practices that perpetuate violence against women. In a personal interview Tume says, "I would not say that I'm a victim of gender-based violence like that to tell the story. But I heard the stories they have told me, and I felt the burden to tell their stories" (T. Tume, personal communication, December 21, 2024). She admits her sense of responsibility to give voice to the silenced, emphasizing the effective role of storytellers in enhancing marginalized voices and raising awareness about issues like gender-based violence. The setting of the play as a refuge is very symbolic and evocative as it indicates trauma, healing, survival and solidarity. Tume's choice for that setting specifically portrays how women under extraordinary pressures support each other.

Tume was inspired to write the play when she experienced a moment where her gender was used to define her role. In the same personal interview, she said:

I'm not that woman... we need more women who can stand up to say no you cannot subjugate me just because I'm a woman so that's where the idea came from and then I was motivated to explore the theme of gender-based violence because I belong to all female group. (T. Tume, personal communication, December 21, 2024)

The title, *Not That Woman*, suggests a rejection of stereotypes imposed by others. The women in the play have self-definition as powerful women who resist asserting their identity and worth. They will not be that women who accept the prevailing culture of silence surrounding gender-based violence.

As mentioned before, Folake was sexually abused by her uncle to be his sex slave for ten years. And Nkechi lost her virginity when she was thirteen by her father and was raped by her drunken husband. In addition, Nkechi was forced to be a prostitute. Similarly, Zainab was forced to marry a sixty-three-year-old husband when she was eleven and was sexually exploited. All these examples are

proof that the female body can be violated easily without any fear from punishment.

This reflects that in the Nigerian patriarchal society, women are considered as the weaker sex, which makes them vulnerable to sexual assaults. This crime is committed deliberately against women in order to control them. Experiencing these forms of sexual abuse in a very young age sadly inflicts psychological scars on these females. For instance, Nkechi embodies the most disgraceful type of violation to the female body. She says, “oh yes, my own father took my virginity when I was just thirteen years old” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019 p.68). She captures the shocking reality of incest and sexual abuse, reflecting one of the most horrible violations of trust and human rights.

Likewise, Folake says about her uncle “he abused me sexually for ten horrid years” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019 p.67). This tragic quotation reveals the immense pain and trauma caused by prolonged sexual abuse. The survivor’s use of “horrid” conveys the horrific nature of the experience, underscoring how the abuse shattered her sense of safety, trust, and well-being. To be abused by a family member makes the violation even more devastating, as it involves a betrayal of familial trust and love. Such experiences devastate the victim’s physical and psychological well-being, leaving lasting scars, contributing to trauma, low self-worth, and difficulties in forming healthy relationships in the future.

The play also deals with female battering, the violent physical abuse that causes trauma to these females. Folake for instance, was brutally beaten by her uncle. Also, Nkechi was badly battered by her father, her husband and Mandigo, a man who impregnated girls by force. Nkechi says “[b]eats me...Even my father, the most irresponsible father and husband in the entire universe” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p.67).

Similarly, Joyce was physically abused and beaten by her husband as well, even during her pregnancy. He even tried to poison her to elope with his mistress. Joyce says about her husband, “Larry is planning to kill me, so that he can be with his secretary. He has actually been poisoning my meals for sometimes now” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p.99). This captures the reality of domestic violence and betrayal that can sometimes remain hidden behind closed doors, manifesting in insidious ways that leave victims vulnerable and isolated.

Likewise, Madam B was savagely battered by her husband to the extent that he attempted to slaughter her in order to take her house. Folake says that

Madam B's husband "had stabbed her and ran away" (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p.103). Besides being physically abused, all females suffered psychologically as their life was threatened by their fathers, their husbands or any male figure in their life. These women endured these forms of abuses in silence because they saw that "marriage is all about endurance and submission" (Tume, p.81).

Therefore, it is clear that all the Nigerian females in the play suffered from harsh traumatic experiences that shattered their identity causing their disempowerment, isolation, victimization, and disconnection with others. For instance, Joyce says, "I'm not allowed to keep any friends" (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p.96). This shows how Joyce was disempowered to the extent that she was deprived of her natural right as a human being to have friends just to please her husband. Nkechi tells Joyce about her husband's plan "to make you dependent on him financially, emotionally and psychologically" (Tume, p.93). Joyce's husband did his best to have absolute control over his wife in every single aspect of her life. Joyce shows total submissiveness and says, "[w]hat am I supposed to do? I am an African woman, my place is with my husband" (Tume, p.75). Joyce's speech reflects the patriarchal cultural norms that trap women in abusive relationships, where their identity is tied to their role as wives.

As noted through the female characters in the play, survivors endure a range of harms that have severe effects on them. Babalola states: Survivors of GBV suffer devastating short and long-term effects on their physical and psychological health including various degrees of physical injuries, forced and unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, limited ability to complete daily tasks, and in severe cases, death. (2021, p.4-6) This highlights the severe impact of GBV on survivors' physical and psychological health. Therefore, all these illnesses must be effectively treated. Tume declares:

I hope that when people read *Not That Woman* or when people see it on stage they can connect with some of those characters you know and they can see themselves in the characters, they can see their sisters and stop repeating itself they can see what they can do what role they can play and becoming part of the solution for their problem...sensitize women of gender-based violence about the power that they hold that they do not know

or they are ignorant about. (T. Tume, personal communication, December 21, 2024)

This shows *Not That Woman's* power to promote empathy by helping audiences to identify themselves or their loved ones with its characters, thereby inspiring action against GBV. It also highlights the play's role in empowering women to acknowledge inherent strength to confront these challenges.

In Herman's book, *Trauma and Recovery*, she explains the strategy to assist survivors of trauma in their recovery from traumatic experiences. It consists of three main stages: safety, remembrance and mourning and reconnection (Herman, 2015, p.11). Herman depicts the dilemma that hunts the trauma survivors, the wish to expose those experiences, and the difficulties in doing so. Herman states:

The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma. People who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner which undermines their credibility and thereby serves the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy. When the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery. But far too often secrecy prevails, and the story of the traumatic event surfaces not as a verbal narrative but as a symptom. (Herman, p.1)

This shows how women are suffering the dilemma of whether to speak about their pain out loud or to keep silent. They are always afraid of society's stigma. For example, Madam B says, "my husband's maltreatment was a thing of shame to me" (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p.104). This reflects the emotional and psychological impact of abuse on the victim, that makes her feel humiliated and trapped in silence. Therefore, Madam B chooses to endure brutal beating just to avoid being described as a weak wife. After experiencing these traumatic sequences, establishing a safe environment is a crucial step in the journey of healing.

The establishment of safety and restoring control upon the self is the first step in the recovery process. It is the central step since the recovery stage cannot develop without securing safety. During the establishment of the safety process, the trauma survivor should restore herself back and have control over her life. She should make her own decisions and explain her own opinions.

In the play, all the female characters are able to establish safety and get free from their fright. As victims, they are confronted with the perpetrators. This confrontation represents the process of getting their freedom from this abusive

relationship. Severing surrounding harmful relationships help these females to establish control over their body. Furthermore, throughout the play, the victims mention Madam B to demonstrate how they join with her into the same team because she symbolizes a securing shelter for any woman who survives trauma. All the females in the play manage to restore power and re-establish a new safe environment in the refuge.

For instance, Folake says, “Madam B rescued me and brought me to this refuge, and taught me how to live again” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p.67). Likewise, Folake says “she rescued us, and took us to the hospital or treatment” (Tume, p. 70). Now the survivors’ first step in their journey of recovery is reached. Consequently, moving to the second step of recovery can be easily achieved.

During this stage, the survivor recognizes what happened to her. She can remember the traumatic experience and tell what exactly happened to her. This stage is the perfect time for a confrontation between the traumatized person and her own soul. The victim should tell the unspeakable stories in order to reveal horrors and the depressing emotions that are hidden inside her soul. At this stage, the trauma survivor reconstructs the story, transforms the traumatic memory, and mourns the traumatic accident that she went through. The remembrance and mourning stage gives a chance to the survivor to tell her own story and grieve the impact of trauma on her, “[t]he survivor can speak of the unspeakable” (Herman, 2015, p.175). Survivors now can have the courage to let their voices be heard.

However, grieving the traumatic loss is a hard task; its complexity is due to the survivor’s feelings of fear and pride. Yet Tume represents all female characters as courageous females who bravely testify their traumatic accidents with other females in order to make other victims aware of their rights: “As the survivor summons her memories, the need to preserve safety must be balanced constantly against the need to face the past” (Herman, 2015, p.176). This reflects that survivors must acquire the delicate balance that enables them to confront their aching memories and at the same time to protect their stability. Facing the past is a very crucial step for healing but it should be combined with safety in order not to risk their lives. For instance, Folake says:

My mother suggested that they keep only my brother in school, while I go and live with a distant uncle. My father agreed. My uncle was magnanimous enough to send me to school; however, he abused me sexually for ten horrid years. After finished school, he seized my certificate and forced me to work in his shop while he paid me nothing. I was my

uncle's sex slave. (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 67)

Through the character of Folake, Tume discusses a very sensitive topic that is considered a taboo, which is incest. Folake is able to remember and plainly tell her previous trauma without fearing any judgment.

Similarly, Tume portrays a raped girl who was violated by her father but freely shares her past trauma. Nkechi remembers her past about her abusive father. He used to beat his wife while she was pregnant. Nkechi recalls her memories and describes her father as, “the most irresponsible father and husband in the entire universe; an unrepentant wife-beater” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 67).

Nkechi courageously describes how savage her father was. She continues digging into her memories and describes the trauma that she faced after her mother's death. Her father beat her and took her own virginity when she was just thirteen years old. Nkechi becomes afraid of the stigma of her African society, so she gives up to the most shameful act, rape. She says, “there was no one I could talk to about the shameful and abominable thing he was doing to me” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 68). Moreover, her suffering does not stop at this point as her father sells her in an attempt to settle his drinking debts. In addition, Nkechi's trauma continued as her husband has no respect for her, and he treats her very “shabbily”. One day, he “beats her into a coma” and leaves (Tume, p. 68).

According to Herman, “the simplest technique for the recovery of new memories is the careful exploration of memories the patient already has,” (p. 184) so, with sorrow and sadness Nkechi here continues exploring her previous traumatic memories which reveals that her pain does not stop at that point. She is taken by Madam Peace who exploits her and by forcing her to become a prostitute. She remembers what Madam Peace tells her, “you shall be handsomely rewarded for your efforts. You will be paid fifty thousand Naira for every female child and seventy thousand Naira for every male child you bear” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 69).

Tume continues in asserting the importance of telling one's story. She says, “[b]y voicing out, by telling stories, it is; like a group therapy for all the women involved... to be aware of your own space and what could be and what is and then makes you know what you must do” (T. Tume, personal communication, December 21, 2024). Therefore, she insists on representing the model female figure who keeps silent in front of the abuse she suffers on the hands of her husband. In time, she breaks her silence and shares the ill-treatment of her abusive spouse. Madam B says:

I wanted people to believe that all was well with my marriage, because I loved my husband dearly and I wanted to make it work. But the truth is that throughout my eighteen years of marriage to that man, he battered me in every possible way; verbally, emotionally, psychologically, physically, and even sexually. (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 103)

Madam B describes a very common attitude that women in African societies do. They fear being judged as unsuccessful couples. Their fear of stigma makes them endure any type of abuse from their male partners. Herman states, "the telling of the trauma story thus inevitably plunges the survivor into profound grief" (2015, p.188). Madam B continues her story with anguish:

My husband's maltreatment was a thing of shame to me. It made me feel less of a woman. Somehow I became convinced that there was something wrong with me to provoke such incessant anger in him. So, for every one of my husband's abuse, I always found a way to blame myself. Before I knew it, I had become an expert at conjuring up excuses for every one of his misbehaviours towards me. It was easier for me to cope that way. (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 103-104)

African women used to blame themselves for the harsh treatment they got from their husbands. They even justified the violation they suffered through their husbands' hands. They doubted themselves instead of seeing the real truth. Fearing this stigma urged African women to refuse to cry out for help. They chose to die in silence to satisfy such patriarchal societies.

All females in the play become brave and fearless to speak up against any violation and topics that are regarded as taboos. By that, Herman's second stage of recovery, mourning and remembering is achieved in the play. In this respect, *Not That Woman* is a testimonial play in which each female character remembers her previous trauma. Herman states, "[t]elling the story reveals that the traumatic story belongs to the past. And the survivor will be busy in the task of rebuilding her life in the present and pursuing her aspirations for the future" (2015, p.195).

