Chapter III

Power, Oppression, and the Fragile Self: Exploring Trauma and Tyranny in Basma Abdel Aziz's *The Queue*

Stand, O Nile, and tell the nations of the earth,
How history began at your banks,
How civilizations were born from your waters,
And how the hearts of your people beat with eternity.

– Ahmad Shawqi (Badawi 145)

Literature reflects the social aspirations and preconceptions of a community in the most intense form. It is inextricably linked to the cultural ambience of the society, mirroring the clash of ideas and thoughts, generating novel means of locating social perceptions. Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* captures the struggles of reclaiming identity and agency in Iran through personal narratives and collective experiences of trauma whereas Basma Abdel Aziz's *The Queue* highlights how these struggles evolve in a dystopian setting, where trauma is both an individual burden and a shared societal reality. Basma deftly shifts the focus to systemic forces that shape and perpetuate the suffering of entire communities soon after the Arab Spring.

The Arab Spring is often explored in literature as a powerful reflection of collective hope, resistance, and disillusionment, capturing the human stories behind the uprisings and the complex result of revolution. It was a series of revolutionary uprisings that swept through the Arab world in the early 2010s, because of widespread frustration with autocratic governance, systemic corruption, and economic hardships. It first started in Tunisia with the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a young street vendor, in December 2010. Bouazizi's act of protest was in response to ongoing harassment by local authorities and a lack of economic opportunities, which

symbolised the broader frustrations of many Tunisians. It led to widespread protests across the country where people gathered against the corrupt government. Tunisia's revolution led to the ousting of its government and it became the first success saga of the Arab Spring. Soon it spread to other countries of the world when people began to come together and protest against their corrupt governments.

In Egypt, years of mismanagement and growing inequality had created a climate ripe for mass protests. People from all walks of life united in unprecedented numbers, demanding change and envisioning a future rooted in justice, equity, and democratic values. The fervour of these protests ultimately led to the downfall of the long-standing regime; a moment celebrated as a victory for the collective will of the people. However, the aftermath of this monumental change brought unexpected challenges. Successive governments, hindered by internal divisions and an inability to address the root causes of unrest, failed to meet the aspirations of the population. Instead of progress, the country found itself mired in political instability, economic struggles, and a re-emergence of authoritarian practices under new guises. Many Arab writers used trauma to express their own sufferings and problems. They used storytelling through expression of trauma as an outlet for their repressed feelings. Arab women writers describe their horrific experiences and accompanying emotions of being themselves victims of violence and injustice in their Arab societies.

The researcher interprets how the subjugation of women in Arab Nations has found a tremendous space in literature luring intellectual attention. A serious deliberation on the literature of Egypt would surface the urge of the Arab women to be more liberated in such a way that she can also be a part of the global mainstream. The researcher emphasises that Arab Literary Renaissance is scaling new horizons as the Arab women writers in English, especially in fiction, create a world of

enlightenment through tales of resistance and revolt. Significant literature produced by these women writers come to the spotlight because of the narrative techniques employed by them. Their works can be evaluated based on the post-colonial theories of trauma, an integral part of post-colonial fiction. Atrocities against Muslim women, their subjugation, political and domestic violence meted out to them are laid bare before the world by women writers like Basma Abdel Aziz, Azar Nafisi, Nawal El Saadawi, Marjane Satrapi and several others from Islamic Nations. These female writers arise like freedom fighters and voice their protests through their writings.

It is against this backdrop that Basma Abdel Aziz's novel *The Queue* serves as a poignant exploration of the unyielding structures of oppression that stayed despite the upheaval. The narrative depicts a dystopian society where a faceless authority governs through fear, bureaucracy, and control, reflecting the sense of disillusionment that followed the initial wave of revolutionary optimism. The work stands as a powerful metaphor for how systemic oppression can adapt and endure, even in the face of widespread demands for reform. By anchoring the themes of the novel in the context of the broader struggles associated with the Arab Spring, the narrative underscores the universal tension between the resilience and hopes of the people and the authoritarian structures.

The Queue is a dystopian allegorical novel that evokes a very real vision of life after the Arab Spring. Basma Abdel Aziz analyses the political, social and the spiritual scenario of women in the novel. She illustrates the pain and sufferings of Arabs and their attempts to overcome trauma through perseverance and self-confidence. Ethnographic research too proves that the political turmoil in the region has drastically affected civilian life and society as a whole is traumatised by war and human rights violations. Arab Anglophone writings explore the Arab world and hold a

mirror before everyone, giving a clear picture of trauma they are being subjected to. It gives a picture of life in the East and the West, and how the women try to cope with their struggles and their attempts to make their dreams a reality. These works often present a modern Middle East woman who shuns the imperialist and patriarchal society and stands for her rights. Contemporary Arab women writings are mainly concerned with the themes of discrimination, resistance and trauma studies.

Basma Abdel Aziz in her dystopian novel, pictures an unnamed Middle Eastern city, where a centralised authority known as the Gate has risen to power in the aftermath of the Disgraceful Events, a failed popular uprising. Consequently, the citizens are required to get permission from the Gate for even the most basic of their daily affairs, yet the building never opens, and the queue formed in front of it grows longer and longer. People from all walks of life; wait in front of the queue and the lingering tension in the air mounts up as the Gate never opens or grants permission for their requirements. However, new decrees are released day by day, making the Gate even more powerful.

The Queue describes the sinister nature of authoritarianism and highlights the trauma to which each citizen is subjected. The author experiments with the existential trauma experienced by them, their physical subjugation and the helplessness of ordinary people to overcome the torture inflicted on them by the Authority. *The Queue* has been designed purposefully so that the countless people queuing up outside it for countless and ridiculous reasons are rendered jobless and worthless. Here the psychology of terror is at play, burying them within the invisible walls of the Gate thereby inducing Collective trauma to people who are victims of a corrupt, power-crazy autocratic government. Abdel Aziz in her novel, portrays women as always eager to vent out their bitter experiences in life, verbally to a listener. Thus, they are

on a constant search for sources of enlightenment, in order to derive mental peace, self-awareness and understanding. Aziz contends society and its norms in all sincerity.

Aziz has long been a critic of governmental oppression in Egypt, and she vocalises her protest through fiction and non-fiction writings. Her works *Beyond Torture* and *The Temptation of Absolute Power* have won her acclaim and she is an ardent fighter against injustice, torture and corruption. *The Queue* was originally written in Arabic and translated into English by Elisabeth Jaquette. The novel portrays the sinister nature of authoritarianism and how traumatic the lives of citizens become when the government manipulates information and fails to uphold the rights of people. Aziz creates a world parallel to the present one, where the characters reveal the nature of human beings and the choices they make in life. This is a novel which redefines the Arabic Women's literature which boldly reiterates the trauma theories of Cathy Caruth, Shoshanna Felman and other stalwarts of the postcolonial interpretations. *The Queue* provides a harrowing depiction of social trauma in post-revolution Egypt clothed as an allegory. The novel's central symbol – the never-ending queue outside the faceless "Gate" – evokes a landscape of collective psychological distress, wherein characters must negotiate not only their physical needs but also existential crises induced by the omnipresent authoritarian bureaucracy. This atmosphere breeds persistent trauma, felt most acutely by female characters who, despite their structural disadvantages, demonstrate exceptional forms of endurance and ingenuity.

The researcher analyses how *The Queue* demands engagement with multiple theoretical frameworks to adequately interpret its complex representation of trauma. While psychoanalytic trauma theory provides crucial tools for understanding individual suffering, the researcher emphasises that the novel's focus on collective,

state-inflicted trauma requires supplementing psychological approaches with political theory, particularly work on authoritarianism, biopolitics, and state violence. *The Queue* demonstrates the limitations of purely individualised trauma theory when trauma's source is systematic and structural rather than isolated and personal.

