

Chapter I

Introduction

“Why do you stay in prison when the door is so wide open?”

– Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi

Contemporary Arab and Iranian women’s writings in English offer an ethnographic lens into the societies, cultures, and literatures of the Arab and Iranian world, bridging diverse narratives and shedding light on the complexities of identities and experiences in those regions. Arab and Iranian Anglophone literatures have gained significant prominence in the contemporary global literary landscape, offering readers a deeper understanding of the collective consciousness of these regions in the light of the unrest in Arab countries, the Arab Spring, the events of 9/11 in the United States, and the subsequent trauma experienced across the Arab and Iranian worlds. Political events in the recent decades and the resultant migration, have had their toll on the social and cultural life of Arabs and Iranians to a great extent. Migration and human rights’ violations in the area have made the ethnic Arab and Iranian writers as well as the writers in diaspora to delve deep into the psyche of the average Arab and Iranian and represent it in literature. Arab and Iranian Anglophone literatures have had a distinct literary revival.

Power struggles and the failing economy of the region have led to the fall of regimes. Arab literature tells the stories of political upheavals, economic instability and gender discrimination in Arab nations. The immigrant diaspora writers talk about their hybrid identities of East and West. Hence the study of Arab literature becomes complete only by assimilation of the egalitarian world beyond East and West. Arab literary Renaissance is transcending new horizons as the women writers in English, especially in fiction, create a world of enlightenment through their tales of resistance

and revolts. A similar dynamic can be traced in Iranian Anglophone Literature, with troubled political and social system under the new regimes formed, soon after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Significant literature produced by the women writers from both the regions have come to the spotlight because of the narrative techniques employed by them. Their works can be evaluated on the basis of the post-colonial theories of trauma which have become an integral part of post-colonial fiction.

Arab and Iranian women writers try to truthfully portray their traumatic experience giving testimony before the readers of the globe. Large scale migration to foreign lands and the resultant dilemma created in those people a yearning for their homeland, which many writers depicted realistically. A tendency to reconnect with the past can be traced in most of their works. Arab and Iranian Anglophone writings explore the Arab and Iranian world and hold a mirror before everyone, revealing the trauma they are being subjected to. They often offer glimpses of life in the East and West and the various ways in which women constantly struggle to actualise their ambitions to fit into both worlds and the subsequent desperateness. These works present the modern Middle East woman who shuns the imperialist and patriarchal society and holds up her human rights. Even in non-fiction writings one can see the reflections of an outsider's dilemma, as in Edward Said's controversial memoir, *Out of Place*. Said discusses the ever-present consciousness of being in exile, complicated by the controversy of identifying oneself. He says, "Better to wander out of place, not to own a house, and never to feel too much at home anywhere, especially in a city like New York, where I shall be until I die" (123).

Born away from homeland, Anglo Arab and Anglo Iranian literatures are haunted by the same hybrid, exile and diaspora issues that have been faced by other post colonialists, with their question of belonging unanswered. Concerns related to

cultural and relational identification lie at the heart of these works. Trauma of war, emotional deprivations, and trans-national identity are expressed through their writings. Middle East Literature received wide acclaim in World Literature when Naguib Mahfouz of Egypt won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988, for depicting life in Cairo, in his Cairo Trilogy. The Man Booker Prize of 2019 was received by the Omani writer Jokha Alharthi for her fiction *Celestial Bodies*, which builds around the pressures on three generations of an Omani family as a result of social change. Majority of Arab and Iranian Anglophone writers are women and they have turned their writings to committed literature, quite committed to making a change in society and the government in their homeland. Many books expose the brutality and torture meted out to civilians by the militant groups and the resisting governments. Their writings ignite a spirit of resilience and courage among the common people, inspiring them to overcome fear and unite in movements for change, as seen during the Arab Spring, across the Arab world and the Tehran Spring (Iranian Revolution of 1979) in Iran.

Though the Arab Spring was not a successful saga in many Middle-East nations, literature after it, is however, marked by trauma and violence. They become the historical depictions of posterity, picturing the desperation and dejection of the common people during the political turmoil. Ironically, critics like Hamid Dabashi make caustic criticism on Diaspora writers of the Arab world, opining that they are giving opportunities to capitalist countries to infiltrate to their own, by their naivety and imprudent comments, as mentioned in his book *Brown Skin White Masks*. Hamid Dabashi's critiques of Arab and Iranian diaspora writers have sparked significant debate within postcolonial studies. Dabashi accuses many diaspora intellectuals of

naively facilitating capitalist infiltration into their homelands through imprudent political engagement (Dabashi 121).