After telling the story many times, the trauma survivor finds herself no longer interested in telling the story. She sees the traumatic experience as something that belongs to the past. Moreover, for the first time she thinks about her future life, this is the exact moment in which she can move on to the third step of recovery. Herman argues, "the major work of the second stage is accomplished when the patient reclaims her own history and feels renewed hope and energy for engagement with life. Time starts to move again" (2015, p.65). This is a turning

point in the survivors' life where they see themselves not as victims but as individuals capable of thriving. Folake says "[t]hese are really sad stories, but they are also stories of power" (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 72). Now the suffering and pain have transformed into strength and resilience. After expressing their grief through these sad stories, survivors become ready to reclaim their agency and inspire other victims and lead them to empowerment and reconcile with life again. Hence comes the stage of reconnection

Survivors of trauma now get the ability to live the present. They build new lives radically different from the old damaged one they had. The process of building life is what Herman refers to as "reconnection"(2015, p.196). Herman states that "by the third stage the survivor is ready to engage more actively in the world" (p.197). Survivors now can have choices, reconnect with the world, maintain faith and develop and adjust new relationships, and can practice self-care feelings. They now feel empowered as "THE CORE EXPERIENCES of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others" (p.132).

The third stage starts with the traumatized person's increased passion in life and in creating a goal for herself. During reconnection, the survivor starts to think about her life. She compares her situations before and after the traumatic experience. She aims at replacing her damaged life with a one that is better than before the traumatic experience. She reaches a stage of engagement with herself, her society, and reality. It is a new chance for her and a turning point from the states of helplessness, displacement, disconnection, and isolation to self-reconnection, safety, and empowerment.

The third stage serves as a truth mirror, allowing her to see the whole story clearly. Now she can clearly see how she has been a victim, and she can avoid the repetition of the harmful experience in the future. Moreover, she can make her own future plans as she is now ready to control her own life. She is able to build trusted relationships and to experience a new role as a fighter who is capable of reconnecting with others. By that she becomes a survivor of trauma who is able to resolve the past and resume the future. Reaching this point brings the step of connecting with others (Herman, 2015, p.202).

Speaking about the importance of solidarity, Tume believes that, "most victims of gender-based violence eventually lose their self-esteem, they lose their sense of self, and they are finished, they are not even now confident to speak. But once they have this collective support from women specially, they are

empowered" (T. Tume, personal communication, December 21, 2024). Thus, Tume emphasizes the efficient impact of solidarity among women in helping survivors of gender-based violence to reestablish their confidence and sense of self. She highlights how collective support can combat the loss of self-esteem and silence caused by violence, enabling trauma survivors to rebuild their lives.

Not That Woman represents this stage through all the female characters in the play. They start to adopt new relationships. For instance, Folake is a representative of this stage as she builds a new relationship with a new person whom she did not know before represented in, Madam B. Folake states, "Madam B rescued me, brought me to this refuge, and taught me how to live again" (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 67). Similarly, Nkechi says, "Madam B... rescued us, and took us to the hospital for treatment" (p. 70). They all managed to build new ties with people, reconciled with life, and established a network of social relationships.

After a period of building new trusted social bonds, the trauma survivor is ready to create a social mission to support others. The traumatized person gets to the moment when she should find a purpose to relate her to real life. She has to get involved in society and contributes to help others. The survivor learns how to participate in social events and help other victims.

This could be traced in *Not That Woman*, as all the female characters manage to restore their power and reconnect with ordinary life. Folake says that their traumatic stories are stories of empowerment and survival (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 72). After surviving, victims of trauma try to help other women to get free from their pain. For instance, Folake gives Joyce a message to maintain self-respect and individuality in her relationship with her husband. Joyce asked "why Larry treat me this way? (p. 91) Trying to raise Joyce's awareness Folake answers, "[h]e treats you this way simply because you allow him. Now, don't get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with being a caring and selfless wife, but you need to retain your sense of self. It is very important! Why did you lose yourself, Joyce?" (p. 91) Here, Folake is trying to enlighten her friend, Joyce. She no longer accepts to see another woman getting abused by her male partner and stay silent. Folake pushes her to feel her self-worth and raise her low self-esteem. Likewise, Nkechi offers a helping hand to other victims. She tells Joyce, "of course, you are welcome here. SWR is always open to women seeking refuge from any form of abuse (p. 101).

Tume says, “[g]ender-based violence is all around us. There is no way you won’t be able to identify with at least one of those characters” (T. Tume, personal communication, December 21, 2024). All females in the refuge decide to cooperate with each other to rescue any abused woman. In addition, they try to challenge their patriarchal society which enforces men’s control upon women. Each one of them states the role that she will play in order to change the state of women in the Nigerian society. Madam B says, “I will not be that woman who encourages her daughter to stay in an abusive relationship or marriage.” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 107). As a victim who has survived from an abusive marriage, Madam B tries to destroy the wrong belief that marriage is all about endurance. She will participate in demolishing the conspiracy of silence that disempowers women and forces them to stay quite regardless of their suffering.

Also, Folake declares: “I will encourage every female around me to dare to dream, nurture their self-esteem, and be the best they can be. I refuse to be an enabler of women's inequality with men” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 107). Folake will offer her help to other women through erasing the stereotypes that their patriarchal society uses to deceive them with as the illusion about women as incomplete and insufficient.

Furthermore, Nkechi says, “I will not be that woman who mocks or judge any woman for being single, divorced, widowed or childless. A woman is a complete human being regardless of her marital Status” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 107). She likewise will encourage other females not to accept abuse within a relationship even if they will continue to be single. She is trying to correct the stereotypical images that stigmatize single women as incomplete, ugly, and passive. This is how Tume herself portrays Nkechi, the single lady as an independent woman who can support herself and support even other females emotionally, physically and financially.

Zainab also announces, “I will not be a party to practices that stunt the development and well-being of women. I choose to support the cause of the girl child” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 108). Zainab will stand against the cultural practices that reinforce female regression and habits that keep women backward.

Joyce as well says, “I will not be a monster-in-law or a passive mother. My sons must know that it is unacceptable to bully or hit a woman. And no, I will not be the other woman; I refuse to be the reason for a fellow woman's heartache!” (Tume, *Not that Woman*, 2019, p. 108). As a mother, Joyce’s message in life will

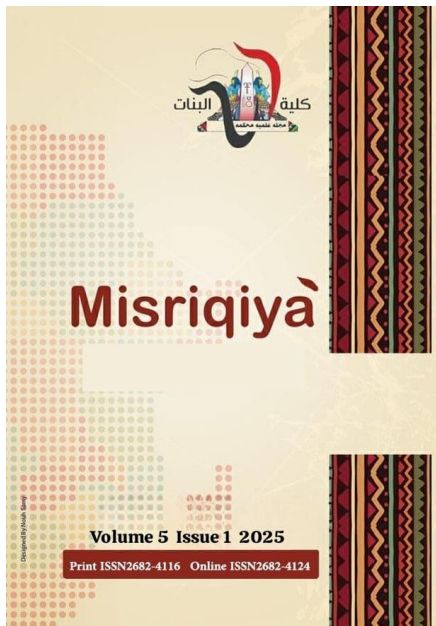
focus on the new generation of young men in order to raise them on morals that tell them how to properly treat women with respect. Each female character in the play states her mission and in one voice they sing “We Shall Overcome” (p. 108).

To conclude, Nigerian women are subjected to exploitation, oppression, brutality, and coercion, they are victims of the biases of their African society. Thinking that persisting abuse is a proof for being good women, Nigerian women suppress their pain and bear harms. This state of submissiveness and passivity does not last long as these females take steps to change their condition.

The chosen play shows that Nigerian women refuse to remain silent in the face of violence directed to them. Instead, they pass through stages to survive and overcome the trauma that they have been through. Whether Nkechi, Zainab, or Folake, Joyce, and Madam B, they all strive for emancipating and improving their self-worth by realizing their potentials and asserting themselves. If Nigerian women apply the same techniques as explored in the play, they will be able to overcome the trauma they face daily in their society.

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Negotiating Integration in the Arab Diaspora: A Study of Leila Aboulela's "The Boy from the Kebab Shop"

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Abstract

This paper examines integration as a psychological strategy employed by Arab immigrants to navigate their experiences of diaspora in Western societies. Using John W. Berry's fourfold acculturation model as a theoretical framework, the research explores the psychological implications of displacement and identity negotiation among Arab immigrants. It investigates how they balance the maintenance of their cultural heritage with adaptation to a foreign environment, highlighting the emotional and cognitive struggles they face. Through an analysis of Leila Aboulela's short story "The Boy from the Kebab Shop," this study explores the psychological conflicts faced by diasporic protagonists, focusing on themes of cultural alienation, displacement, homesickness, nostalgia, and multicultural identity formation. The research examines the integration process as a complex and individualized experience, revealing how each character employs distinct coping mechanisms to reconcile their ethnic identity with their host culture. The findings illustrate how integration emerges as a multifaceted and dynamic psychological process, shaped by the historical, emotional, and sociocultural backgrounds of the individuals involved.

Keywords: integration, acculturation, John W. Berry, homesickness, nostalgia, Leila Aboulela

Introduction

Immigration and Diasporic Experiences of Arab Immigrants in Western Communities

Immigration is a global phenomenon that involves populations and countries with diverse backgrounds. It has been portrayed as both a source of problems and opportunities for individuals and societies. Interactions and contact between people of different origins have long been occurring and cannot be considered a recent phenomenon. Throughout the history of humankind, people have journeyed across the globe for several reasons, such as seeking better opportunities and lifestyle, escaping persecution and disasters, engaging in trade, pursuing conquest and colonization, or simply pursuing adventure and enjoyment. The result of these previously mentioned endeavors was bringing together people of diverse cultural backgrounds. Blending such differences has brought about transformations in the traditional lifestyles and cultures of the groups involved, often giving rise to new societies (Sam & Berry, 2006, p. 2).

In *The Arab Diaspora: Voices of an Anguished Scream*, Zahia Smail Salhi (2006) states that the term ‘Diaspora’ signifies dispersal, scattering, or *al-shatat* in Arabic. Arab Diaspora encapsulates all Arabs living permanently in countries other than their country of origin (P. 2). At this point, a clear distinction should be established between the various categories of members of Arab Diaspora. Even though any individual prevented from returning home is an exile, there are distinctions among exiles, refugees, and expatriates. That is why it is essential to point out the various causes of becoming exile.

While it is a commonly shared conviction that exiles are stereotypically referred to as being forced out of, evicted from, or displaced from their country of origin, other exiles choose willingly to flee their homeland for various reasons. For instance, political activists fear political prosecution, so they leave their country seeking protection in another country and usually fall into the category of asylum seekers. Other exiles, like labor migrants who depart from their country for economic reasons, such as seeking better employment opportunities and pursuing better standards of living. Others seeking a better academic career or higher education choose to be self-implemented exiles for intellectual reasons (Salhi, 2006, p. 2).

However, notwithstanding the reasons that compelled exiles dislocated from their homelands, they all keep an idealized image of home as a lost paradise and rarely manage to entirely adopt their new dwellings. Hence, they share this

common feeling of solitude, estrangement, loss, and longing, and cannot eschew nostalgia and pain. To surmount these feelings, they reconstruct a new world that somehow echoes the old one they left behind. Items they brought with them from their home country will be given a pivotal position in their new land. Their traditional attire will be displayed during special occasions. Other Arab restaurants that carry the name of an Arab city or well-known monuments, Arab stores, mosques, and cultural centers will be implemented in the host community. In that way, they build for themselves a micro community that brings together other compatriots and a world akin to their homeland (Salhi, 2006, p. 2).

This attempt to create a world that resembles the original home within the host community leads to two significant outcomes. On one hand, it creates an unnatural world, which eases the pain of being cut off from one's own culture. On the other hand, it creates a new landscape in the host country, as new cultural elements are being added to inform the host society about other cultures. *In Reflections on Exile: and other Literary and Cultural Essays*, Edward Said (2013) states, "The exile's new world, logically enough, is unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction" (p.187).

This is further consolidated in the literary works of Arab writers living in exile. Those Arab authors who live in the Western World write in English; thus, a new podium of Diasporic creativity has been created. Although they write in the language of the host country, their literature is by no means similar to that of the host country, nor is it like that of their country of origin. This genre of Diasporic literature stands as "a space where both home and host cultures converge, intersect, and even clash, resulting in a third culture, which situates itself in a third space which is that of the Diaspora" (Salhi, 2006, p.15).

This kind of Literature is Diasporic, resembling the writers who produced it. It occupies a third space as it is not entirely Arab nor is it entirely English, just like its creators occupy a third space in the host society. Diasporic literature, nevertheless, obtains its originality in this difference. Moreover, it is this quality of being Diasporic or Exilic that makes it appealing to both parties; while the eastern readers use it as a medium to better understand the West, the Western readers also use it as a window to understand the East better, especially when it is written in their original language (Salhi, 2006, p.16).