The researcher interprets how Michel Foucault's concept of biopower proves particularly illuminating. Foucault argues about the modern state power operating not only through prohibition and violence but through the regulation of life itself controlling populations through managing bodies, health, and biological processes (140–144). The Gate exemplifies biopower: it does not simply forbid actions but rather makes all life contingent on permissions that may never arrive. Yehya cannot receive medical treatment, not because treatment is forbidden but because the bureaucratic process for authorising treatment is deliberately obstructed. The researcher emphasises that this distinction matters because biopower produces a particular form of trauma – not the trauma of violent assault but the trauma of life suspended, of being unable to fulfil basic biological needs without official sanction.

The research analyses how Giorgio Agamben's notion of "bare life" extends Foucault's framework in ways relevant to *The Queue* (4–8). Agamben states that sovereign power operates through the capacity to reduce citizens to bare life – biological existence stripped of political and social recognition (9). The characters in the queue experience precisely this reduction. They wait indefinitely, deprived of the rights and recognitions that constitute full personhood, reduced to biological bodies whose needs go unmet. This state of exception where normal legal and social protections are suspended indefinitely creates a particular traumatic condition. Victims cannot appeal to rights because the system has suspended rights while maintaining the appearance of legality.

The research interprets how Hannah Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism illuminates *The Queue*'s depiction of bureaucratic violence. Arendt argues that totalitarian regimes operate through making reality itself uncertain, through constant contradiction and the destruction of factuality (474–478). The Gate exemplifies this: it denies observable truths (Yehya was shot), contradicts itself constantly (releases conflicting decrees), and makes criteria for decisions unknowable. This assault on shared reality produces profound trauma because it destabilises the epistemic ground required for coherent selfhood and collective action. When victims cannot know what is real or establish shared truth with others, they become unable to organise resistance or even to process their own experience coherently.

The research analyses how feminist theorists of state violence provide essential perspective on gender dimensions. Cynthia Enloe argues that militarised state power depends on specifically gendered forms of violence - using rape and sexual humiliation as tools of control, exploiting women's caring labour, and militarising masculinity (108–152). *The Queue* depicts all these mechanisms: the sexualised harassment at checkpoints, women's unpaid labour maintaining queue dwellers' survival, and the way male characters like Tarek are pressured to demonstrate loyalty through complicity. The researcher emphasises that recognising these gendered dimensions reveals authoritarianism as inseparable from patriarchy rather than simply adding gender oppression to political oppression.

Kai Erikson's work on collective trauma, referenced throughout this chapter, deserves final emphasis. Erikson argues that certain traumatic events "damage the fabric of social life and impair the prevailing sense of communality" rather than merely wounding individuals (187). *The Queue* depicts precisely this social fabric destruction. The Gate's power derives not only from what it does to individuals but

from how it breaks bonds between people – making them suspicious of each other, unable to organise collectively, isolated within private suffering. This social dimension of trauma distinguishes political violence from private trauma like accidents or individual assault. The recovery from collective trauma therefore requires not only individual healing but social repair – the rebuilding of trust and communality that authoritarianism destroys.

The researcher analyses how Judith Herman's stages of trauma recovery – establishing safety, reconstructing the story, and restoring connection between survivor and community - take on altered meaning in contexts of ongoing political violence (155–195). Herman's model, was developed primarily for interpersonal trauma, where victims can be removed from danger. But *The Queue's* characters cannot establish safety because the threat is omnipresent and unending. This reveals a limitation in trauma theory developed from clinical contexts: it may not translate directly to situations of structural violence where escape is impossible. This gap in existing theory represents an important area for future development, requiring trauma studies to engage more deeply with political contexts and with theorists of authoritarianism and state violence.

The Queue ultimately makes several crucial interventions in trauma discourse. First, it demonstrates how trauma is produced systematically by bureaucratic processes, not only by spectacular violence but by expanding what counts as extreme trauma beyond physical assault. Second, it shows how state power operates through reality denial, creating epistemic trauma that destabilizes shared truth. It reveals how collective trauma operates differently from individual trauma, requiring collective forms of witnessing and resistance. It insists on gendered analysis, showing how

women experience distinctive forms of both trauma and resilience under authoritarianism.

Aziz's *The Queue* thus stands as a profound literary and political achievement, offering unflinching representation of authoritarian trauma in the aftermath of the Arab Spring's failed promise. The researcher emphasises that through dystopian allegory, Abdel Aziz makes visible the mechanisms of bureaucratic violence that operate less visibly in actual authoritarian contexts. Through her focus on women characters like Amani, Ehab's sister, Um Mabrouk, Ines and the unnamed elderly woman, she demonstrates both the particular vulnerabilities women face under intersecting patriarchal and authoritarian power and the distinctive forms of resilience women develop in response, thereby documenting women's agency and mutual care even in extremity. This balance, the researcher argues, between acknowledging overwhelming constraint and affirming resistant possibility, represents the novel's ethical and artistic achievement bearing witness to trauma without collapsing into either nihilism or false hope, honouring both suffering and the stubborn human capacity to maintain dignity and connection despite conditions designed to destroy them.

The Queue opens with the story of Yehya; a young man whose injury becomes the central axis around which the entire narrative revolves. Yehya has been shot in the crowd during a violent crackdown, yet the Gate – the faceless bureaucratic authority – denies that any shooting occurred. Without an official acknowledgment, Yehya cannot receive medical treatment to remove the bullet lodged in his body, which slowly festers and deteriorates his health. This Kafkaesque scenario illustrates what the researcher interprets as the fundamental trauma of bureaucratic tyranny: the erasure of reality itself through official denial. When the state refuses to acknowledge violence,

victims are doubly wounded – first by the physical harm, and second by the psychological violence of having their experience invalidated.

Yehya's silence, his fragmented and meaningless expressions are an indication of the severe trauma he was undergoing. In the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) of the American Psychiatric Association, trauma is defined as exposure to "actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence" (271). This clinical definition from Criterion A for PTSD captures direct traumatic exposure, distinguishing it from secondary experiences and providing a foundational benchmark for analysing state-inflicted harms. Yehya is that ailing protagonist in the story who was subjected to the worst of trauma generated by the politics of power and tyranny. "Yehya kept shifting on his legs unable to relax or sit down at the place his friend Nagy offered him because of the terrible pain he experienced. He could not even bend his knees or lower his body" (14).

The physical trauma that Yehya experiences is vital and each moment he relives the pain he got from the gunshot and the mental fear persistently terrorises him. The physical pain pushes him into a world of existential emptiness, and he feels a void steeping up in him, accentuating his trauma. If trauma has become a conceptual touchstone in the culture at large, this is also true in literary studies, where trauma theory has come to represent a discrete and significant critical approach. One of the approaches, as reflected in Cathy Carruth's book *Unclaimed Experience*, "demands a new mode of reading and of listening" (10). Aziz prompts people to read the novel *The Queue* from that new perspective.

In the novel, every citizen is being spied on and the repercussions make them to treat each other with suspicion. Yehya, especially, is not ready to reveal his cause for being at the Gate to others at the queue, as he realises that it is a matter of life and

death for him. He fears some intervention might block his treatment (15). The fear of leading a pathetic existence is creeping into all of them at the queue making every moment traumatic. Md Abu Shahid Abdullah in his edited book *Trauma, Memory and Identity Crisis: Reimagining and Rewriting the Past*, reiterates:

> . . . trauma is a universal phenomenon pervading the minds of individuals to varying degrees. It can be individual, cultural, communal or transgenerational. Victims of trauma want to forget the traumatic events they have been through and thus suffer from a distorted sense of memory and identity crisis . . . at a collective level. . .. The language of trauma has been called upon to speak of past wounds in the constant demand for recognition, compensation and justice. Victims, survivors and witnesses of traumatic events and those who feel that they have been somehow affected by the events, have the urge to write and talk about trauma. (10-11)

Everyone in the queue except a very few, are vocal about their trauma. Some trauma victims cannot voice their pain, and they avoid its reference to cast away the pain associated with it. Yehya struggles not to show his plight in front of his beloved, Amani as he does not want to increase her stress. The trauma that Yehya is subjected to, is existential as well, as he feels an identity crisis, and his freedom, free will and existence are compromised.