However, the researcher contends that such critiques overlook the complexity and agency of diaspora writers. These authors negotiate hybrid identities in transnational contexts, producing literature that challenges rather than capitulates to dominant hegemonies. Their work serves as sites of resistance and self-representation that transcend simplistic categorisations. Moreover, this may indicate Dabashi's insufficient understanding of issues affecting women. To reduce diaspora writers to mere instruments of imperialism neglects the profound traumas they depict. Rather than naivete, these writers employ sophisticated narrative strategies to confront authoritarianism and global power imbalances. Their dual accountability to homeland histories and global dynamics positions them as critical interlocutors in cultural and political debates.

Close readings of selected texts, particularly by Arab and Iranian Anglophone women writers, demonstrate an active subversion of normative power structures. These writers foreground gender, exile, cultural memory, and trauma, offering counter-narratives to both colonialist discourse and patriarchal norms. Their producing of testimonies and affirmations of resilience disrupts the binaries Dabashi proposes.

The researcher therefore advocates an analytical framework that acknowledges the multiplicity and intersectionality of diaspora experiences. While recognising Dabashi's warning against imperial allegiance, this study emphasises the necessity of engaging diaspora literature on its own terms, valuing it as a vibrant cultural and political force rather than a passive conduit for external agendas.

The tension between Dabashi's polemics and the literary realities explored here underscores the challenge of negotiating postcolonial identity and politics. Bridging this divide demands nuanced, ambivalent readings that respect complexity and highlight literary agency as a site of transformative power within Arab and Iranian diasporic contexts. On the whole, *Arab and Iranian Literary World* is the magnum opus to study Arab and Iranian political history of the century. These writers are so committed to their works and they represent the surge of nationalism for creating a better Middle East world tomorrow.

Beverly Milton Edwards' opinion expressed in her work *Contemporary Politics in the Middle East* is quoted here extensively for a better understanding of the problem:

. . . considering the post-colonial setback of colonialism, that Imperialism's fragmentation of the Middle East into a multitude of weak states dependent on core states for security against each other and its division of the unified regional market into small economies exporting primary products to the Western states and dependent on imports from it has led to a state of constrained consensus politically. When there is a hegemonic power (UK, USA) that lays down the laws on behalf of the world capitalist system, ensuring capitalist access to cheap energy, it becomes easier for external powers to exploit the local rivalries to sustain their penetration to this region. However, favourable conditions for regional autonomy have been largely reversed since the end of the oil boom. The West has restored its eligibility to intervene militarily and impose economic sanctions and loan conditionality enforcing the age of imperialism at the expense of regional autonomy. No analysis of the international politics of this region can be convincing that does

not take into account the profound impact of the ongoing struggle for regional autonomy from external control. (166)

It is worthwhile to make a note of what Barry Buzan in *People, States, and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, points out regarding the problems faced by the Middle East countries. The Islamic Middle East is the only classical civilisation that has not managed to re-establish itself as a significant world economy since the formal retreat of Western empires. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the forefathers have struggled to shape their future. With world powers trying to carve up their spheres of influence, the Middle East countries took sides and fell for the bi-polarity of cold war. The conflict and rivalry among the states led to violence and death, the warfare affecting civilians leading to massive exodus. The News headlines speak of internal strife, proxy wars, mass migration and international interests colliding in the region. This area is especially turbulent with waves rocking several countries, so big that their efforts are being felt worldwide, including the West. Terrorism, extremism, age-old sectarian tensions and the faltering oil prices contribute drastically to the disintegration of the Middle Eastern nations. (176–178)

What Hamid Dabashi says in his book *Iran: A People Interrupted* is also worthy of notice in this context:

Resisting the onslaught of the misbegotten U.S. empire, its military might and faltering hegemony alike, are tall and graceful lighthouses of the collective will of people around the globe insisting on their pride of place, the dignity of their communal gathering to oppose and end tyranny in terms conducive to a future that is rooted in their own unending and unfolding history. (216)

According to him, Iran faces severe human rights violations and very delicate political situation. He examines the internal political challenges and the impact of external pressures on Iran, including issues of governance, human rights, and external interventions.