‘Integration’ as a Psychological Adaptation Strategy for Arab Immigrants

In *Oxford Textbook of Migrant Psychiatry*, John Berry (2021) holds that “All peoples are now engaged in relations with people of other cultures. This engagement often takes place in culturally diverse societies” (p.311). To better understand these intercultural relationships, Berry employs the concepts of *acculturation* and *adaptation* and explores the conceptual links between them. Berry’s most substantial objective is to explore whether a specific approach to intercultural engagement exists for migrants and other acculturating groups that correlates with improved psychological and sociocultural adaptation. On that account, an identification distinction between both concepts has been laid out by Berry as he identifies acculturation as “the process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between cultural groups and their individual members” (Berry, 2021, p. 311). On the other hand, he identified the concept of adaptation as a central element in his acculturation model theory, framing it as the approaches by which immigrants and acculturating groups adjust to new cultural contexts. Berry’s model categorizes individual adaptation strategies according to two core dimensions: first is the degree to which individuals maintain their heritage culture, and second is the extent to which they engage with the host society. These dimensions yield four acculturation strategies- integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization- each representing a different form of adaptation to intercultural contact (Berry, 1992, p. 3).

This paper examines the concept of ‘*integration*’ and how it is being adapted by Arab immigrants to function properly in the host societies through balancing their traditional values with the demands of the host culture. Due to globalization, Arab immigration movements have expanded, rendering integration as one of the psychological strategies that Arab immigrants use as a coping mechanism within Western communities. Arab immigrants, specifically, confront unique hardships and challenges in adapting to Western societies, and this is because of the cultural, linguistic, and religious differences that stand as a gap between their ethnic background and the new norms that need to be embraced. According to John Berry, integration, as a psychological strategy, is not merely the process of becoming a part of a new society but also a coping mechanism that facilitates identity stability and mental health for immigrants (Berry, 1997, p. 9).

Berry’s primary focus and basic issue of his research in the field of acculturation psychology is to find out whether there are factors that lead to more

positive adaptation for immigrants in the host societies. Concerning the psychological adaptation of immigrants, ‘integration’ has been announced by Berry to be the most positive adaptation strategy; thus, he coined the term ‘integration hypothesis’. This hypothesis proposes that when immigrants are ‘doubly engaged’ (i.e., by engaging both their heritage cultures and with others in larger society), they will be more successful in their lives, including having a sense of personal well-being, and achieving greater sociocultural competence (Berry, 2021, p. 314). Berry states that “integration strategy has been shown to lead to better adaptation than the other three forms of adaptation, those who pursue and accomplish integration appear to be better adapted, while those who are marginalized are least well adapted” (Berry, 2021, p. 314). Angela Nguyen and Benet-Martínez are psychology professors who are influential scholars in the specialization of acculturation and integration, particularly known for their work on ‘biculturalism’. They carried out a meta-analysis of Berry’s hypothesis across 83 studies and over 20.000 participants; they concluded that integration (‘biculturalism,’ in their terms) is associated with better adaptation. They found that integration has a significant and positive relationship with psychological adaptation, for instance, life satisfaction, positive effect, self-esteem, and sociocultural adaptation, for instance, academic achievement, career success, social skills, and lack of behavioral problems “With this meta-analysis, biculturalism is positively related to adjustment, and this relationship is stronger than those between adjustment and either dominant or heritage cultural orientation” (Nguyen and Benet-Martínez, 2013, p.137). Berry lays out a possible explanation for their influential conclusion, which correlates integration with positive adaptation, that those who are engaged with both cultures receive support and resources from both cultures and are competent in dealing with both cultures (Berry, 2021, p. 314).

The Theoretical Framework

Berry’s Acculturation Model Theory: An Overview

David L. Sam is a professor of cross-cultural psychology in the schools of psychology and medicine at the University of Bergen, and John W. Berry is an emeritus professor in the Department of Psychology, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario. Both are important leading theorists in the field of acculturation. In their collective book, *The Cambridge Handbook of Acculturation Psychology*, Sam and Berry (2006) outline the various contexts surrounding acculturation, examining the key theories and concepts related to

groups and individuals undergoing cultural transitions, including immigrants, refugees, expatriates, indigenous peoples, foreign students, and tourists. Based on the theoretical and methodological framework of cross-cultural psychology, they shed light mainly and specifically on the issues and challenges that arise when people from one culture move to another culture, in which reciprocal adjustment and tension benefits are involved. While acculturation has been part of human history since it was first recorded, it is only in recent decades that psychology has witnessed a significant increase in research focused on the topic. They attribute this increased interest in the scope of acculturation to numeral reasons; however, they gave exclusive attention to two main issues. Firstly, the increase in worldwide migration, due to natural or man-made disasters like war, political conflicts, poverty, and famine, as well as improved means of travelling over larger distances. Secondly, the increasing importance of understanding the link between culture and human behavior has been advanced by those working in the field of cross-cultural psychology (Sam and Berry, 2006, p.1).

Berry explains that the fundamental goal of cross-cultural psychology has been to demonstrate the influence that cultural factors have on the development and display of individual human behavior (Berry, 1997, p.1). Central to understanding such cultural influences is the concept of acculturation. Building on the foundational definition by anthropologist Robert Redfield, acculturation describes "those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p.149). This foundational sociological and anthropological definition of the concept laid the groundwork for later anthropologists, psychological models, and studies of acculturation, and Berry stands as a prime example. Redfield's early studies on acculturation have significantly influenced his acculturation model theory. Berry confirmed Redfield's identification of acculturation and developed it into a theoretical framework that focuses on individual and group adaptation strategies in intercultural communities.

Berry's acculturation model represents four distinct adaptation strategies of how individuals cope and adjust in plural societies. According to Berry, these four adaptation strategies are based on two key dimensions. The first dimension is 'preference for maintaining one's heritage culture and identity,' and by this, Berry means the extent to which an individual appreciates their culture, traditions, and

identity and is keen on preserving them. This dimension reflects whether individuals wish to retain their original cultural attributes or erase them. The second dimension is ‘preference for having contact with and participating in the larger society,’ hence, this indicates whether individuals obtain the willingness to function properly in the host society and embrace its culture or attempt to avoid it (Berry, 2021, p. 312).

According to Berry’s theory, the previously mentioned dimensions function as an intrinsic measurement tool that indicates the adaptation strategy carried out by individuals in the host societies. Berry’s four adaptation strategies carry different names, from the point of view of non-dominant groups ‘immigrants.’ When individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interactions with other cultures, the **assimilation** strategy is defined. In contrast, when individuals place a value on holding on to their original culture and at the same time wish to avoid interaction with others, then the **separation** strategy is in action. When there is an interest in maintaining one’s original culture while participating in daily interactions with other groups, then **integration** is the strategy that is embraced. When Integration is being embraced as a coping mechanism by immigrant individuals, this means that there is some degree of cultural integrity maintained, while at the same time seeking to participate as an integral part of the larger social network. Finally, when there is little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance and little interest in having relations with others, often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination, then **marginalization** as a strategy is defined (Berry, 2021, p. 313).

The concept of **acculturative Stress**, according to Berry, is proposed as one of the most fundamental outcomes of the acculturation process (Berry, 2006, p. 292) and it refers to the psychological stress and difficulties that immigrants experience as a result of adapting to a new cultural environment as it arises from the challenges and conflicts encountered when navigating between one’s own heritage culture and the host culture, he defines it as “a number of stressful psychological phenomena that involve conflict and often result in new forms of behavior that interfere with smooth day-to-day functioning” (Berry, 1992, p. 6). Lowered mental health, particularly anxiety and depression, feelings of marginality and alienation, identity confusion, and longing for home are identified by Berry as a particular set of stress manifestations which occur during acculturation (Berry, 1992, p. 8). Identity confusion arises during acculturation when immigrant individuals struggle to reconcile their heritage with the new host

culture, and Berry's model identifies this as a 'stressor', particularly resulting in a reduction of immigrants' mental health (Berry, 1987, p. 492). Kalervo Oberg (1960) is a foundational figure in the study of the acculturation process, particularly known for his work on 'culture shock.' He states that the increasing feeling of homesickness while emerging into a new culture builds a sense of rejection (of the new cultural norms) and being rejected (from the host society), and this is a critical part of the acculturation process because how the immigrant responds to that overwhelming stressor will decide which acculturation strategy to be adopted and will lead to very different results (Oberg, 1960, P.143). Berry states that acculturation strategies are known to affect acculturative stress: "integration strategy is the least stressful, while marginalization is associated with the most stress, assimilation and separation are known to fall in between" (Berry, 1992, p.10).

Berry's Concept of Integration

As outlined previously, integration is one of Berry's proposed four adaptation strategies by which immigrants attempt to function properly in the host society. Berry defines adaptation as "the changes that take place in an individual in response to the experience of acculturation" (Berry, 2021, p. 313). Berry elaborates on two distinct dimensions of adaptation, namely, psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation. Psychological adaptation mainly refers to mental and emotional well-being as it encompasses aspects like self-esteem, life satisfaction, and mental health. Psychological adaptation is often stressed through indicators like stress levels, anxiety, and depression. A positive psychological adaptation is predicted when the individual can maintain positive mental health while adjusting to the challenges of the new community. Sociocultural adaptation centers around the immigrant's ability to function actively and engage effectively in the new environment. This dimension involves absorbing and adhering to the host society's new norms, behaviors, customs, skills, and language required to interact with the dominant group. A successful sociocultural adaptation is demonstrated through the immigrant's development of social competence together with efficient communication in social situations, which consequently provides productive relationships in the new cultural environment (Berry, 2021, p. 314).

According to Berry's well-known 'integration hypothesis.' (Berry, 2021, p. 314), immigrants who practice integration as their adaptation strategy are exposed to experiencing the most positive psychological and sociocultural

adaptation. More precisely, the most favorable psychological and sociocultural adaptation emerges when immigrants manage to embrace the new culture alongside maintenance of their heritage (Berry, 2013, p. 1130). Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006) aimed to examine the previously highlighted hypothesis in their collective book *Immigrant Youth in Cultural Transition: Acculturation, Identity, and Adaptation Across National Contexts*. The book is an extensive project that studies the cases of over seven thousand immigrants in thirteen countries. It investigates the navigation of adolescent immigrants at the convergence of their original culture and the culture of the host society, focusing on the patterns of acculturation and its impact on the psychological and sociocultural adaptation. The study demonstrates that participants who employed integration as their adaptation coping mechanism managed to adjust to the host communities more effectively. This was compared alongside the participants who focused only on their original culture (i.e., separation), or who were thoroughly immersed in the new culture (i.e., assimilation), or who developed cultural and identity confusion, causing renunciation of both cultural ties (i.e., marginalization). Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder emphasized this conclusion as follows:

The main conclusion was that the largest proportion of youth seek to maintain a connection to their heritage culture after migrating, and at the same time, they also become involved in the daily life of the larger society. We termed this combination ‘integration’. Many fewer seek to live by either giving up their heritage culture (‘assimilation’) or avoiding participation in the larger society (‘separation’), or, when they do neither (‘marginalization’). The other main conclusion was that immigrant youth adapt better psychologically and socioculturally when they seek integration than any of the other three ways of living following migration. (John W. Berry et al, 2006, p. 11)

Although the integration process is theoretically appealing, it faces significant challenges. Numerous immigrants were forced to leave their homes and settle in foreign countries, only to achieve integration within their host societies. That does not exclude the fact that there are serious conflicts and challenges that they had to confront through their journey towards integration. These challenges can be represented in structural barriers such as discrimination, racism, and unequal access to resources, which consequently hinder integration efforts. Accordingly, Berry asserts that integration, to be achieved, requires

‘mutual accommodation,’ which means that integration is not merely an individual choice but additionally depends on the acceptance and openness of the host society. A society that fails to embrace multiculturalism creates barriers that make achieving integration challenging and unfeasible, thus driving immigrants to adopt less effective coping mechanisms (Berry, 2011, p. 216).

In conclusion, John W. Berry’s framework provides the theoretical and conceptual tools to analyze the acculturation experiences depicted in the works of the Anglophone Arab writer Leila Aboulela. His concept of integration provides a balanced and constructive approach for addressing the challenges and opportunities of multicultural living experiences in her story "The Boy from the Kebab Shop".

Leila Aboulela: an Anglophone Arab Writer

Geoffrey Nash (2007), in his analytical book devoted to Anglophone Arab literature, *The Anglo-Arab encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab writers in English*, defines Anglophone literature as a kind of literature conceived and executed in English by writers of Arabic background, and in that sense, it is qualitatively different from Arabic literature and Arabic literature translated into English (p. 11). What makes that genre of literature stand out is the fact that it is written by Arab writers who have the experience of being immigrants to Western societies, portraying the complexities of displacement. The description implied by this adjective ‘anglophone’ does not simply provide a linguistic ‘shelter’ for Arab writers in English. What the label also achieves is a much wider umbrella under which certain themes of identity crisis, the struggle for belonging, and cultural hybridity are discussed (Al-Maleh, 2009, p. x). Those Anglophone Arab writers are equipped with first-hand knowledge of both cultures, and they carry out the role of mediators, interpreters, double-sight observers of the two cultural entities, or cultural translators (Sarnou, 2014, p. 68). This very much applies specifically to Anglophone Arab women writers, as their literary works brought more recognition and visibility to the Arab woman whose identity is perceived by Western readership as being different, peculiar, and complex because of her portrayal in the media and in the books of early orientalist. One of those outstanding Anglophone female contemporary writers is Leila Aboulela.