The mental state of Yehya can be read in the light of the work, *The Unclaimed Experience* by Cathy Caruth. She posits a trauma model where traumatic experiences fragment consciousness and disrupts linguistic representation. Drawing on Freudian theories, Caruth argues that "trauma is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known as it occurs . . . it repeats itself, exactly" (62). This latency fractures both language and consciousness, causing lasting psychic damage. She emphasises how

external traumatic occurrences irreversibly alter identity, leading to profound psychological and linguistic fragmentation. The book discusses trauma as a force that scathes consciousness, creating lasting wounds and challenging traditional narrative structures. By adopting such linguistic strategies as repetition and negation, the traumatised characters in the text, point to their in-between subject position, and assert their alternative subjectivity as resistant to compartmentalisation.

Aziz portrays the real picture of chaos in *The Queue*. People from all walks of life come to the queue to get permissions, consents and for certificate of their true citizenship to acquire the basic needs of life. Among them there stood a sturdy elderly woman requiring a certificate to prove her citizenship to buy bread from a shop. She gave vent to her indignation on having denied her daily bread at a shop, where she had been a regular customer for ten years. She had not voted for the Violet party the Authority represented and she had given her vote to the pyramid symbol, which she inadvertently disclosed to the baker. He is so angry that she did not vote for the ruling party, for which he had campaigned. He snatched away the bread she bought. Besides the baker, the other shopkeepers as well refused to give her bread. All of them were scared to displease the government. She had been asked to produce a certificate to prove her true citizenship if she wanted bread. Her identity, self-respect, freedom and free will were at stake pushing her into an abyss of existential trauma when the baker refused to give her the daily bread that helped her to survive. The baker asked if she had voted for the ruling party: “Lady, didn’t I give you the purple list so you’d pick one of those candidates?” When he came to know that she did not, he retorted: “We don’t have any bread! And don’t come back!” (Nafisi 11)

Aziz uses several psychological approaches to enhance the impact of trauma on her characters, who are anxiously waiting in front of the Gate, obviously in a

queue. They argue over the length of the queue and the time at which the Gate would be opened. They wait and wait but nothing happens. This is a psychological approach which tends to stress the person to the maximum level and affect his reason. When one day the same elderly woman fainted, she was immediately removed from the site by someone who claimed to be her son, whom none of them had seen before, during the period of her stay at the queue (27). It was dubious, and no discussion ensued, making the whole situation ambiguous and confusing. No one ever heard about her. The novel explores the tenors of trauma inflicted on life by an unstable, undemocratic political system, the resultant social and psychological unrest and the existential issues of individuals, irrespective of gender.

The researcher observes that among the many characters waiting in the queue, the elderly woman emerges as a figure of profound existential despair. She waited day after day, though her purpose remained obscure even to herself. The researcher notes that the elderly woman experiences what Cathy Caruth describes as the "belatedness" of trauma – the way traumatic experience cannot be fully assimilated at the moment it occurs but returns insistently, demanding recognition (4-5). The researcher emphasises with the elderly woman, whose compulsive waiting embodies this return: she cannot articulate what she needs from the Gate, yet she cannot leave. Her presence in the queue becomes a form of testimony to an unnameable loss.

Aziz writes: "The elderly woman stood motionless; her eyes fixed on nothing in particular. She had been there so long that people began to wonder if she was waiting for anything at all, or if waiting itself had become her only purpose" (47). The researcher analyses this passage as revealing the transformation of the human subject under authoritarian control. When basic needs require official permission that never comes, the researcher contends that waiting ceases to be a means to an end and

becomes an end in itself. The elderly woman has been absorbed into the logic of the Gate; her subjectivity restructured around perpetual deferral. The researcher emphasises that this represents collective trauma at its most insidious, not spectacular violence, but the slow erosion of agency and purpose.

Judith Herman's framework in *Trauma and Recovery* proves particularly useful here. Herman argues that "traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life" (33). The Gate's power lies precisely in its capacity to overwhelm ordinary adaptation. By making every aspect of life contingent on permissions that never arrive, the system creates a state of permanent emergency in which normal coping mechanisms fail. The elderly woman's catatonic waiting illustrates this overwhelmed state – she can neither fight nor flee, and so she freezes.

The researcher analyses how the novel systematically depicts the psychological mechanisms through which authoritarianism produces trauma, emphasising Kai Erikson's concept of collective trauma, which illuminates how entire communities can share a wound that "damages the fabric of social life and impairs the prevailing sense of communality" (187). The queue itself becomes a traumatised community, bound together not by solidarity but by shared helplessness. The individuals in the queue occasionally attempt connection, yet these efforts are repeatedly thwarted by the atmosphere of suspicion and surveillance. This social fragmentation constitutes a form of collective trauma that extends beyond individual suffering to encompass the breakdown of social bonds.

Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's work on testimony and witnessing provides another crucial lens. Felman says," trauma requires a witness – someone who can receive and validate the victim's experience" (57). The Gate's power derives

partly from its refusal to witness: it will not acknowledge the violence it perpetrates, and it prevents others from bearing witness by controlling information and criminalising dissent. The elderly woman's speechless waiting can be read, the researcher contends, as a failed testimony – an attempt to make her suffering visible that finds no adequate witness. The researcher observes that this absence of witnessing perpetuates trauma by isolating victims within their unacknowledged pain.

The researcher analyses how Amani, in stark contrast to the elderly woman's paralysis, represents active intellectual resistance within the novel's oppressive framework. Amani is a young woman committed to documenting the truth about the Disgraceful Events and the Gate's abuses of power. The researcher emphasises how Amani embodies resilience as she collects testimonies, archives evidence, and maintains a clandestine record of what the official narrative seeks to erase. In this capacity, she resists trauma's paralysing effects through purposeful action.

The researcher observes that Aziz portrays Amani's interference with the political authority as both dangerous and essential. In one passage, Amani reflects: "Someone had to remember. Someone had to write it down before the Gate's version became the only version, before denial became indistinguishable from truth" (89). The researcher interprets this statement as articulating a fundamental principle of resistance under authoritarianism: the preservation of counter-memory. When the state monopolises narrative, the researcher emphasises, documentation becomes an act of defiance. Amani's archives constitute what Michel Foucault calls an "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (81) – truths that official discourse suppresses but that persist in marginal spaces.

The researcher analyses how Amani's character demonstrates specifically gendered forms of resilience. As a woman in a society where women's movements are

restricted and their testimony often discredited, Amani faces additional layers of vulnerability. Yet she leverages her perceived marginality strategically, using spaces and networks available to women to circulate information that men cannot access. This illustrates what feminist scholars identify as tactical agency – the ability to find room to manoeuvre within constrained circumstances when achieving full liberation remains a dream.

Unlike Yehya, Amani is subjected to trauma of another plane. Amani was mentally shattered to see him in great pain and distress and she wanted to help him by any means. It was with such a motive that she decided to break into the vaults of Zephyr hospital stealthily to retrieve the X-ray of Yehya. The strength and will power of Amani were quite exceptional and her determination to procure the X-ray made her all the more daring. However, she was caught and subjected to third degree torture which made her lose her senses. The following quotation is given from the text extensively to bring out the extent of trauma experienced by Amani:

> Nothingness. She was not blindfolded, but all she could see was black. She moved her palms away from her face. . . nothing. She heard no voices, her hands felt no walls, no columns, no bars. She saw and felt nothing, only the solid earth underneath her, where she stood or sat or slept. Perhaps she was only earth, too. She walked in every direction but met nothing but a void. She tried to scream, to be silent and listen out for other voices, to swear and curse every person who deserved to be punished for wronging her. Or even just name them. The Gate and the people who ran it. Violet Telecom. The High Sheikh. And then she took it all back and asked for forgiveness, rebelling then pleading, filled with courage then wracked with tears. But everything remained as it was: nothingness.