Leila Aboulela is a well-known and acclaimed Sudanese writer as well. She was born in Cairo to a Sudanese father and an Egyptian mother but grew up in Khartoum. In 1990, Aboulela migrated to Scotland to join her husband, an oil engineer. When she relocated to Aberdeen, she started her writing career while

looking after her children. Aboulela lives and relates to two different cultures and constantly travels from East to West. Through navigating Aboulela's socio-historical background, the exposure to the migration process from the Eastern community to the Western one, along with all the cultural differences and difficulties that result from this process, plays a great role in influencing and reshaping her works. This proves to be evident when her novels and short stories continue to focus on the conflicts, challenges, and dilemmas that Muslim immigrants grapple with during their residence in Western communities.

In her short story collection *Elsewhere, Home*, Aboulela (2018) deftly evokes mainly very different locations: the snowy, remote cities and multiculturalism of Scotland, particularly Aberdeen, and the heat and conviviality of Khartoum and Egypt. Aboulela realized that three fundamental countries make up her identity, which are: Sudan, Egypt, and Britain. Accordingly, Sudan, Egypt, and Aberdeen are the settings for much of her works because mainly, these are the countries where she lived throughout her life, playing a vital role in contributing to the reconstruction of her identity as an Anglophone writer.

In Aboulela's fictional works to date, she is concerned with probing the ethical and identity dilemmas faced by Muslim immigrants in the Western world. In most of her short story collection, *Elsewhere*, Aboulela pertained to the Sudanese characters in the diaspora. Her main characters, whether males or females, are habitually Arab migrants who are forced to leave their homelands, attempting to get a better lifestyle in Western societies, or to escape a desperate reality at home. In this journey, they live in a constant state of exile as the new abode fails to become home, and they are left in a state of suspension between the new reality and a past they are emotionally and spiritually stuck in. Her short stories discuss mixed-race relationships, halal food requirements, abortion among non-Muslims, and the position of white Muslim converts as well.

Aboulela uses her writing as a means of returning home or drawing nearer to home as a cure for the agony of longing. As she notes in an interview:

What children see, hear, and experience sears itself into their psyche. My memories of the Sudan of my childhood are vivid, and it was homesickness that made me want to hold on to these images and put them down into words. When I returned to Sudan after being away, I continued to look for what was familiar, and it was still there, in patches, among the modernity and changes that had taken place over time. (Sulieman and Al-Samani, 2014, para. 4)

Consequently, to deliver her experience and her longing for her home, Sudan, to the reader, she portrays vivid pictures of Sudanese culture and traditions such as Sudanese family gatherings, Sudanese wedding traditions and ceremonies, and even the traditional Islamic burials and funerals. She purposely uses the English language instead of the Arabic language in her writing with a total awareness that most of her readers are Westerners. In that way, she takes the responsibility of bringing Eastern culture into the hands of Western readers. Aboulela is also known for using Arabic vocabulary, terms, and expressions along with English, slang of the Scottish streets, and colonial discourse in her linguistically hybrid novels. In addition, she is a highly intertextual writer, and her texts allude to the Qur'an, Sudanese writers such as Tayeb Salih, Western romance fiction, and Arab poets.

"The Boy from the Kebab Shop": Exploring Migrants' Struggles and Their Quest for Integration

Notably, Leila Aboulela's short story "The Boy from the Kebab Shop" is a narrative that demonstrates multiple non-stereotypical portrayals of the Arab immigrants' dilemmas within European societies. The core of immigration complexity starts to show itself when the immigrants find themselves torn between two different worlds: the one they have left behind and the one they are trying to adapt to. Each character, in her short story, represents a particular struggle anchored in the diasporic tensions of cultural dislocation, fractured identity, and the clash between traditional heritage and the demands of fitting into a new society. The short story's setting is in a Western urban environment where the Arab characters attempt to reconcile their Muslim heritage with the secular lifestyle they find in England.

The narrative revolves around the complicated and entangled relationship between a young Muslim girl living in London and a boy working at a local Kebab shop. Dina is a seventeen-year-old girl who was born to a Scottish father and an Egyptian mother. Dina's Scottish father proposed to her mother during a visit to Egypt, and when they got married, they left Egypt and moved to Dina's father's country, Scotland. Accordingly, Dina was born and raised in the secular environment of England, which made her connection to her Muslim Arab-Egyptian heritage blurred and almost nonexistent. Dina's father passed away years ago, and she lives with her mother alone. Shushu, Dina's mother, lives in a constant state of regret about her marriage to a Scottish man and leaving her home country for his sake. Shushu is homesick and indulges in this state of nostalgia for Egypt. That's why she tries to fill this void inside her by creating an Egyptian

atmosphere at home by always watching black and white Egyptian films and listening to Egyptian songs.

Kassim is a young man working at a local kebab shop. He was born to a Moroccan father and a Scottish mother. Kassim's character is portrayed as the opposite of Dina's. Although he was born to a Scottish mother and has been raised in England, he has embraced his Muslim identity. Dina's encounter with Kassim forms a turning point in her life. Through their connection, she starts to unfold and discover all about her Arabic heritage and her religion, Islam. Kassim's relationship with Dina stands as an invitation to his inner world and his faith. Dina finds herself and her identity are torn between two different worlds, the world of her Arab culture and Islam that she has been ignorant of all her life, and the world of England's secular life.

Displacement and Alienation

Leila Aboulela portrays the struggles of 'displacement' and 'alienation' through the character of Kassim, a Scottish boy with a Moroccan background who is working in a Kebab shop owned by a Muslim family, Basheer, Samia, and their toddler. Kassim has converted to Islam, and that's the main reason why he finds self-reassurance and peace working with Muslims rather than trying to work at any other place. Kassim is introduced in the short story as a second-generation immigrant who has a Scottish mother and a Moroccan father. Even though he has an Arab father, Kassim had a European upbringing that made him far from Arab or Islamic practices. For instance, as the narrator describes:

Kassim had not had a religious upbringing. His Moroccan father had given him a Muslim name, circumcised him at the age of eight months, and took him to the children's mosque school only five times. After that, secular life had taken over. Kassim's Scottish mother had no interest in religion and no Muslim friends. She was close to her large Aberdeenshire family, and Kassim grew up with Christmas and Hogmanay (Aboulela, 2018, p. 94).

However, regardless of his Westernized upbringing, Kassim embraced his ethnic heritage as an adult when he converted to Islam and found self-reassurance by doing Islamic practices like prayers. He sought the friendship of Basheer by working in his kebab shop, motivated by Basheer's Muslim identity and the solace it offered: "it was the daily contact with Basheer, day-in day-out, through the mundane and the significant that had made Islam a rhythmic reality, a feasible way of living" (Aboulela, 2018, p. 94). Kassim's Western cultural alienation in Scotland is represented through surrounding himself with Islamic and Arab

culture and through working in the kebab shop where he practices cooking and serving Arab food like ‘doner kebab’, ‘doner pizza’, ‘samosa’, ‘onion bhaji’, and ‘tahini’. Kassim used to go to a judo class when he was a teenager, which, according to Aboulela, “awakened his dominant Muslim Identity” (Aboulela, 2018, p. 95). Attending Judo classes allowed him to connect with Arab boys to reclaim his Arab-Islamic heritage. Kassim’s clinging to this opportunity to strengthen his bond with his traditional roots is solid proof of his tendency to choose his ethnic culture over the European one.

Kassim’s psychological behavioral patterns align directly with Berry’s identification of ‘separation’ as an adaptation strategy. Following Berry’s theoretical construct, the two dominant factors that influence immigrants’ adaptation mechanisms are: the extent to which immigrants maintain their heritage culture and the extent to which they seek interactions with the host—dominant— culture. The intersection of these two dimensions within the immigrants’ psyche yields one of Berry’s four adaptation strategies (Berry, 1992, p. 4). The adaptation strategy of ‘separation’ occurs when immigrant individuals place a high value on maintaining their original cultural identity and traditions, while intentionally minimizing or even avoiding any form of mutual interactions with the dominant culture, “adopts the receiving culture and retains the heritage culture” (Schwartz, 2010, p. 238). This coping mechanism is observed in immigrant communities that form ‘ethnic enclaves’—areas where the residents are from the same ethnic group— by that means cultural practices, language, and religious observances are openly preserved, manifested, and conducted without restrictions, while simultaneously interacting with the host society is limited. For instance, those kinds of immigrants tend to establish their own educational centers, religious institutions, and businesses, thus reducing the necessity of engaging or intercommunicating with the culture of the host society (Szapocznik, 2010, p. 243).

The sense of Kassim’s cultural separation is shown through the way he communicates with the customers in the kebab shop. Although his job in the kebab shop requires high communication skills to deal with the foreign culture, he lacks deep communication with the locals, which highlights his sense of being an outsider. Aboulela tries to shed light on one of the most common dilemmas of second-generational Arab immigrants in Western communities, like Kassim, who is being culturally alienated and displaced. Being born or raised in Western societies, he is educated and socialized in Western systems but grew up in a

household shaped by Arab values. This duality often leads to internal identity conflict as he feels insufficiently Arab at home neither does he feel sufficiently western in society. As a result of this inner conflict, Kassim struggles to fully define himself within the culture of the host country. Thus, he chooses to embrace his original culture and to get separated from the culture of the host country.

Berry's concept is reflected in Kassim's struggle to fully define himself within the Western community, which makes him culturally separated. This is shown through his choice to embrace his Islamic faith and his deliberate choice to work in a kebab shop rather than any other place. For Kassim, the 'Kebab Shop' functions as a space of a cultural and spiritual microcosm of his identity, and the fact that the shop is run by a devout Muslim couple that share the same values, traditions, and Islamic practices creates a world that resembles his ethnic culture, where his faith and ethnicity are normalized and affirmed.

Identity Crisis

The struggle of 'identity ambiguity' is represented by Aboulela through Dina's character. Although she has an Arab and Islamic background, she turns to be completely ignorant of any Arab culture or Islamic practices. Dina is portrayed as a Westernized immigrant; Aboulela describes her Westernized appearance saying: "Many of the girls were wearing headscarves, some were wearing shalwar kameez- others like Dina wore the student outfit of Jeans, a sweatshirt, and outrageous shoes" (Aboulela, 2018, p. 88). Dina's father passed away and she lives with her mother only and even at home there are not a single sign of any Islamic practices, and this is revealed by Aboulela through the description "Dina walked into the setting room... there was a bottle of gin on the coffee table." (Aboulela, 2018, p. 92). Although Dina's mother is an Egyptian with an Islamic background, she turns out to be an alcoholic, which opposes Islamic traditions and principles. Dina neither knows anything about Arabic nor tried to learn the language from her mother. When they sat together to watch Egyptian films, she only watched because the channel had English subtitles "Nile TV was good for Dina because it had English subtitles on most of the films and so she could follow them. Sometimes, but not often, Shushu would make comments about the actors or the plot, give Dina snippets of information about Egyptian culture" (Aboulela, 2018, p. 93).

Aboulela's portrayal of this environment aligns with Berry's concept of 'assimilation' as an adaptation strategy practiced by Dina in the host society, highlighting the absence of ethnic, cultural, and religious signs that affect her

identity. Sam and Berry define ‘assimilation’ as “the strategy used when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek close interaction with other cultures” (Sam and Berry, 2010, p. 476). Immigrants who employ ‘assimilation’ as their adaptation tactic adopt the cultural norms, values, and behaviors of the host or dominant culture while relinquishing those of their heritage culture.

When Dina went to the kebab shop to give Kassim her father’s suits as a donation for the Syrian refugees, she went to the back of the shop at a ‘staff only’ area and found Kassim in the position of prayer. Dina didn’t even recognize that what Kassim was doing was Islamic prayer “Why was he like that, his forehead, nose and hands pressed onto the floor, Why?” (Aboulela, 2018, p. 99). Regardless of her Arab cultural background, Dina is completely unaware of any Islamic practices, as Aboulela expresses, “though Dina was from generations of Muslims, she had never seen anyone praying. On television, yes, or a photo in a schoolbook, but not within arm’s reach, not in the same room, not someone she knew, someone she loved” (Aboulela, 2018, p. 100). Aboulela represents the character of Dina as an example of the second-generation immigrants’ assimilation into the Western lifestyle. Dina's complete immersion in the secular life of England, coupled with her lack of awareness of her ethnic culture, exemplifies the ‘assimilation’ strategy.

Berry laid out the psychological and social implications of ‘assimilation,’ which can facilitate achieving better social outcomes for immigrants, consequently, leading to greater acceptance by the host community. As Berry indicates ‘assimilation’ is often associated with lower levels of acculturative stress compared to ‘separation’ or ‘marginalization,’ “those pursuing assimilation experience intermediate levels of acculturative stress” (Berry, 2005, p. 1). However, it may also include psychological costs exemplified in the loss of cultural identity, feelings of alienation from one’s ethnic community, and internal identity conflict. Immigrants who assimilate often experience a solid adaptation to the host culture but report identity confusion and weaker ties to their ethnic community compared to integrated peers (Berry et al., 2006, p. 11). This applies to Dina’s character, who fully immersed herself in the secular life of England, unaware of her ethnic culture.

Homesickness and Nostalgia versus Integration

The sense of ‘homesickness’ and ‘nostalgia’ are normal symptoms and dilemmas that confront immigrants when they settle away from their home. These issues are portrayed through the character of Shushu, Dina’s mother. Shushu is an

Egyptian woman who got married to an English man and had to leave her hometown to be with her husband. Notwithstanding that this serves as a dream for so many Arab women, Shushu despises life in Scotland as she tells her daughter, “Everything shrank when your father brought me here” (Aboulela, 2018, p. 93). As she grew older, Shushu came to the realization that marrying a foreign man was not an actual blessing, but an affliction in disguise, as Aboulela utters, “She had despised him and despised him until he shriveled into his grave. The good-looking *khawagah*, who had pursued and enchanted her in the Gezira Club, had whisked her off her feet and away from her family, had brought her to drab life, in a drab place” (Aboulela, 2018, p. 93). Knowing the fact that she had spent most of her life away from her home and how her family cut her off because she married a Scottish man, got her into a deep depression, and a sense of indifference. Shushu turns this depression and homesickness into being an alcoholic. Shushu attempts to embrace this sense of homesickness and nostalgia through the long hours she spends watching Egyptian black and white films on television.

‘Marginalization’ is one of John Berry’s strategies of acculturation. Marginalization strategy indicates little possibility or interest in any cultural maintenance, neither the culture of origin nor the culture of the host community. Immigrants who embrace marginalization as their coping mechanism tend to have little interest in building relations with others, often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination (Berry, 1997, p. 5). The narrative portrays the character of Shushu as not being attached to any culture, neither her ethnic Islamic culture nor the Western culture. She is nostalgic for Egypt, but she is detached from any Islamic practices to the extent that she didn’t pass on any of the Islamic principles to her daughter. That affected Dina’s identity later on and made her ignorant of her own ethnic identity. Simultaneously, Shushu resents her life in England and has no interest in embracing its culture. Aboulela perfectly managed to represent the character of Shushu as a first-generation Arab immigrant who got lost between two different cultures.

Basheer and his wife Samia stand as an example of first-generational Arab immigrants who managed to perfectly balance between two different cultures and to adapt to the norms of the Western community through their business ‘kebab shop’. Aboulela tries to convey a positive message to the readers through the characters of Basheer and his wife Samia, who managed to apply the concepts of ‘integration and ‘positive adaptation’ appropriately. Samia takes pride in her Muslim identity and Arab cultural practices, and this is reflected through her act

of breastfeeding her baby in front of Dina, which contrasts with Western norms. When Samia breastfeeds her baby during the fund-raising dinner, she does so naturally and confidently, despite Dina's discomfort and the Westernized cultural tendency to view such acts as private or shameful. Aboulela ironically describes Dina's behavior, symbolizing Western contradictions, as she says, "as an average British girl of eighteen, Dina had seen plenty of nudity but she had never seen a woman breastfeed a baby" (Aboulela, 2018, p. 91). When Dina witnesses Samia immediately breastfeeding her crying baby as a natural reflex of a typical Arab mother, she feels repulsed because, in that situation, Samia is far from being the idealized mother figure in Western culture "She definitely did not look like an antiseptic mum in television ad for pampers. Dina looked away" (Aboulela, 2018, p. 91). Samia's ease stands as a representation of healthy integration where cultural traditions are preserved and expressed openly without shame or concealment.

Positive adaptation is strongly reflected by Basheer, who owns the Kebab shop, and knows that integration is the ideal solution to survive in a foreign community. Basheer has accepted the circumstances and the role that has been imposed on him in the host society, and by doing this, he is embodying the reality that many immigrants face; survival comes first, often at the cost of deeper integration. Basheer and Samia organize fundraising dinners and community gatherings at their workplace that bring together people from different cultural backgrounds. This involvement reflects a willingness to engage with the host society while maintaining their cultural distinctiveness by serving Arab food, aligning with Berry's concept of 'Integration'—maintaining one's original culture, while participating in daily interactions with other groups (Berry, 2005, p. 705). 'Integration' involves the selective adoption of new behaviors from the larger society, for instance, Basheer's and Samia's ability to communicate with the foreign customers in English, and retention of valued features of one's heritage culture and which is represented through Basheer's commitment to prayers and Samia's retention of Islamic woman's appearance "the white scarf that covered her hair" (Aboulela, 2018, p. 91). Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder studied over 5000 immigrant youth who have settled in 13 countries to examine the four acculturation strategies, and they concluded that the most preferred acculturation strategy is 'integration' (Berry et al., 2006, p. 11). Additionally, Berry defines integrated individuals as having positive ethnic and national identities, efficiency in both languages, and a friendship network that includes people from both

cultures (Berry, 2005, p. 707). Regarding acculturative stress, Berry states that “there is a clear picture that the pursuit of integration is the least stressful but marginalization is the most stressful; in between are the assimilation and separation strategies” (Berry, 2005, p. 708).

Aboulela's Power of Language and Imagery

Regarding Aboulela's language in the narrative, she uses simplicity over complexity. Her sentences are short and simple yet deeply reflective and thought-provoking, mirroring to the reader the emotional tension within the immigrant character's psyche. For instance, when it comes to the character of Kassim, her use of concise phrases and succinct narration mirrors his inner psychological sense of cultural isolation and detachment. Although Kassim had a European upbringing, he willingly chose to convert to Islam. When he converted to Islam and found self-reassurance in Islamic practices, he tended to get detached from the Western culture around him. Kassim's use of Islamic traditional greeting with Dina, who is represented by Aboulela as a more assimilated individual, highlights Kassim's barrier to full acceptance or integration into the Western society “He opened the door for her and said, *salamu alleikum*” (Aboulela, 2018, p. 95).

Concerning Dina's characterization, her use of the English language as a way of communication and being completely unaware of the Arabic language and Islamic greeting mirrors her assimilation into Western culture. Kassim was the first person to introduce her to Islamic greeting and practices “It was the first time for Dina to say ‘*salamu alleikum*’” (Aboulela, 2018, p. 99). Regarding Basheer and his wife Samia, who are considered an older migrant generation, although they deal with customers in English, they use the Arabic language when they are off work. Aboulela sets an example of full adaptation and balanced integration through Basheer and Samia's use of the Arabic language during their daily communication “Samia and Basheer spoke in loud Arabic, which Dina couldn't understand” (Aboulela, 2018, p. 95-96).

Vivid imagery is a significant tool used by Aboulela to depict the physical landscape of migration. “The kebab shop” stands out as a two-dimensional and vibrant symbol. It symbolizes societal integration and economic hardships. The idea of introducing and serving Arab food to English citizens plays a crucial role in cultural exchange. Aboulela's precise choice of ‘kebab’, which is a famous Middle Eastern cuisine, yet is being served in a Western setting, is a portrayal of integration on a societal level. Moving to the other dimensional symbolism, the shop itself symbolizes the economic limitations imposed on migrants who often

find themselves in low-status jobs regardless of their abilities and ambitions. This is directly applied to Kassim, who is confined to working long-hour job with a low income despite his young age and available opportunities. The heat environment of the kebab shop and repetitive nature of Kassim's work portray this image of the opportunities' limitations that he draws for himself. For Kassim, the kebab shop symbolizes his heritage and a home that he clings to over Western society. Aboulela represents Basheer's kebab shop not only as a business, but a symbol of economic survival and how immigrants carve out economic spaces for themselves in Western societies because they may not have available or easy access to mainstream collar-job opportunities. Basheer's ability to sustain the business of the kebab shop suggests an accomplished level of success and societal integration in the Western community.

Conclusion

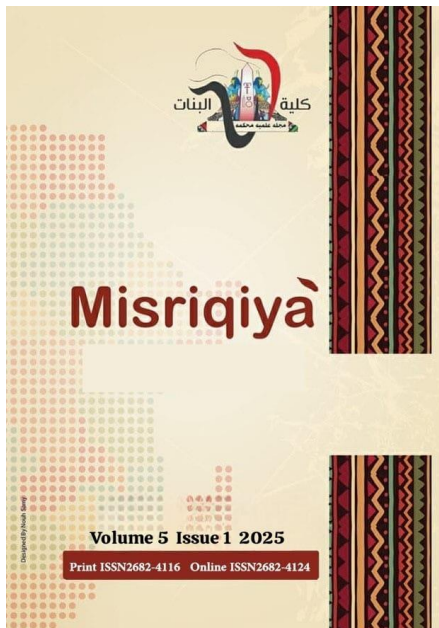
The study deals with the concept of integration as one of the four strategies of the acculturation model theory proposed by John W. Berry, applied to the Arab immigrants' experience in Western societies. The paper tackles different psychological coping mechanisms employed by the Arab immigrants, taking into consideration the change of their historical background. Through analyzing Liela Aboulela's short story "The Boy from the Kebab Shop," The study follows the psychological conflicts that the Arab protagonists face during their displacement in Western communities.

Based on the study's analysis, what makes the short story stand out as an actual Arab migration experience and a unique narrative are two pivotal factors. Firstly, Aboulela's ability to give each character the function of representing a specific theme. Each theme is an examination of a crucial migration diasporic struggle for Arab immigrants. To exemplify, the themes of displacement and alienation are represented through Kassim's constant overwhelming feeling of not belonging to Western culture. Dina's dilemma of not knowing to which culture she belongs portrays the theme of identity ambiguity. Shushu's continuous longing for her homeland—Egypt—sheds light on the themes of homesickness and nostalgia. Basheer's and his wife Samia's capability to integrate positively in Western society depicts the theme of biculturalism. Secondly, Aboulela's ability to create enduring vividness for the reader through her deliberate and crafted use of language, imagery, and symbolism, by which she conveyed the previously discussed themes.

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The Third Space and the Trap of Inferiority in Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced* (2012)

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Abstract

This paper investigates some of the cross-cultural obstacles that immigrants encounter in the host society, as they oscillate between two distinct cultures. Through an analysis of Ayad Akhtar's (1970-) Pakistani-American play *Disgraced* (2012), the paper explores the characters' "third spaces", focusing on the protagonist Amir's grapple with his fragmented in-between identities. It examines how Eastern immigrants could view themselves as inferior, thus conceal their original identities and adopt the new Western culture. Like many minorities in the United States, this is what some Pakistani-Americans do for the sake of economic prosperity and social acceptance. The paper draws on Homi K. Bhabha's post-colonial concepts of 'mimicry', 'ambivalence', 'hybridity' and 'third space' to highlight the extent to which these concepts impact the colonized identities. The paper also explores whether immigrants can create a balanced 'third space' by embracing their indigenous cultures or not.

Keywords: Pakistani-American Minorities, Eastern Immigrants, Homi Bhabha, Third Space, In-betweenness, Inferiority

Introduction

This paper seeks to explore the cultural challenges that Eastern immigrants face as they navigate between their indigenous culture, and the new Western one. By examining Ayad Akhtar's (1970-) Pakistani-American play *Disgraced* (2012), the study delves into the "third spaces" of the characters, with a particular focus on the protagonist's inner conflict with his "ambivalent" "hybrid" identity and sense of inferiority. The study also explores the ways "hybrid" Eastern immigrants could perceive themselves as inferior to the Western mainstream, thus assimilate to the new culture and hide their original identities in pursuit of success and recognition from society.

This study draws upon the theoretical concepts of Homi K. Bhabha (1949-), who is one of the most eminent scholars in post-colonial studies. The study applies Bhabha's post-colonial concepts of 'mimicry', 'ambivalence', 'hybridity' and 'third space' to investigate the impact of the interaction between the colonizer and the colonized. It also explores the impact of these concepts on people's identities and how they result in creating a melting pot society. The study accentuates the extent to which Bhabha's concepts could be revealing of the identities of the colonized and investigates whether immigrants can create a balanced 'third space' by embracing their heritage and overcoming their "inferiority complex".