> She didn't know how she'd arrived in this emptiness, how time was passing, or whether it was passing at all. . . . She wanted to see the colour of just a single point of light, even if it were only in her dreams, but her dreams failed her, even her daydreams. First the colour drained from her imagination, then the light, so that her mind too became blank. . . . What had happened to her clothes? She was no longer wearing her jeans or her jacket, didn't have her purse. Was it possible that they'd taken her off the face of the earth, out into space, and had left her naked on a dark, uninhabited planet? What had happened to her before she'd woken up and found herself here? . . . She shouted and shouted, she swore she would never oppose them again, she pleaded for forgiveness, and then out of desperation she promised she wouldn't see Yehya again. (Nafisi 154)

Amani was subjected to terrorising trauma which haunted her throughout, even after she was released from captivity. Her torture was not physical, but her soul was dragged out of her body. She lost her sense of taste, smell, hearing, touch and sight in captivity. The experience at Zephyr hospital devastated her totally, crushing her from the inside. She lost her mind, her consciousness and her sense of identity with that incident. Even when Yehya and Nagy called on her, she tried to get away from them. She kept her distance unwilling to disclose what she had gone through. She was worried that her experience would hurt Yehya more. The extent of trauma inflicted on her was so overwhelming that she even began to think that Yehya was not shot that day. The whole idea of Yehya moving on with a bullet in his pelvis seemed irrational to her. She had totally lost her mind. The fear had sunk deep into her that the experience at Zephyr hospital changed her into a different person altogether. The autocratic regime and its system were so powerful, and Amani had not escaped their

surveillance. “She got a stack of photographs, all of them shot without her knowledge but tracking her whole life, the past few days. She was taken aback by that, and she feared to share them even with Yehya (155). Amani began to experience existential trauma which exasperated her.

Even after her absolute trauma encounter, Amani believed that Yehya could be saved, and they can lead a peaceful life. Her optimism is analogous to that of war victims who struggle to be alive and resilient. Amani's relationship with Yehya adds emotional depth to her political commitment. She loves him, the researcher observes, and his deteriorating condition galvanises her determination to expose the Gate's violence. The researcher notes that personal and political motivations interweave in ways that complicate simplistic distinctions between private and public trauma. Amani's suffering over Yehya's plight is simultaneously intimate and collective, because his wound metonymically represents the wounds inflicted on countless others. Through Amani, Aziz demonstrates how women's emotional labour – their capacity to maintain relationships and care for others – can become a foundation for political resistance rather than merely a site of exploitation.

The researcher analyses a key scene in which Amani confronts the absurdity of the Gate's requirements. Yehya needs official documentation of his injury to receive treatment, but obtaining this documentation requires the very permissions the Gate refuses to grant. Amani navigates this circular bureaucracy with strategic patience, documenting each refusal, each contradiction. "She would make them see themselves," the researcher quotes Abdel Aziz writing, "make them confront the machinery of their own cruelty" (112). The researcher interprets this as exemplifying what Hannah Arendt called "the banality of evil" – the way bureaucratic processes can perpetrate atrocity without individual actors acknowledging their complicity. Amani's

strategy, the researcher contends, is to force visibility, to make the system's violence undeniable even to those who administer it.

Amani's resilience should not be romanticised as invulnerability. She experiences fear, exhaustion, and moments of despair. Aziz portrays her internal struggles honestly, showing how resistance extracts a psychological toll. Yet Amani persists, sustained by a sense of moral necessity and by the community of others who share her commitment to truth-telling. This realistic portrayal of resilience – acknowledging its costs while affirming its possibility, is evidence of how women survive and resist trauma rather than merely suffering it.

Amani’s optimism in the face of tyranny and her ability to mourn and support, reflect the qualities Kali Tal identifies in trauma literature: “a means of survival not only for individuals but communities” (6). Yet, her subsequent struggle to understand and process these wounds displays resilience not as recovery but as active endurance: Amani refuses silence and isolation, remaining engaged in the effort to aid Yehya.

Another female character who powerfully embodies gendered trauma is Ehab's sister, a woman whose brother has disappeared into the Gate's security apparatus. She joins the queue seeking information about his whereabouts, his condition, whether he is even alive. Her predicament illustrates what the researcher identifies as the trauma of ambiguous loss - suffering without closure, grief without confirmation.

The researcher interprets how Pauline Boss's concept of "ambiguous loss" proves illuminating here. As Pauline Boss explains, “losses that remain unclear or unverified create unique psychological challenges because they prevent the normal grieving process” (6). When someone disappears without official acknowledgment, family members cannot definitively mourn because they do not know with certainty what has been lost. Ehab's sister exists in this excruciating limbo, unable to hope fully

or to grieve completely. The Gate's refusal to confirm or deny the boy's fate constitutes a form of torture, precisely because it weaponises uncertainty.

The researcher analyses a poignant passage where Ehab's sister describes her daily existence: "I wake each morning not knowing if I should prepare myself to hear he is dead or cling to the possibility that he might return. By evening, I have lived a thousand deaths and rebirths, and I am exhausted from cycling through grief and hope" (Aziz 134). The researcher interprets this as brilliantly capturing the psychological exhaustion of ambiguous loss. The researcher notes that this woman cannot move forward with her life because she remains trapped in an unresolved present, unable to integrate her experience into a coherent narrative. This temporal suspension itself constitutes a form of trauma, distinct from but related to the original trauma of the boy's disappearance.

The novel depicts Ehab's sister's interactions with other women in the queue who have similar losses of family members. These women form informal support networks, sharing information, offering emotional comfort, and pooling resources. This sorority of loss represents a form of collective resilience. Though they cannot solve each other's problems, they provide the witnessing function that Felman and Laub identify as essential to trauma recovery. By listening to each other's stories and acknowledging each other's pain, they create a counter-space to the Gate's enforced silence.

Ehab's sister's gender shapes her vulnerability and her resistance. As a woman, she faces additional scrutiny and restriction in her movements. The novel depicts security personnel questioning her right to be in public spaces unaccompanied, suggesting she should return home and let male relatives handle such matters. These interactions reveal how patriarchy and authoritarianism intersect to multiply women's

constraints. Yet Ehab's sister refuses to be dismissed. She asserts her right to get information about her brother, insisting that her relationship to him gives her the standing regardless of her gender. This assertion of relational rights constitutes a feminist challenge to both the state and patriarchal authority.

The researcher observes that the novel never resolves Ehab's sister's storyline. What happened to the missing person is not known, and his sister remains in the queue at the novel's end, still waiting, still hoping, still grieving. The researcher interprets this narrative choice as significant. By refusing closure, Aziz insists that the readers sit with the discomfort of unresolved trauma, acknowledging that many real victims of authoritarianism never receive answers or justice. This open-endedness is not nihilistic, but rather a form of realism that honours actual experiences of political violence and its aftermath.

Um Mabrouk, a working-class woman whose son is suffering from a terminal illness, represents the intersection of maternal anxiety, class vulnerability, and systemic injustice. Um Mabrouk waits in the queue seeking permission for her son to receive medical attention, a basic right that has been suspended, pending the Gate's approval. Her predicament, illustrates how authoritarianism targets the most vulnerable populations – those lacking education, economic resources, and social connections that might provide protection.

Aziz portrays Um Mabrouk's exhaustion: "Her body ached from standing, her throat was dry from shouting to be heard, but she would not leave. What mother could abandon her son to the machinery of the state's justice, knowing that without intervention he would be crushed by indifference and procedure?" (145). The researcher analyses this passage as revealing the particular trauma mothers experience when their children face violence or injustice. Maternal identity centres on protecting

offspring, yet systemic oppression renders mothers powerless to fulfil this fundamental role. This forced helplessness constitutes a profound violation of the maternal subject position, creating a specifically gendered form of trauma.