Further, the study explores some of the challenges that Eastern and Muslim immigrants face, especially post 9/11. The research thus starts by offering a brief biographical background about Ayad Akhtar and his works. Then, it attempts to apply Homi Bhabha's post-colonial concepts of 'mimicry', 'ambivalence', 'hybridity' and 'third space' on Akhtar's play *Disgraced* with a special focus on the character of the Pakistani immigrant in the play, Amir. The paper underscores the repercussions that would occur when hybrid immigrants, minorities, and colonized individuals feel inferior to the culture of the colonizer. In this case they often become compelled to assimilate to the new mainstream culture for the sake of gaining approval from the Western colonizer. The paper also attempts to answer the question whether their mimicry and cultural assimilation lead them to create a balanced third space or a fragmented in-betweenness.

Homi Bhabha's Concepts: Mimicry, Hybridity, Ambivalence, and Third Space

In the late twentieth century, postcolonial critical theories developed to analyze the influence of colonialism on various cultures. These postcolonial theories focus on the colonized experience and investigate the colonizer's

hegemony through Eurocentric literary works. Bill Ashcroft et al. state that a prominent aspect of postcolonial literature is “rewriting the canon” (1998). This rewriting of literature through post-colonial theories allows authors to correct the false portrayals of their culture. Hence, they can subvert the colonial ideas about the “other” and dismiss the misrepresentations of the colonized. According to Ashcroft et al., post-colonial literature came out from the experiences of colonization and emphasized the conflict with colonial power and highlighted their difference from the colonial assumptions and this is what makes them clearly post-colonial (1998).

During colonization, people in the colonies become subject to domination, exploitation, and compelled assimilation. Behind the mask of civilization and freedom, European rules and cultures are imposed on the subjugated others, whereas their indigenous cultures are marginalized. In colonial discourse, the colonized are identified as objects, others, and uncivilized savages. According to Bhabha, the objective of the colonial discourse is to portray the colonized as degenerated or inferior based on their race to justify colonization and conquest and to create governmental and instructional systems (1994). The colonizer justifies their hegemony and imperialism by defining the colonized as inferior to them and establishing themselves as their superior master that must be obeyed. In his essay, “Colonialist Criticism” from his book, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*, Chinua Achebe argues that colonizers have often perceived colonized individuals in a negative stereotypical way such as “outcasts”, “simple natives” or obedient dolls. He also explains that colonizers created generalized assumptions to treat all natives as if they had the same experiences and conditions, no matter what their ethnic background was or where they came from (1988). To emancipate themselves from the colonizer’s justified suppression and “mythology of ‘civilisation’ ... [and] ‘Western civility,’” (Bhabha 1994), the colonized strive for decolonization and independence to reclaim their freedom and retain their cultural heritage.

Furthermore, both the colonized and the colonizer develop ‘hybrid hyphenations’ due to their cross-cultural interactions. Accordingly, they adopt new hybrid identities that comprise of both different cultures which Bhabha defines as “third spaces” (1994). The colonized people become torn between two identities: the new dominant one and the one that belongs to their indigenous culture and heritage. This creates ambivalence in their characters, and develops a ‘third space’, in which they follow the traditions of two distinct cultures.

Long ago, this ethnocentrism has created an inner conflict in the minds of Eastern colonized people and developed their “inferiority complex” (Adler, 1927). They mimic Western behaviors and assimilate as a self-defense mechanism, disregarding their cultural norms and traditions which the West regards as ‘uncivilized’ and ‘savage.’ They, therefore, consciously, or unconsciously, assimilate by adopting Bhabha’s postcolonial concepts as a reaction to Western society’s stereotypes and ethnocentric views.

Through Homi Bhabha’s essential key concepts, “hybridity,” “ambivalence,” “mimicry,” and “third space” (1994), the relation between the colonizer and the colonized is well-examined. These concepts convey the ways the colonized have resisted the colonizer’s power and hegemony (Huddart, 2006) and reveal the extent to which the colonized individuals are influenced by the colonizer’s dominant culture.

Bhabha’s term *mimicry* denotes copying and imitating the dominant culture’s language, habits, speech, manners, behaviors, customs, and traditions. He maintains that mimicry “emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (1994). Furthermore, he explains how the colonized mimic the colonizers, who are in power, in order to be in a similar powerful position as they are; however, the outcome of their mimicry may come out ridiculous. He asserts that mimicry “represents an ironic compromise” since it is “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (1994). Therefore, he conveys how imitating the ones in power would be fragmented and could never turn out completely the same.

Although *the other’s* mimicry is not exactly the same copy, it somehow reproduces a new tool by which the colonized can resist the colonial discourse. The colonized becomes a “menace” (1994) that reveals the colonizer’s hegemony. He further emphasizes that not only does mimicry imply imitating the dominant culture’s traits and aspects, but also exaggerating this imitation, which differentiates it from mere simple imitation (El-Bardisy, 2020). Through mimicry, the colonized exposes the colonizer’s authority, “almost as though colonial authority inevitably embodies the seeds of its own destruction” (Ashcroft, 1998). Furthermore, the “resemblance and menace” (Bhabha, 1994) can transform both colonizing and colonized people into “hybrid” and “ambivalent” creating new opportunities for the colonized to resist the colonial discourse. Once the colonized understands the colonizer’s limitations and discloses his notions through this imitation process, he forms a new threatening hybridized identity.

The term hybridity refers to an integration of cultures that often occurs due to cross-cultural interactions. Bhabha states that “Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other denied of its authority - its rules of recognition” (1994). Accordingly, both mimicry and hybridity produce disturbance to the power and culture of the colonizer. Hybridity that results from the engagement between the colonizing and colonized cultures, disables the hegemony of the dominant culture and causes its downfall. Through intercultural engagements, these hybrid spaces can challenge the norms and shift power relations, causing change in people and societies. Therefore, both hybrid societies can become “two-powered” (Ashcroft et al., 1998). Bhabha also contends that all cultures are mixed and impure since they are constructed by hybridization. Thus, hybridizing is a reciprocal process that affects both the colonizer and the colonized during cross-cultural communication. The colonial “authority may also become hybridized when placed in a colonial context” (1998). Dr. Salman Khan and Shaukat Ali suggest that hybrid culture is a trial of enforcing first world countries’ cultures into third world countries (2020). However, hybridity might disable the hegemony of the dominant culture and cause its downfall.

Bhabha argues in *The Location of Culture*, that while hybridity looks at the ways people interact with and assimilate into various cultures, a new cultural space can arise in the spaces between dominant and dominated societies, (1994). This new cultural space is what Bhabha calls the *third space* that encourages the emergence of new principles, ideas, and perspectives; thus, redefines “new structures of authority” (1990). In other words, a new “third space” can emerge from this hybrid mixture of the two different cultures. This “third space” is where cultural boundaries blur and blend into each other, and a new hybrid culture emerges, combining the traits of both cultures (Milostivaya, 2017). When cross-cultural communication occurs between the colonized and the colonizer, they absorb both cultures, and each creates their own “third space”. According to Bhabha, all cultural systems are created in a space that he calls the “Third Space of enunciation”, or an in-between hybrid space, that is “neither the one thing nor the other”. This in-between space is a “production of something else besides, [where the identity of the colonized becomes] neither empty nor full, neither part nor whole” (1994).

Although the third space shares some similarities with the two spaces it has emerged from, it is entirely new and has new values and fresh perspectives (Bhandari, 2022). Eleanor Byrne expresses that Bhabha’s third space “is not

simply one thing or the other, nor both at the same time, but a kind of negotiation between both positions” (2019). Bhabha explains that hybridity is what creates a third space, where new thoughts and cultures emerge. (1990).

Further, hybridity arises in an *ambivalent* space, which contains the cultural identity (Ashcroft et al., 1998) since it is a mixture of cultures that occurs within multicultural spaces. According to Ameli in his book *Globalization, Americanization, and British Muslim Identity*, hybrid identities are prevalent among young immigrants, where they grow up with a mixture of traditional and modern cultures. This cultural mixture creates confusion in their identities; thus, they find themselves caught between two roots, two cultural beliefs, and “two opposing waves” (2002). Thus, due to intermixed cultural encounters between the colonizer and the colonized, hybridity creates a contradicting space in both counterparts’ cultural identities. Likewise, immigrants who experience cross-cultural encounters for a long time, establish a new intermixed identity in their own “third space”. However, their third space could blend contradicted cultures and ideas; thus, they may develop dual thoughts and “ambivalent” identities.

The term *ambivalence* originates in psychoanalysis whereby it describes having opposing views and contradictory feelings towards the same thing. Ambivalence is defined as a fluctuation between two things (Young, 1995). According to Bhabha, ambivalence indicates a dual interest to and a repulsion from an idea, a person, or an action. He exemplifies it as, “a constant fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite” (1994). Fitzgerald et al. describe the ambivalence as “the ability to hold two opposing ideas in the mind at the same time” (1945). Thus, the colonized oscillates between two opposing cultures which may develop an inner conflict within himself. When people immigrate from their homelands and arrive to a new host culture, they encounter some obstacles dealing with foreign people from another background. They come across different languages, customs, and traditions, and some of them experience anxiety and frustration, or what Kalervo Oberg calls a “culture shock” (1975).

Accordingly, some immigrants reject the new culture by separating themselves to preserve their culture only. However, some others integrate and co-exist with the dominant culture while maintaining their heritage. They attempt to, gradually, acculturate to new social and cultural levels. Meanwhile, others ignore their origins and, completely, assimilate into the new culture. By doing so, they mimic the dominant culture, creating a ‘melting pot’ society where everyone shares similar characteristics.

Challenges Facing Muslim Pakistani-American Minorities in the Melting Pot of the United States

Over seven million Pakistanis residing abroad, Pakistan has the sixth-largest diaspora. It comprises ninety-seven percent of Muslim citizens (Bigsby et al., 2019). According to the recent statistics of the “U.S. Census Bureau”, the total number of Pakistani minorities in the United States is above six hundred thousand. Muslims, especially post September 11, 2001, have been stereotypically identified as terrorists based on the misconceptions of their religion, race, or ethnicity. Edward Said maintains in *Covering Islam* that “Islam has always represented a particular menace to the West”. In addition, Said explains how Muslims have been portrayed by the media as “oil suppliers, as terrorists, and more recently, as bloodthirsty' mobs” (1981). Such negative portrayals have created Islamophobia and induced racism towards Muslims in Western societies. Thus, instead of valuing diversity of cultures and religions, the mainstream has been imposing conformity and uniformity. Muslim minorities in America underwent the law's powerful abusive power. They have been marginalized, monitored, demonized, and considered as a threat (Noureiddin, 2019).

According to the German researcher Heike Berner in his dissertation, “Home Is Where the Heart Is?”, “culture, history, and ethnicity” are essential factors that are deeply interrelated and greatly affect the formation of identity (2003). Subsequently, identity crisis has been a significant concern in most societies that include Muslim immigrants and minority groups. In the aftermath of 9/11, Muslim minorities have encountered a dilemma of either maintaining their cultural roots or assimilating to the mainstream in “justification for acceptance” by the society. Although around two-thirds of Muslims in the United States consider their faith primarily essential to them, they realize that migration comes with a price. Migrating does not only entail changing one's setting, but also transforming one's physical, intellectual and emotional status, which feels like a betrayal for one's roots (Bigsby et al., 2019).

For a long time, minorities from different cultural backgrounds have found refuge in the United States away from their countries' political wars or economic crises. Since then, having a hybrid identity has been an essential part of the American society for long. It has gathered numerous cultures from a wide range of nations to pursue the ‘American Dream’ and the freedom that it entails. Several ethnic minority groups immigrated there, hoping for prosperous careers and better opportunities. As a result, these ethnic minorities have created a multi-cultural society in the United States, turning it into a “melting pot”.

The “melting pot” portrays the immigrants’ cultural assimilation into the United States, which has become a “complicated fusion cuisine” (Shteyngart, 2004). Debbie A. Hanson states in *The Journal of American Folklore*, “Whether one views America as a melting pot, a salad bowl ... it is undoubtedly true that, aside from its Native American population, the United States is, and always has been, a country of immigrants” (2011). As minority groups try to blend into the mainstream, to make communication easier during cross-cultural encounters, they mimic the American norms and habits. Through their mimicry and assimilation, they create a “melting pot”, where everyone tries to fit in and match up the Western standards. As a result, they transform a diverse and heterogeneous community into a melting homogeneous one.

Although the “melting pot” implies to the integration of several cultures into one amalgamated culture, this assimilation process has had negative portrayals since the 1960s due to its “ethnocentric and patronizing imposition on minority peoples” (Alba & Nee, 2009). Due to racism and Islamophobia, Muslim minority groups feel compelled to imitate the dominant society. These dominant societies succeed in making people act and think in specific ways to promote a particular stereotypical image about a certain race or ethnic group (Abdel Samie & Abdel-Wahab, 621). Thus, Muslim minorities conceal their identities in fear of these societal demands and stereotypes.

These negative portrayals of Muslim minorities resonate with the Western gaze and ethnocentric view of colonized people as being the ‘other’, ‘savages’ and ‘less civilized’ people. Du Bois argues that because of this biased racism on marginalized people, they often start to reconsider their self-worth and image in society, which typically leads to self-condemnation and culture repulsion instead of condemning the mainstream society for such false stereotypes (2007). Thus, this ethnocentric gaze creates an ‘inferiority complex’ within these minority groups, leaving them compelled to fully assimilate into the white society and conceal their origins. According to W. Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole, “ethnic minority groups have to 'unlearn' their cultural traits, which are 'evaluated by the host society as inferior’” (as cited in Alba & Nee, 2009). Thus, these minority groups are considered inferiors who should give up their own roots and assimilate into the mainstream culture to have a better life in the United States.

Consequently, some Muslim immigrants, including Pakistani-Americans, conform to burying their roots in fear of Islamophobia and racism. Some of them even renounce their race and heritage. After erasing their traditions and origins, they no longer look like their real selves. However, they might do this to protect

themselves from racism, as well as to reach the American Dream, thinking that it would make them ascend to higher levels and obtain better opportunities in their lives.

As a response to such negative portrayals, some Muslim Pakistani American artists have created several autobiographical narratives and plays to correct such misinterpretations of Muslim minorities. Their work reflects controversial issues that hybrid Muslims encounter in immigration.

Ayad Akhtar (1970-): His Life and works

Ayad Akhtar is a renowned Pakistani-American playwright and novelist, who has made noteworthy contributions to the American theater. In dozens of languages, his novels and plays have been published and performed in many popular theatres. He has received many awards such as the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, the Edith Wharton Citation of Merit, and the American Academy of Arts (Schwartz, 2020). He grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, after his parents immigrated in the late 1960s from their hometown in Pakistan. Akhtar pursued his studies in film direction and theatre at the School for the Arts at Columbia University and Brown University (Benea, 2015). Akhtar's Pakistani American heritage endows him with a distinctive viewpoint on issues such as race, religion, and cultural assimilation (Asif, 2015). Akhtar considers himself “a narrative artist [not] a novelist or screenwriter or playwright (Sriram, 2014).

Akhtar has been influenced by his contemporaries Stephen Adly Guirgis and Quiara Alegria Hudes, reflecting the multifaceted nature of American society (Bigsby et al., 2019). This has affected his style of writing narratives, storytelling techniques, and character development. As a result, he has been able to create controversial plays that capture his audience. Ayad was deeply religious in his youth, but as he grew older, he wanted to fit in among the American society in Wisconsin. He believed that he did not belong to the same cultural space as his white friends. He had a tough time accepting his heritage and Muslim identity and instead tried to assimilate, especially post 9/11, which is the subject of most of his works (Levingston, 2014). His work has also been praised by critics because it reflects his personal Muslim American experience (Asif, 2015) and the struggles of Muslim immigrants in diaspora (Hasan & Noori, 2021).

Akhtar's plays, influenced by several dramatists and cultural factors, delve into subjects such as the identities of minorities, Islamophobia and ethnic and religious biases (Abdel Hakim, 2019). While viewed from a Muslim perspective, his themes are universal such as “religious devotion and self-awareness” (Levingston, 2014). His most successful Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Disgraced*,

whose dialogue "...bristles with wit and intelligence" (Isherwood), explores the complexities of Muslim identity in America after the tragic events of 9/11 (Cain, 2022). His other famous works include *American Dervish*, which has been translated into more than twenty languages, *The War Within* (2005); *The Who & The What* (2014); *The Invisible Hand* (2015) and many others (Ayad Akhtar (n.d.)). Akhtar has been awarded many fellowships, in addition to becoming a board director at Yaddo. In 2021, the New York State Writers Institute chose Akhtar to be the New York State Author (University of Scranton, 2022).

In his most famous play, *Disgraced* (2012), Akhtar challenges stereotypes and misconceptions about Muslim identity by addressing essential social and political problems. He explores ethnic identity, which highlights his commitment to displaying the diverse nature of identity in a multicultural society. In an interview with Stephen Moss of *The Guardian*, Akhtar says that all he did was to turn and look at what he was running away from, and then he came out with all the creativity (Moss, 2013). He merges both his autobiography with controversial social themes, which adds authenticity to his work.

In summary, Ayad Akhtar's development as a playwright is greatly inspired by his personal life, heritage, and experiences. His controversial plays have made him a prominent figure in American theater. Through his work, he tackles stereotypes, diverse identities, and different experiences that define individuals in cross-cultural communities.

The Ambivalent Third Space in Akhtar's *Disgraced* (2012)

Akhtar's acclaimed Off-Broadway play *Disgraced* (2012) depicts the conflicts that Muslim minorities undergo and the multiple conflicting identities they create while trying to integrate into the American society. He expresses how 9/11 has had an impact on his struggle with his own identity, questioning what he wants to be and what he is ashamed of (Pioneer Press, 2014). *Disgraced* provides a powerful insight into the challenges encountered by Islamic Americans post 9/11 era (Geier, 2012). It significantly portrays the aftermaths of their assimilation due to the discrimination and racial stereotypes they face. The characters exemplify different aspects of Bhabha's concepts as they experience significant changes in their lives during their imitation and assimilation processes. They are depicted as negatively affected by their religious and ethnic backgrounds. Instead of balancing their new "third space" with their hybrid culture, they mimic the Western mainstream and adopt the Eurocentric ideologies that view the Eastern culture as inferior to them. By surrendering to this colonial mindset, they aspire to achieve the American Dream which symbolizes strength and modernity. To

achieve this, they devalue themselves and look down on their culture with shame and inferiority.

Disgraced is a one-act play that includes four scenes. It takes place in the apartment of the Muslim American-born of Pakistani heritage, Amir Kapoor, and his American wife, Emily, on New York's Upper East Side. Amir is a lawyer who tries to have a partnership with the Jewish people who run his firm. Hence, to gain acceptance from the mainstream, he renounces Islam and condemns his identity. He pretends to be a Hindu Indian and changes his last name Abdullah to Kapoor to obscure his Pakistani Muslim identity. Contrary to him, his wife, Emily admires the Islamic traditions and is greatly influenced by the teachings of Islam, while also embracing her American culture and heritage. Amir's nephew, Abe, also imitates the Americans to avoid discrimination and Islamophobia. He tries to hide his real identity by changing his original birthname, Hussein; however, unlike Amir, he eventually turns back to his religious roots. He visits Amir to try to convince him to support a Muslim imam, who has been charged with funding a Palestinian organization, which is allegedly labelled as "terrorist organizations." Emily and Abe succeed to persuade Amir to defend the imprisoned Imam's case. Later on, Amir invites his African-American co-worker, Jory, and her Jewish curator husband, Isaac, to dinner at their apartment. They start with casual conversations and escalate to debates about race, anti-Semitism, and Islam. Amir finds out that Jory has received a promotion to a partner position at the Jewish law company instead of him due to the company's concerns about his integrity, false identity and association with the Muslim Imam's case. What makes matters worse is that he discovers that his wife has had an affair with their Jewish friend. Thus, Amir realizes that his assimilation and heritage denial were in vain. He spits in his Jewish friend's face and beats Emily until her face bleeds. In the end, Amir realizes that he has lost his wife and his job. He tries to reunite with her, but she refuses and leaves him in his misery and disgrace.

To assimilate into the American melting pot, the characters in the play adopt mimicry, but they face several obstacles and fail to be an exact copy of the mainstream nor integrate and be a part of the society. As Bhabha contends, copying the colonizer produces "a repetition with difference", and "the desire to emerge as authentic through mimicry . . . is the final irony of partial representation". Hence, replicating the colonizer's behaviour might appear as "mockery" (1994). It might be an ironic mimicry because it cannot be identical to the mainstream. According to Ania Loomba, in her book titled *Colonialism/postcolonialism*, "The process of replication is never complete or

perfect, and what it produces is not simply a perfect image of the original, but something changed because of the context in which it is being reproduced” (2002). Nonetheless, mimicry can be threatening to the colonizer and subversive of his colonial hegemony.

Therefore, they become caught into ambivalence and torn between their original culture and the dominant one which they wish to be part of. Through investigating the protagonist Amir's struggle with his hybrid identity and gaining acceptance across Western cultures, significant aspects of Homi Bhabha's mimicry, hybridity, third space, and ambivalence are uncovered within the play.

Akhtar presents Amir as a self-made man, who integrates with the norms of American society. However, behind this image, he is vulnerable and struggles with an inner conflict about his Pakistani heritage, feeling disconnected from it. Thus, by representing Amir's internal and external conflicts, the dramatist builds dramatic tension. Stephen Moss of *The Guardian* claims that the protagonist finds it difficult to balance his multiple identities as an Asian American versus an American, a Muslim versus a secularist, and an activist versus a passive observer of injustice (Moss, 2013).

Amir mimics the Americans, speaks a “perfect American accent” (Akhtar, 2012, p. 12), and wears a “six-hundred-dollar Charvet shirt” (p. 44). To assimilate completely, he changes his Muslim last name from Abdullah to Kapoor, a Punjabi name, to evade any religious or racial profiling. He further conceals his real identity and religion and pretends to be an Indian American in hopes of getting promoted at his Jewish firm. Consequently, thinking he is Hindu, his boss sends him a gift of “a bottle of scotch” and “a statue of Siva” (p. 16). Changing his last name also symbolizes his fear of becoming an outcast for his religion. He devalues his own heritage and renounces his Islamic roots to be approved. Amir's renunciation highlights his misconception of assimilation; he thinks that renouncing his cultural and religious roots is the key to embracing a more American identity and getting accepted by society.

Amir experiences major changes in his life after he attempts to mimic the American mainstream. His mimicry builds up his new hybrid identity. Subsequently, he creates a new “third space,” that has both cultures' ambivalent and contradicting ideas. Thus, his new third space increases his inner conflict and struggle to accept himself. He develops what Du Bois calls a “double consciousness” which makes him incapable of seeing himself except through other people's eyes (2007). Therefore, Amir becomes torn between the two cultures and experiences a sense of “two-ness,” two distinct identities and two

divergent thoughts (p. 9). His third space is now full of ambivalence and opposing ideas, that are portrayed throughout the play.

Further, satire is a central device in Akhtar's characterization of Amir as he prefers wearing expensive six-hundred-dollar shirts, but his dinner party takes place in his apartment, which is very simple and has "subtle flourishes of the Orient" (Akhtar, 2012, p. 11). This scene also highlights his ambivalence since his apartment's Oriental atmosphere contradicts with his rejection of his Eastern culture. Also, his ambivalence is shown in his contradiction with Islamic traditions, as he drinks "wine" and eats "pork tenderloin" (p. 38). He tries to represent success as it is viewed in the West by eating chorizo and drinking wine (Soloski, 2012). In addition, he condemns his faith and says, "I'm not Muslim. I'm an *apostate*. Which means I've renounced my faith" (Akhtar, 2012, p. 57) and falsely depicts Islam as "a backward way of thinking...comes from the desert. From a group of tough -minded" (p. 33). Meanwhile, he ambivalently says he is proud of "those folks in Middle East dying for values you were taught were purer and stricter and truer..." (p. 38). He also contradicts himself by asserting that the Quran matters and by referencing what the prophet says about paintings and dogs in the following exchange:

AMIR (CONT'D): And paintings don't matter. Only the Quran matters.

EMILY: Paintings don't matter?

AMIR: I didn't mean it like that.

EMILY: How did you mean it?

AMIR: Honey. You're aware of what the Prophet said about them?

EMILY: I am, Amir.

JORY: What did he say?

AMIR: He used to say angels don't enter a house where there are pictures and/or dogs. (p. 54)

This scene reflects what Bhabha calls a "slippage" of mimicry (1998), since it highlights Amir's ambivalent third space, and inner conflict. No matter how hard he tries to contempt his roots, he feels a sense of belonging to his Islamic heritage. His duality and ambivalence are clear when he talks to his cousin Abe about his name change:

AMIR: I'm talking about you being called Abe Jensen.

Just lay off it with me and your folks at least.

ABE: It's gotta be one thing or the other. I can't be all mixed up.

EMILY (Off Amir's reaction): Amir. You changed your name, too.

ABE: You got lucky.

You didn't have to change your first name.

Could be Christian. Jewish.

Plus, you were born here. It's different. (Akhtar, 2012, p.18)

He again contradicts himself and criticizes his cousin's mimicry for changing his Muslim name from Hussein to Abe, while he himself has changed his last name to hide his Muslim origins. Abe depicts his mimicry and sense of inferiority towards his origins. He justifies changing his name by referencing the Quran. He tells Amir how lucky he is that his first name could be thought of as Christian or Jewish instead of Muslim to avoid racial profiling. In contrast to Amir, Abe was not born in America; thus, he does not hold citizenship, though he wishes to.