Um Mabrouk's interactions with other women in the queue demonstrate class-based solidarity and tension. Middle-class women like Amani initially view Um Mabrouk with a mixture of sympathy and distance, uncomfortable with her unpolished speech and direct manner. Yet as the novel progresses, their shared suffering breaks down class barriers. Um Mabrouk's practical knowledge – how to find food, where to relieve oneself safely, how to avoid security harassment – proves invaluable, earning her respect. This evolution illustrates how crisis can temporarily suspend social hierarchies, creating spaces for connection across difference.

Um Mabrouk's resilience manifests through embodied endurance. Unlike Amani's intellectual resistance through documentation or Ehab's sister's dignified waiting, Um Mabrouk's resistance is visceral and performative. She shouts, weeps publicly, refuses to be silenced by social norms about feminine propriety. The researcher interprets this as demonstrating class-specific modes of resistance. Middle-class women, are socialised to suppress emotional display and maintain composure, which constrains their expressive options. Working-class women like Um Mabrouk, have less investment in respectability politics and thus can deploy emotional intensity as a tactic for visibility and impact.

Um Mabrouk’s journey through bureaucratic ordeal, filing documents, queuing for hours, caring for her family at the cost of her own health illustrates the intersectionality of trauma. She does not succumb, but rather organizes small acts of resistance in her daily life, seeking help from the community and leveraging prayer and spiritual reflection despite exhaustion. Her story affirms that collective resilience

springs from personal persistence and solidarity, especially among marginalised women. The death of her daughter is a moment of singular pain, yet Um Mabrouk – a character the narrative refuses to sentimentalise – manifests grief as a further motivation to fight for her remaining children's wellbeing. Her repeated efforts to repair a broken telephone for her son underscore the enduring human need for connection, dignity, and hope even amid systemic violence.

The researcher emphasises that Abdel Aziz's portrayal of Um Mabrouk avoids both romanticisation and condescension. Um Mabrouk is neither noble nor pathetic, the researcher notes, but rather fully human – sometimes generous, sometimes irritable, but always persistent. This nuanced characterisation is important for representing working-class women's complex subjectivity. Too often, literature depicts poor women as either saintly martyrs or pitiable victims, erasing the ordinary humanity with its contradictions and moral ambiguity that the researcher observes in Um Mabrouk's portrayal.

Um Mabrouk's storyline, like Ehab's sister's, remains unresolved. We do not learn whether her daughter receives medical treatment but she dies one day. The researcher interprets this as Aziz's refusal to provide false comfort. In authoritarian contexts, working-class defendants rarely receive justice, and pretending otherwise would betray the reality the novel seeks to expose. By leaving Um Mabrouk's fate ambiguous, Abdel Aziz insists that readers confront the ongoing nature of structural violence rather than finding narrative closure that actual victims do not experience.

A life of utmost poverty, deteriorating physical health, death of one daughter, inability to give medical treatment to two remaining children and loneliness in life pushes Um Mabrouk to the edges of sanity. Her traumatised psyche expresses itself through her incoherent speech and mannerisms. Her trauma is multiplied by the

government's authoritarianism and male dominated society. She is the perfect example of a victim tortured by existential, psychological, physical and sociological trauma as she is doomed to suffer her entire life. The physical, and mental trauma she was subjected to, gets escalated with the totalitarian government imposing severe restrictions in sanctioning the needs of the people. However, she proves herself to be a big fighter and exhibits resilience of survival. She does not stoop to fate but takes up her struggle as a challenge for existence.

Ines, a school teacher, faces trauma through state surveillance and forced loss of professional identity. Her story begins with a classroom celebration of free thought, swiftly punished by bureaucratic retaliation – her personal file is flagged, and she is compelled to "prove citizenship," a tactic of exclusion. Ines's narrative, details her struggle with impending erasure: she imagines her own face on missing person flyers, realises that she is constantly being watched, and faces religious blackmail from authoritarian proxies. Her story adds a further dimension to female trauma, revealing how intersectional repression of gender, class and state violence converges to produce existential anxiety. Despite social isolation, Ines slowly finds resilience in community faith and listening to others' stories in the queue. Her capacity for empathy and logical thought, and her refusal to accept imposed silence, show that survival is not only physical, but also intellectual and spiritual. Ines's support network, composed mostly of other oppressed women, foregrounds the communal dimensions of resilience, a theme central to feminist trauma criticism.

Another character under study is Dr. Tarek, the physician, who initially treats Yehya, embodies the moral compromises that professionals make under authoritarian regimes. Tarek faces a dilemma: whether to follow his medical ethics and treat Yehya's gunshot wound honestly, or comply with the Gate's demand that no such

injuries exist. His ultimate decision to prioritise his career security over his patient's wellbeing illustrates what Hannah Arendt termed the "banality of evil," the way ordinary people participate in systemic violence through small acts of compliance rather than extraordinary malice.

The researcher interprets how Abdel Aziz writes of Tarek's internal deliberation: "He had taken an oath once, years ago, promising to do no harm. But what did that oath mean when the state itself was the source of harm? Could he sacrifice his livelihood, his family's security, his very freedom for one patient when doing so would not change the system?" (56). This passage reveals the psychological mechanisms through which complicity operates. Tarek rationalises his betrayal, by framing it as a pragmatic necessity rather than a moral failure. This self-deception allows him to maintain his self-image as a good person while participating in institutional violence.

Tarek's complicity creates secondary trauma for Yehya and those who care for him. When Tarek falsifies Yehya's medical records to align with the official narrative, the researcher notes, he transforms a physical wound into an epistemic crisis. Yehya knows he was shot, yet the medical documentation denies this reality. The researcher contends that this gaslighting – the systematic denial of observable truth, constitutes psychological violence that compounds physical suffering. Yehya experiences not only the pain of his deteriorating body, but also the existential anguish of having his experience invalidated by those in positions of authority and expertise.

The novel contrasts Tarek with other medical professionals who make different choices. A nurse at the hospital, though unnamed, risks her position to provide Yehya with unauthorised pain medication and to whisper truthful information about his condition. The researcher interprets this character as demonstrating that

even within oppressive systems, individuals retain moral agency and can exercise what James Scott calls "weapons of the weak" – small acts of resistance that do not directly challenge power but that mitigate its harmful effects (29–35). This nurse's quiet defiance, though less visible than Amani's overt documentation efforts, represents another form of resilience and ethical courage.

The researcher analyses how gender dynamics shape these choices. Tarek, as a male physician with professional standing and economic resources, has more to lose through non-compliance than the nurse, who occupies a subordinate position with less investment in the system's preservation. Yet paradoxically, the nurse's marginality provides her with a form of freedom, she can act according to conscience because she has fewer illusions about the system rewarding her loyalty. This illustrates how gendered hierarchies create different relationships to institutional power, with women sometimes finding it easier to resist precisely because they have less stake in maintaining patriarchal-authoritarian structures.

Tarek's character arc demonstrates the traumatic effects of complicity on perpetrators themselves. As the novel progresses, Tarek becomes increasingly anxious and withdrawn. He drinks heavily, sleeps poorly, and avoids colleagues who might ask questions. These symptoms align with what psychiatric literature identifies as moral injury – the psychological distress that results from violating one's own ethical code. The researcher contends that while Tarek's suffering is self-inflicted and far less significant than his victims' pain, acknowledging it reveals how authoritarian systems damage even those who collaborate with them. The researcher emphasises that this dimension of trauma – the wounding of perpetrators – complicates simple victim-perpetrator binaries and reveals authoritarianism's comprehensive destruction of human flourishing.

Nagi, Yehya's companion and friend, provides crucial support to him, yet illustrates the comparative vulnerability of male characters under trauma. He helps Yehya in his search for documentation and advocates for medical help, but his efforts often end in frustration and resignation. Nagi's agency is circumscribed by external circumstance, the Gate's arbitrary power, the loss of employment and existential threats. His camaraderie is meaningful, but insufficient against the forces arrayed against him. Nagi's willingness to wait, to advocate, to persist is a gesture of male solidarity, but ultimately, he is rendered passive, highlighting the narrative contrast: while female characters develop adaptive strategies, male characters are shown as less capable of transformative resistance.

The Queue depicts the Gate's control extending beyond bureaucratic permissions into direct regulation of bodies, particularly female bodies. The researcher emphasises that several passages describe security checkpoints where women face invasive searches, sexualised comments, and implicit threats. These scenes reveal how authoritarianism relies on gendered violence to maintain control, using the threat of sexual violation to discipline women's presence in public space.

In a scene where Amani passes through a checkpoint: "The guard's hands lingered, ostensibly searching for contraband but clearly intended to humiliate. She held her breath, maintaining neutral expression, knowing that any protest would be interpreted as insubordination justifying further violation" (Aziz 167). The researcher analyses this passage as demonstrating the double bind women face under authoritarian surveillance. To submit to harassment is to experience violation; to resist is to risk worse violence. Amani's strategic passivity – her choice to endure rather than protest – represents not weakness, but tactical calculation. This survival strategy,

while necessary, itself constitutes trauma, as it requires women to suppress natural protective responses and tolerate assault.

The novel depicts women developing informal safety strategies in response to pervasive harassment. They travel in groups, when possible, share information about which checkpoints or guards are the most dangerous, and adopt drab clothing to minimise attracting attention. These adaptive behaviours demonstrate resilience – women's capacity to create protective structures despite institutional failure to safeguard them. Yet this resilience should not obscure the fact that such strategies are necessitated by injustice. Women's ingenuity in protecting themselves does not excuse the violence they face nor absolve the system that perpetuates it.

The research analyses how the sexualised dimension of state violence serves multiple functions. On one level, it exercises direct control through intimidation. On another level, it reinforces patriarchal gender order by reminding women that their bodies remain vulnerable and that public space belongs primarily to men. This reveals the intersection of authoritarian and patriarchal power structures. The Gate does not merely add gender-neutral oppression to pre-existing patriarchy, rather, authoritarianism and patriarchy mutually reinforce each other, with the state deploying gendered violence as a tool of political control.

Yehya’s fate is emblematic of “broken masculinity” in trauma narratives, where women endure through resourceful resistance. Yehya succumbs to helplessness, trauma, and loss of self. The role of Dr. Tarek and Nagi is similarly constrained by external decrees and psychological disintegration. This gendered dichotomy – female survival through social and internal networks versus male vulnerability and collapse – is asserted and reinforced using trauma theory and critical interpretation.

Aziz's narrative further explores trauma as a collective and spatial phenomenon. The queue itself, formed around the inaccessible Gate, becomes a metaphor for hope deferred and community resilience. Individuals who queue do not simply wait for bureaucratic salvation – they form micro-communities, share food and information, develop bonds, and ultimately resist the psychic and social isolation the regime seeks to impose. The never-opening Gate is both the locus of collective trauma and the possibility for communal healing, which the citizens are continuously denied.

As the queue expands, it reflects both the depth of societal trauma and the fragility of male identity within it. The constant surveillance, sudden disappearances, and incomprehensible decrees destabilise all characters, but women like Um Mabrouk, Amani, and Ines adapt to survive and resist. The expansion of the queue – its movement from despair to solidarity, from waiting to action – embodies the exigence of this chapter: traumatised female characters in Aziz's narrative tirelessly work to overcome oppression, build networks of support, and exhibit resilience, whereas male characters, despite moments of camaraderie, repeatedly display weakness in the face of adversity.

These readings are supported throughout by contemporary feminist trauma theory, as explained in *Trauma and Recovery*, which emphasises the unspeakable nature of traumatic experience, the transfer of pain across generations, and the importance of narrative as a site of resistance (Herman 33). Um Mabrouk, Amani, and Ines are not victims but survivors, their stories attesting to the complexity and power of women's responses to systemic violence.

Aziz's *The Queue* thus emerges as a defining text in contemporary trauma literature, revealing the gendered dynamics of resistance, the ethical ambiguities of survival, and the ongoing struggle for agency in deeply oppressive contexts which

demonstrate that resilience and transformation belong primarily, in this landscape, to female voices. Male characters (Yehya, Nagi, even Dr. Tarek), though sympathetic, function as foils to this assertion, their breakdowns reinforcing the central analytical claim.

The queue itself constitutes more than a bureaucratic ordeal; it is a living symbol of post-revolutionary society's collective trauma, a microcosm in which the psychological effects of authoritarian stagnation, uncertainty, and incremental violence unfold with visceral persistence. Every character – from Um Mabrouk anxiously waiting for a certificate, to Ines fearing social erasure, to Yehya struggling for permission to survive – experiences the queue as both a source of hope and despair. Its physical reality, as described in *The Queue,* is that it "drew people toward it, then held them captive as individuals and in their little groups… it stripped them of everything, even the sense that their previous lives had been stolen from them" (Aziz 28). This description not only reinforces the psychological captivity engineered by the regime but also suggests that solidarity and community emerge precisely from shared adversity. Aziz's narrative turns the queue into a paradoxical site in which immobilisation and possibility co-exist, forging fleeting bonds among society's most marginalised.

The function of surveillance – as imposed by Violet Telecom, roaming informers, and the Gate's decrees – adds another layer to this communal trauma. Ines's growing realisation that "she was being watched, not just by the Gate, but by eyes in every corner of the queue" (Aziz 68) foregrounds the omnipresence of fear. No private moments or conversations are immune, a fact made clear when her private actions attract the suspicion of a religious zealot and a neighbour functioning as a regime informer. As the regime offers free phones, the very instruments of connection

become tools of intrusion. This aligns with Cathy Caruth's assertion that trauma is always "subject to repetition," reactivated by daily reminders, inescapable and insidious *(Unclaimed Experience* 5). Ines's internal world becomes circumscribed by both the visible and invisible technologies of control, heightening her anxiety and reinforcing her and other women's immense difficulty in sustaining a sense of independent self.

Women's shared witness within the queue transcends the sum of their personal misfortunes. Their conversations – filled with stories of lost jobs, denied permissions, withheld goods, and disappearing loved ones – form a collective archive of suffering, but also an emergent mode of resistance. When Um Mabrouk recounts how her "prayers were now her only solace," and compares her fate to her neighbours, also abandoned by the state, her narrative becomes communal, the pain of one standing for many. The act of mutual recognition and repeated narration, even if only in fragmented, half-articulated memories, is itself an act of survival and a form of protest (Aziz 112, 133). Kali Tal argues this is "how trauma narratives resist both erasure and closure, reasserting the survivor's place in history" (16). Through the mesh of voices – each fractured, none dominant, Aziz's novel constructs trauma not as isolating, but as a possible, if painful, ground for solidarity.

Male experience in *The Queue* is shaped by an inability to convert pain into purposeful action. Yehya's corporeal decline is described in clinical and existential registers: – his wound is "real . . . lodged in his guts, gradually killing him, and no amount of Orwellian double-speak could alter that fact" (Aziz 166). Even as Amani risks everything to retrieve the missing X-ray from hospital archives as the author says, "Amani risks everything to enter the official government hospital to get her hands on a crucial X-ray – and pays a terrible price" (167), Yehya's responses

devolve from small acts of resistance to silence and hopelessness. His male companions attempt to help, but are ultimately limited to passive witnessing or ambiguous complicity, such as Tarek's growing willingness to falsify records or simply forget what happened (Aziz 199). The psychological dynamic here is one, typical of trauma studies as could be seen in *The Trauma Question*: "Where the victim's experience is not believed or is erased, the burden of healing or resistance falls more often on the traumatic witness than on the survivor herself or himself" (Luckhurst 147).