Moreover, Amir's ambivalence is evident in his relationship with Emily as his renunciation for his Islamic heritage contradicts with her deep interest in his Islamic background and culture. Her interest in Islam forces him to face his own reality and reminds him of his origins and of post 9/11 prejudices. This increases Amir's identity crisis and his urge to hide his true self; thus, making him feel more trapped in his feelings of inferiority and prejudice. He claims that "the next terrorist attack is probably gonna come from some guy who more or less looks like me" (p. 31), which shows his perception of himself as a terrorist in the eyes of American society. Edward Said states in *Culture and Imperialism*, that hybrid identity leads to the suffering of diasporic people, "... the net effect of cultural exchange between partners conscious of inequality is that the people suffer" (1994). As Amir builds up his third space through mimicry and assimilation, he suffers from feelings of inferiority toward the mainstream, which further intensifies his identity crisis.

The Trap of Inferiority in Amir's Third Space

Akhtar symbolizes Amir's marriage to Emily as a gateway to his mimicry in pursuit of the American Dream. He depicts Emily as Amir's key to Americanization, as he mentions that, Franz Fanon states in *Black Skin, White Mask* that by having a white woman, one gains access to the white culture. Fanon expresses:

I wish to be acknowledged not as black but as white. Now-and this is a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged-who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white: love. I am loved like a white man.

I am a white man.

Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to

total realization. . .

I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. (1986)

Furthermore, the dramatist introduces a different form of symbolism in Emily's painting of Amir as Diego Velázquez's Portrait of Juan de Pareja, both at the beginning and end of the story, which serves as "a framing device" for the play (Al-Amro, 2021). The painting conveys Emily's 'white saviour complex' (2021, p. 8809), and her perception of Amir's 'mimicry' and 'inferiority complex'. She tries to draw him in the image of a wealthy man, who is in fact a slave in disguise of a rich man. Emily's painting of Amir exemplifies his mimicry and masquerade, not his real identity. In the painting, she draws him as a brown man wearing a white businessman's suit and tie. Through her eyes, she transforms Amir from a brown slave into a white elite. The painting declares her feeling and reaction towards the waiter's racist gaze to Amir at the restaurant:

EMILY: A man, a waiter, looking at you.

AMIR: Looking at us.

EMILY: Not seeing you. Not seeing who you really are. Not until you started to deal with him. And the deftness with which you did that. You made him see that gap. Between what he was assuming about you and what you really are.

AMIR: The guy's a racist. So what?

EMILY: Sure. But I started to think about the Velázquez painting. And how people must have reacted when they first saw it. They think they're looking at a picture of a Moor. An assistant.

AMIR: A slave.

EMILY: Fine. A slave.

But whose portrait—it turns out—has more nuance and complexity than his renditions of kings and queens. And God knows how many of those he painted. (Akhtar, 2012, p. 12)

Thus, Emily, the white 'colonizer', secretly views Amir, the 'other', as a 'slave', but her 'white saviour complex' makes her try to whitewash him so that he looks similar to the 'colonizer', thinking that this would protect him from facing racist looks like the waiter's. Therefore, Emily contributes to shaping Amir's third space and constructing his hybrid identity by hiding his real self. Through Amir's mimicry of white people's attire, Emily tries to cover the fact that he is seen as a 'slave' and makes him match the American standards. Amir conforms to Emily's construction of his identity and his Americanized self, which contradicts who he really is. By trying to mimic the whites, Amir submits to the Western gaze and

believes that he is a 'slave' and inferior to the whites. Thus, to be in the same whites' superiority level, he mimics them and forms a fragmented third space, but, simultaneously, struggles with ambivalence as he tries to disregard his origins. Lopamudra Basu argues that "Amir, following his predecessor Juan de Pareja, is seeking approval of white American society and his gaze is directed at Emily and other representatives of that group who hold power and whom he is always trying to appease" (2016).

Amir tries to escape from his reality and mask his new Americanized self in order to please his wife, friends, and every white person around him. However, he feels a sense of contempt for both his origins and the new Americanization he tries to mimic. This duality resonates with Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and ambivalence, as he navigates between the two cultures, but his mimicry makes his identity incomplete. Thus, he lives in a third space comprising of his two cultures but filled with fragments of belonging to neither cultures and feelings of self-contempt and inferiority towards his Eastern heritage. This sense of inferiority makes Amir compelled to hide any traces that belong to his Pakistani origins and chooses to Americanize himself in every possible way.

Amir's attempts at full assimilation may reflect a desire for self-fulfillment through fantasizing about being a white man. He only wants to satisfy his inner self and his ego to feel that he is just as white as other Western people with all the privileges they have at work and in society. His inferiority complex of feeling less than other white people around him has made him loudly reject himself and act as if he is completely a white American.

The Western gaze and white supremacist ideologies have led Amir to dismiss his Eastern roots and attempt to assimilate through whitewashing. Amir suffers from feeling inferior to the white, and that his original culture cannot blossom or be civilized.

Akhtar represents this Western gaze in the climax scene of Amir and Emily's dinner party with their friends, Isaac and Jory. During the rising action, the suspense intensifies, and the dramatic mood becomes tense when they discuss the symbolism of Emily's Velázquez's portrait. As the conversation unfolds, Akhtar foreshadows Amir's conflict and inferiority complex. He represents the white Western gaze through Isaac's eyes since he only sees Amir in a racist stereotypical image. Isaac expresses to Emily that Amir is a "slave," who "finally has the master's wife" (Akhtar, 2012, p. 63), referring to her painting. Another scene also foreshadows Isaac's discrimination towards Amir when they speak about his Charvet shirt:

ISAAC: So, there you are, in your six-hundred-dollar Charvet shirt, like Velázquez's brilliant apprentice-slave in his lace collar, adorned in the splendours of the world you're now so clearly a part of... And yet...

AMIR: Yeah?

ISAAC: The question remains.

AMIR: The question?

ISAAC: Of your place. For the viewer, of course. Not you. It's a painting, after all... (p. 44)

Isaac, symbolizing the white colonizer, feels that Amir's mimicry forms what Bhabha calls a "resemblance and menace" to him (1994, p. 86). He realizes that Amir wears expensive clothes and has a beautiful American wife, thus might be in the same status as him, which foreshadows "the menace of mimicry" (p. 88). However, to him, Amir's mimicry remains fragmented and is just a "mockery" (p. 86) of himself. He still considers Amir "inferior" and "barbaric", no matter how expensive Amir wears. He believes that Amir cannot be equal to him in his financial and social status. For him, Amir's expensive shirts cannot hide his self-deprecation and inferiority complex. Isaac symbolizes the white man that has imposed himself and his hegemony on the colonized just to make them feel less than themselves. These Western ideologies have rendered the Eastern the constant need to assimilate and even surpass the white society, although they internally feel that no matter how hard they try to assimilate, they can never be in the same status or equal to the white. Therefore, the Eastern consistently undergo a feeling of insufficiency, accompanied by an urge to assimilate to the dominant colonizer. Likewise, Amir symbolizes the colonized who has fallen into a trap of his inferiority complex in his new third space, where he is forced to be biased to the new white culture and reject his indigenous culture. He has unconsciously colonized himself by degrading his own identity which is formed as a third space instead of embracing it. He internally oppresses himself and reflects the negative stereotypes about colonized people, believing that he is naturally inferior due to being from an Eastern culture. He believes in Said's argument in *Orientalism*, which critiques the Western racist notion that portrays "the Orient as being always the same, unchanging, uniform, and radically peculiar object" (1979), and that the white is the civilized superior with the upper hand. The West has imposed these ideologies of themselves as being more intelligent and more civilized, thus the Eastern have been unconsciously driven into these beliefs of being eternally colonized, less intelligent, and that they can never be as privileged as the white

colonizer. This inferiority creates an ambivalent third space identity that makes the colonized torn between embracing their own culture which is portrayed as ‘less civilized’ or staying in the same spot of being marginalized while trying to fit into the mainstream.

In Amir’s case, he constantly puts himself into comparison with the mainstream. He cannot change his race or color; however, he tortures himself by comparing himself to his white coworkers and friends. This torturous comparison is what Mel Robbins depicts in her most famous theoretical book *Let Them* as, “upward comparison,” which is the tendency to compare yourself to people that you think are superior to you in some unchangeable aspects of their life. She further explains that research shows that this upward comparison “destroys your self-esteem”. Robbins conveys that one cannot stop from engaging in this self-destructive comparison except when they choose to embrace what they already have and “stop obsessing over the cards in someone else’s hands” or it will make them lose everything (2024, p. 112-113). Therefore, Amir keeps torturing himself by mimicking the whites, in order to nail the promotion at the Jewish law firm.

During the falling action, Amir’s cousin Abe, after several trials of mimicry, fails to balance his third space nor integrate his Islamic origins. He aspires to have an American citizenship like Amir and get as ‘American as American gets’ (Akhtar, 2012, p. 19). He depicts himself as inferior for being born in an Eastern country as Pakistan. He turns to fundamentalism and gets in an FBI interrogation. However, in the last scene, he expresses how the West has disgraced them, as Muslims, as he says:

ABE (CONT’D): For three hundred years they’ve been taking our land, drawing new borders, replacing our laws, making us want be like them.

Look like them. Marry their women.

They disgraced us.

They disgraced us.

And then they pretend they don’t understand the rage we’ve got?
(p. 76)

Abe finally realizes that he has fallen into the trap of his inferiority and realizes that his mimicry has been in vain. When he and Emily seek Amir’s assistance in defending the Muslim Imam at the trial, they turn Amir’s life upside down. As a result, the Jewish law firm regards him as anti-Semitic and promotes Jory, Isaac’s wife, instead of Amir.

In the end, Akhtar represents the dénouement of the plot when Emily exits the stage and leaves Amir. He sits in silence and “takes a searching long look” at Emily’s Portrait of him (p. 78). This long pause symbolizes his isolation, representing his fragmented third space. Amir feels disgraced as well, as he “betrays his faith and is betrayed by it” (Bigsby et al., 2019). He is left all alone after he loses his job and beats his wife for her infidelity. He beats Emily brutally with resentment, blaming her for making him play a role in a game where the rules were out of his control (2019, p. 18). Amir is left in isolation, feeling out of place in both worlds and not completely embraced by either.

This teaches Amir a lesson; he should have created a balanced third space and embraced his identity rather than trying to be something else other than himself. It further highlights that there are things that one cannot change, such as their race, origins, and colour; thus, one should embrace themselves. As a hybrid immigrant, Amir should embrace his race and culture in order to create a third space that has a balanced mixture of both cultures, instead of trying to change what cannot be changed.

Conclusion

Amir, as a hybrid immigrant, could not create a balanced third space by integrating both his new culture and his indigenous one. Thus, he falls into the trap of his inferiority and fails to embrace the two different cultures in his third space. To balance his new third space in his assimilation journey, he could have retained his roots, customs and traditions instead of denying them. However, he assimilates by doing what Bhabha calls “a repetition with difference” (1994, p. 88). Like many minorities, because of his fear of being racialized and outcasted for his religion, he takes the wrong route where he buries his roots and whitewashes himself which turns out as Bhabha says “almost the same, but not quite” (p. 86). He denounces his heritage and marries an American girl, thinking that this would contribute to his mimicry and prosperity in his career, only to find himself trapped by his inferiority complex. Although Amir feels compelled to assimilate to gain acceptance and fulfil the American Dream, when he loses everything, he realizes that his denounce for his culture and religion has been in vain. It becomes apparent that Amir was fooled by thinking he was living the Westernized life he dreamt of. He recognizes that his feelings of self-deprecation and inferiority led to his downfall, as he has turned his mimicry into “mockery” (p. 86). He has lost everything because of making himself a mere copy of the people around him; thus, they no longer respect him.

Finally, Akhtar accentuates the fact that if Amir had self-recognition and identification of his own heritage, people would have approved him, instead of abandoning him for his masquerade and fragmented identity. He maintains that if one disregards their own roots, they shall not expect others to respect them. Amir should have embraced his third space by respecting his culture and heritage. Since Amir has already disrespected his roots and disgraced himself, people around him felt free to cross the line and disgrace him as well. He deprecated himself to please others, but once they had the chance to humiliate him, they did not hesitate to do so. He contradicted himself that he could no longer tell what is right from wrong. He renounced Islam just to seek approval from the host society; thus, he disgraced his own roots multiple times to be accepted; nonetheless, all what he got was rejection from his friends and co-workers. Therefore, Akhtar emphasizes that if one does not respect their roots, nobody will respect them. According to Akhtar and as it is apparent in his play *Disgraced*, to live as an immigrant, one should balance between the new culture and their own heritage, and create a third space that combines both cultures without contradicting their principles or beliefs.

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