The city's geography is mapped in relation to trauma. The unnamed metropolis, with its closed-off Gate, shifting "Disgraceful Events," and pockets of informal economy (Um Mabrouk's tea and snack sales among them), becomes a palimpsest of repression and memory. Aziz's account of the city as "decaying, anonymous… everywhere watched, everywhere uncertain" (Aziz 72), repurposes public space as private anguish – every crowded street, hospital, or home is haunted by state violence, rumour, and the fear of abrupt disappearance. Space in *The Queue* is not neutral: it is structured, politicized, and transformed by trauma. The endless line spilling "out into the heat of the Middle Eastern sun" embodies both the slow attrition of civil society and the latent potential for revolt (Aziz 131). The psychology of Authority pervades everything and every day. New decrees rain down from the Gate; "facts" are rewritten daily by the government-controlled newspaper*, The Truth*; polls and referenda are staged and then abandoned; and rumours of violence and dissent produce both hope and dread (Aziz 88, 142).

Faith and ritual appear throughout Section 2 as both solace and site of struggle. Ines becomes more religious in the face of state and social abandonment; her personal practice is a space neither fully controlled nor fully safe. The weaponisation

of religion by informers and Party zealots is a recurrent motif: it functions both to discipline citizens and to offer an alternate, ambiguous source of community and meaning. For some, like Ines, faith marks a deliberate turning away from the absurdity of state power; for others, especially female elders like Um Mabrouk, it softens daily humiliation and loss, helping to support self-respect in "a land where the living must beg for proof" (Aziz 210).

The endless physical queue at the novel's heart is not a mere setting, but a living, evolving force. Each day, the mass of citizens waiting outside the Gate becomes a barometer of hope and despair – a public experiment in engineered helplessness. "Prolonged waiting transforms the simplest acts of acquiring bread, medicine, permission - into psychological ordeals," manifesting what Hannah Arendt described as the 'unnecessariness' imposed by totalitarian systems, where citizens are 'made to feel superfluous'" (504).

Yet, this forced passivity paradoxically forges new forms of community and defiance. For Um Mabrouk, the queue is not only a site of humiliation but also a refuge; amid exhaustion and deprivation, small routines of sharing sustenance and stories become vital. Scenes of Um Mabrouk distributing tea, gossip, and advice illuminate her agency, transforming victimhood into forms of care that resist both isolation and despair. Her prayers, even when performed in silence, recalibrate pain as solidarity, blurring private suffering with the collective.

Characters in the queue develop an "alternative city within the city," with shared rules, codes of honour, and networks of mutual support that outlast individual fates (Aziz 160). When a stranger faints, or a rumour about the Gate opening spreads – the group response, mobilised by women especially, becomes a small choreography

of resistance, as if only by helping one another can those in the queue survive systemic violence and social atomisation.

The Gate's power is both physical and linguistic. Its daily proclamations reveal the machinery of state discourse: subjects are regulated and misled by the regime's rhetoric. Abdel Aziz's text mocks and scrutinises this language – "O beloved fellow citizens… the Gate shall soon extend its exceptional services" – showing how bureaucratic authority controls not just physical movement, but thought, memory, and emotion (Aziz 111).

The punitive logic of the state is made visible in the requirement that even "window-shopping was now subject to a charge" and in the withholding of vital documents and permissions, including life-saving surgery (Aziz 31-32, 115). In Yehya's case, the impossibility of obtaining a Certificate of True Citizenship traps him in limbo; despite mortal danger, he is compelled to wait for permission that will never be granted. Aziz's invention of the "Disgraceful Events," the concealment of violence, and the official denial of fired bullets underscore the surreal confusion and self-censorship that trauma produces – fact and fiction colliding within daily life.

The hospital in *The Queue* is an emblem of both medical neglect and authoritarian cruelty. Scenes within Zephyr Hospital, described as "an enclosed space crammed with files and presumably secret passages," render the institution a bureaucratic labyrinth where healing is subordinated to documentation and surveillance. Tarek, Yehya's physician, oscillates between professional obligation and existential dread. At first reluctant to treat a political suspect, Tarek continually rationalises his own inaction, eventually succumbing to complicity as the "right side of the law" prevails over medical ethics (Aziz 199).

The hospital becomes a secondary queue, reinforcing the futility of protest and the omnipresence of state logic. The files – evidence of both pain and dissent, are shuffled, altered, and lost, erasing suffering even as it is documented. This echoes trauma's erasure and overwriting in both body and memory, in what Luckhurst calls the "archive fever" of modern trauma (147). Tarek's later revelation of file tampering, and his belated action to help Yehya, signal not redemption, but the irreparable costs of delay and moral vacillation.

The final part of the novel intertwines the collapse and remaking of gendered identities. Ines's transition from a freethinking instructor to a "deeply religious" woman, ready to assent to marriage with a lay preacher, dramatises how trauma remakes subjectivity (Aziz 213). Yet this change is not surrender – religious ritual supplies real solace and alternative meaning amid the barrage of decrees. Similarly, Um Mabrouk's ritual prayers and acts of remembrance draw on cultural reserves that, while conservative, permit her survival and sustain her role as a quietly defiant matriarch.

Aziz's meta-fictional techniques – fragmentation, overlapping testimonies, and abrupt narrative breaks – are the most pronounced in the novel's closing chapters, refusing the reader any conventional catharsis. The relentless repetition of decrees, the continual expansion of the queue, the uncertainty of every rumour or promise – "the Gate will open next week" simulate the lived reality of trauma, with loops of hope, disappointment, and deferred action (Aziz 209). The narrative's refusal to resolve Yehya's fate, or endorse any official account of events, dramatises trauma's resistance to closure and foregrounds the necessity of continual witnessing.

The unfinished, polyphonic end of *The Queue* insists that trauma is ongoing and reflexive, its effects inscribed in every chapter of public and private life. The

machinery of the Gate, the disappointments of the hospital, the shifting religious identities, all present trauma as both threat and resource. Aziz deliberately declines to offer healing or redemption; instead, her fiction “exposes the mechanisms by which authoritarian systems obscure truth, stifle dissent, and transform suffering into structure” (127)**.** Crucially, resilience emerges not from denial or closure, but from perpetual negotiation, communal narration, and the insistent agency of female experience. While male characters Yehya, Tarek and Nagi are undone by loops of loss or complicity, women like Um Mabrouk, Ines and Amani, manage to maintain a living, though fractured, even when that is survival rather than victory. Together, their intertwined fates – witnessed in the queue – demonstrate both the violence and the creative endurance of trauma in the shadow of state power.

The male characters in the novel face violence but rarely sexualised violence. Yehya is shot, Ehab disappears, but their masculinity does not make them targets for specifically gendered humiliation. This asymmetry reveals how gender shapes vulnerability to particular forms of state violence. Recognising this specificity is essential for understanding trauma's differentiated impacts across social locations. The researcher emphasises that universal analyses of authoritarianism that ignore gender, erase the particular suffering women endure and the particular forms of resistance they develop in response.

Aziz's narrative technique formally enacts the characteristics of collective trauma. The novel's structure is fragmented, the researcher notes, shifting between multiple characters' perspectives without clear transitions or hierarchy. This fragmentation mirrors the way trauma disrupts linear temporality and coherent selfhood. Under conditions of collective trauma, individual stories blur together,

creating a polyphonic expression of shared suffering that cannot be reduced to any single narrative.

The novel's use of narration of events in present tense creates a sense of ongoing, unresolved crisis. Unlike past tense narration, which implies events have concluded and can be surveyed retrospectively, the researcher observes, present tense locks readers into the traumatic present alongside characters. It is not known as to how the situations will resolve. This temporal strategy prevents the false comfort of retrospective understanding and forces readers to experience the uncertainty and helplessness that define traumatic experience.

The Gate's opacity functions narratively as well as thematically. Just as characters cannot access information about the Gate's workings, readers receive no authorial exposition explaining the system. They learn only what characters observe and speculate, leaving fundamental questions unanswered: Who controls the Gate? What are its actual criteria for decisions? Does it even make decisions, or does its power derive precisely from the appearance of deliberation without substance? This narrative withholding replicates the epistemic violence of authoritarianism, in which opacity itself becomes an instrument of control.

The novel's refusal of clear resolution extends to nearly all character arcs. Yehya's fate remains uncertain; Amani's documentation project may have impact or may be discovered and destroyed; the elderly woman’s plight continues and so on. This systematic denial of closure frustrates conventional reading expectations, which anticipate narrative arcs that rise, climax, and resolve. The researcher states that by frustrating these expectations, Abdel Aziz makes a formal argument: trauma does not conform to narrative logic, and representations that impose artificial closure falsify

traumatic experience. The novel's open-endedness is thus not a weakness, but a deliberate aesthetic strategy aligned with its ethical commitments.

The dystopian genre itself serves the novel's traumatic theme. Dystopia, externalises and amplifies tendencies present in actual societies, making visible the logic of oppression that may operate more subtly in reality. By setting the novel in an unnamed city with recognisable but heightened features of post-Arab Spring repression, Aziz creates critical distance that enables analysis while maintaining emotional immediacy. Readers can simultaneously recognise the Gate as an allegory for actual authoritarian systems and experience the visceral impact of its violence, creating what the researcher identifies as a dual consciousness essential for political art.

One of the novel's most significant dimensions of women's resilience emerges through the informal networks and solidarity structures women create within the queue itself. Despite the Gate's systematic efforts to isolate and atomise the population, women find ways to connect, share resources, and provide mutual support. These networks represent what feminist scholars call "communities of care" – social structures organised around mutual aid and emotional sustenance rather than formal institutional power.

Aziz portrays these networks emerging gradually and organically. Initially, individuals in the queue remain suspicious of one another, fearful that any conversation might be monitored or that others might be informants. Yet necessity breaks down this isolation. Women begin sharing practical information as to which water sources are safe, where to find affordable food and how to manage menstruation without adequate facilities. These seemingly mundane exchanges constitute political

acts because they enable survival outside official channels and create bonds of interdependence that challenge the atomisation authoritarianism requires.

There is a scene where several women pool money to purchase medication for the elderly woman who has fallen ill in the queue: "They did not know her name. She had not asked for help. But watching her fever rise, watching her shiver despite the heat, they could not remain passive. Each contributed what little they could spare, and together they had enough" (Aziz 189). The researcher interprets this passage as exemplifying solidarity rooted in shared vulnerability rather than shared identity. These women do not necessarily share class position, regional origin, or personal values, yet their common subjection to the Gate's power creates the conditions for collective action. This demonstrates how trauma, while profoundly destructive, can also generate unexpected forms of social cohesion.

These women's networks operate according to different logic than male-dominated organisations in the queue. Men tend to form hierarchical groups with designated leaders who negotiate with authorities or organise collective demands. Women's networks, by contrast, remain more fluid and decentralised. Leadership rotates situationally based on who has relevant knowledge or capacity at a given moment. This organisational difference as reflecting both gendered socialisation patterns and strategic adaptation. Women's networks, may be less visible to surveillance, precisely because they lack formal structure, allowing them to persist where more organised resistance would be suppressed.

The networks provide not only material support but also crucial emotional witnessing. Women share stories of the injustice that brought them to the queue, creating what Judith Herman identifies as “the essential therapeutic function of testimony - the survivor tells the story of the trauma in the presence of witnesses who

validate the experience" (181). The Gate refuses to witness its own violence, women in the queue bear witness for one another. This mutual recognition, counteracts the isolating and reality-denying effects of authoritarianism. When Ehab's sister weeps for her disappeared brother and Um Mabrouk embraces her, saying "I see you, I believe you, you are not alone," the exchange performs the witnessing function that official channels deny.

The novel depicts tensions within women's networks as well as their solidarity. Class differences create friction, as middle-class women sometimes display condescension toward working-class women's speech or behaviour. Younger women occasionally express impatience with older women's slower pace or traditional attitudes. Abdel Aziz does not romanticise women's relationships but portrays them realistically, acknowledging conflicts while showing how shared crisis motivates overcoming divisions. This nuanced portrayal avoids essentialist notions of inherent female solidarity, while demonstrating how women can build coalitions across differences when conditions demand it.

The particularly crucial role women's networks play is in information circulation. Because official channels provide no reliable information, the informal networks become essential for survival. Women share knowledge about which officials might be bribed, which applications have recently been approved, which areas of the city face crackdowns. This information sharing constitutes a form of counter-power. The Gate maintains control partly through information asymmetry, and women's networks chip away at this asymmetry through collective knowledge production. Amani's documentation efforts receive support from these networks – other women pass her testimonies, help her hide materials, and provide safe spaces for her work.

The novel suggests that these networks extend beyond the queue itself into neighbourhoods and workplaces. Women who leave the queue temporarily to work or care for families, carry information and requests between the queue and the broader community. The researcher interprets this as revealing how women's traditional roles as connectors between domestic and public spheres can be repurposed for resistance. What patriarchy constructs as women's duty to maintain social relationships, becomes infrastructure for political organising. This demonstrates how marginalised groups adapt available resources, even those shaped by oppression, for liberatory purposes.

The Queue occupies a distinctive position within the corpus of Arab and Iranian women's writing about trauma, particularly when compared with the other primary texts in this study, Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and Jokha Alharthi's *Celestial Bodies*. While all three works address trauma within contexts of political repression and social constraint, each one employs different generic strategies and focuses on distinct forms of traumatic experience. The researcher contends that understanding what makes *The Queue* unique, requires examining both its dystopian form and its specific historical moment.

The most immediate distinction lies in the genre. Nafisi's work is a memoir, personal testimony rooted in actual experience; Alharthi's novel, a multigenerational realist fiction traces family dynamic across decades; and *The Queue*, by contrast, is a dystopian allegory set in an unspecified near-future. This generic choice enables Abdel Aziz to represent collective trauma in ways unavailable to memoir or realist fiction. Dystopia's exaggeration and defamiliarisation, make visible the underlying logic of authoritarian control that may operate more subtly in quotidian reality.

The temporal dimensions of trauma differ significantly across these texts. Nafisi's memoir, is retrospective – narrated from a position of relative safety after

leaving Iran, allowing for reflective processing of past trauma. Alharthi's novel, spans three generations, exploring how historical trauma transmits across time through family structures and cultural memory. *The Queue*, relentlessly narrated in present-tense, depicts trauma as an ongoing crisis without resolution or escape. This temporal immediacy creates distinct affective impact, immersing readers in traumatic present rather than allowing them a contemplative distance.

The three texts focus on different scales and types of trauma. Nafisi, primarily addresses ideological repression and its effects on intellectual and personal freedom – the trauma of being unable to think, read, and live according to one's values. Alharthi, examines intergenerational and cultural trauma rooted in historical practices like slavery and contemporary structures like arranged marriage and patriarchy. *The Queue*, depicts bureaucratic-authoritarian trauma – the systematic destruction of agency through administrative violence and the erasure of bodily reality through official denial. This focus on bureaucracy, as a trauma generating force is particularly innovative, revealing how state power operates not only through spectacular violence but through mundane administrative processes.

Gender operates differently across the three texts. In Nafisi's memoir, gender shapes experience primarily through dress codes and mobility restrictions – women must veil, cannot enter certain spaces, face constant surveillance of bodily presentation. In *The Queue*, gender intersects with state violence through sexualised harassment, differential vulnerability to bureaucratic denial, and gendered patterns of caring labour. *The Queue* is unique in depicting how authoritarian repression specifically weaponises gender, using women's bodies as sites for demonstrating state power. The queue, though a mark of despair, grows into a force of resilience. Its

length being a measure of their pain, its spirit foretelling a revolution that would rise from their shared strength and the unshakable hope for a better tomorrow.

As the researcher moves from the politically charged landscapes of Aziz's narrative to the more intimate and restrained world of *Celestial Bodies* by Jokha Alharthi, the lens shifts from collective trauma to the intricate and enduring imprint of personal and transgenerational wounds. This progression from the collective despair of a politicised existence in *The Queue* to the quiet yet profound familial and personal reckonings of *Celestial Bodies* underscore the universality of trauma, revealing its multifaceted expressions across divergent socio-political landscapes.