Revolutionary groups, such as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), continue to spread theocratic extremism globally, while Iraq battles Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militants, who have held significant territories in the past. Iran's influence in the Persian Gulf region also poses challenges, creating geopolitical tensions. Arab nationalism is on the rise because of the over-indulgence of the West in their intrinsic affairs. The West is facing severe setbacks for this intrusion, with the 9/11 incident to point out one. The foreign policies of the western countries towards the Middle East are inflaming the Middle East nationalism and the resultant terrorism and civil wars cause misery to the life of the civilians.

Western interference adds fuel to fire, thereby making the lives of ordinary people turbulent. In most of the Arab countries, where the revolutionary Arab Spring has sown seeds, the civilians want to put an end to the autocratic corrupt rule and political system and thereby establish democracy protecting human rights. Uprisings in Egypt and Libya had made the public hopeful about an alternative democratic government. Similarly in Iran, after the revolution of 1979, referred to as the Tehran Spring, revolutionary theocratic leader Ayatollah Khomeini and his successor Ali Khomeini imposed strict measures to obey the theocratic practices which curbed the freedom of women. With UN insisting on nuclear disarmament on Iran and with major sanctions on its economy, the country faces unemployment and poverty.

The refugee issues on host communities cannot be underestimated. As months become years, the relationship between the refugee and the host communities change

and the fabric of these societies also keep changing. Alexander Betts and Paul Collier note the evolving tensions and express that: “As time passes, initial hospitality towards refugees often gives way to resentment in host communities, particularly when economic pressures mount and local resources strain” (145).

The political turmoil has drastically affected civilian life, and society as a whole is traumatised by war and human rights violations. The common man is forced to flee his nation and seek asylum at foreign land as a refugee. The issue of desperation, displacement and unemployment of youth prompt them to join terrorist groups at a very young age altering the fabric of society. Yet, amidst this contemporary turmoil, classical Arab and Iranian literature remain as a vital repository of cultural resilience.

Arab and Iranian literature serve as a gateway to the cultural and intellectual legacy of these countries. The rich tradition of classical Arab and Iranian literature has produced a vast body of work that encompasses philosophy, history, poetry and other narrative forms. Through English translations, these timeless texts have become accessible to a global audience, offering profound insights into the cultural, intellectual, and social landscapes of the Arab and Iranian world. Classical Arab works and their translations help in preserving and sharing the depth and diversity of Arab literary heritage. These works continue to resonate with modern readers, bridging cultural divides and enriching global literary discourse. *One Thousand and One Nights* (or *The Arabian Nights*) is one of the most famous works of Arab literature, containing a vast collection of folk tales, fables, and legends. Malcolm C. Lyons’ three-volume English translation, completed in 2008, is one of the most comprehensive and faithful to the Arabic original. Lyons captures the spirit of the tales, maintaining the storytelling quality that has fascinated readers for centuries.

Unlike earlier translations which often focused on the exotic and fantastical elements, Lyons' translation emphasises the cultural, moral, and philosophical dimensions of the stories. The work remains an essential reading for anyone interested in world literature, folklore, and the cross-cultural influence of Arabic literature. The book captures the trauma faced by people especially women from the ruthless autocrats.

The Quran, the holy book of Islam, has been translated into English many times, but M.A.S. Abdel Haleem's version (published in 2004) stands out for its clarity and accuracy. Abdel Haleem, a renowned scholar of Arabic and Islamic studies, aims to provide a translation that remains faithful to the original text while being understandable to a contemporary audience. His translation is noted for its elegant style, straightforward language, and an emphasis on the thematic coherence of the text, unlike some earlier translations that treated the Quran in a more fragmented manner. Abdel Haleem's work is highly regarded for its balance between readability and accuracy and as an epitome of human experiences that transcend all geographical and cultural borders.

The legacy of Iranian literature is a rich and enduring one, spanning centuries and encompassing a wide range of genres, from poetry and mysticism to modern fiction. The great Persian poets like Rumi, Hafez, Saadi, and Omar Khayyam have left an indelible mark on world literature, with their works exploring themes of love, spirituality, and the human connection with the divine. Rumi's mystical poetry, in particular, has transcended cultural and linguistic boundaries, influencing both Eastern and Western thought. This literary tradition continued into modern times, with contemporary writers like Sholeh Wolpé carrying forward the legacy through her translations and original works. Wolpé's translations have made classical Persian literature, such as *The Conference of the Birds* by Attar, accessible to modern

audiences, while her own poetry reflects themes of exile, identity, and cultural dialogue. Alongside Wolpé, other Iranian fiction writers such as Shahriar Mandanipour and Marjane Satrapi have brought to light the complexities of modern Iranian life, particularly in the context of gender, politics, and revolution. Together, these voices, both classical and modern, represent a continuous and evolving tradition of Iranian literature that resonates globally, embodying a deep engagement with human experience, social justice, and philosophical inquiry.

Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* and Sholeh Wolpé's comprehensive works reflect the complexities of present-day Iranian political and social life through deeply personal narratives. *Persepolis*, Satrapi's graphic memoir, poignantly captures her experiences of growing up during the Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War, offering a vivid critique of political oppression, censorship, and the struggle for personal freedom. Through her art and storytelling, Satrapi highlights the resilience of individuals, especially women, in the face of authoritarianism. Similarly, Sholeh Wolpé, in her collection of poetry entitled *Abacus of Loss: A Memoir in Verse* bridges Iranian cultural heritage with contemporary concerns, often addressing themes of exile, displacement, and the pursuit of identity in the diaspora. Both writers engage with the ongoing tension between tradition and modernity, and the struggle for individual rights and freedom of expression in the face of Iran's political and social restrictions. Their works offer nuanced reflections on the complexities of Iranian life, providing powerful voices of resistance and resilience.

Layla Al Maleh in her work, *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature* elucidates that the Arab Spring, as termed by the West, includes a series of demonstrations, protests and civil wars against authoritarian regimes that started in Tunisia and spread to much of Arab world. Though the

autocratic leaders of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen were overthrown by the outcry for democracy, Libya devolved into lawlessness, Egypt reverted into military dictatorship, and the uprising in Syria turned into a sectarian Civil war, with Western manipulations. Earlier Women's political participation in the demonstrations of the Arab Spring was high. Cyber activism also paved path for the spread of the revolution. But its impact has not matched expectations. Women faced discrimination in the Arab world and since expanding their roles and participation was not a priority for the revolutionary forces, they ended up sacrificing a lot with no gain in the end. Majority of the population of the Arab world is under the age of sixty and over half are female. The Arab countries, despite having a poor record of most of the gender issues, successfully reduced gender gaps in areas like education and healthcare. Women of all-encompassing countries have taken the path to challenge the transgressions of their countries, especially women activists and writers (Al Maleh 85-96). This internal activism intersects with broader religious interpretations, where divergent Islamic jurisprudence further shapes women's agency.

Different branches of Islam treat women's rights and dress codes in different ways, which directly affects women's freedom and daily lives across Middle Eastern countries. Sunni and Shia Islamic laws have different rules about what women can wear, how much property they can inherit, and what freedom they have in society. Both branches require women to wear hijab, but Shia law allows more flexibility in how women interpret this requirement compared to stricter Sunni interpretations (Ansari 45). In countries following Shia law, women can often wear colourful clothing and have more inheritance rights, while Sunni-majority countries typically enforce stricter dress codes and give women fewer legal rights (Cheema 78). Egypt, following Sunni Islamic law, restricts women's rights in marriage and divorce

through its Personal Status Law, though recent changes allow women to seek divorce without their husband's consent (Sharafeldin 136). Iran represents an extreme case where the Shia-majority government requires all women to wear strict Islamic dress, with heavy fines and imprisonment for violations, making it one of the most restrictive countries for women's clothing choices (Ali and Kayyal 28).

Oman follows a different branch of Islam called Ibadi, which allows women to wear traditional colourful robes and does not require face covering, while also legally protecting women from gender discrimination. These differences show that Islamic law is not the same everywhere and women's rights and freedom depend heavily on which branch of Islam their country follows and how strictly the government enforces religious rules. The three countries studied in this research are Egypt, Iran, and Oman. Each represent different approaches to women's rights within Islamic legal systems, demonstrating how religion, politics, and culture combine to create very different experiences for women across the Middle East. The trauma of imprisonment, floggings and humiliation shatter the women leading to psychological distress and force them to revolt against the governments concerned.

A few decades ago, women in Saudi Arabia were not allowed to travel, work, study abroad, marry as they wish, to get divorced or gain admittance to a public hospital without permission from a male guardian. Women were expected to be committed to Sharia discipline without any violation and are restrained by the religious veil (Sharafeldin 38). However, with much UN interventions, women have been allowed to vote since 2015 and have got the right to drive vehicles from 2018 in Saudi Arabia. Countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt have made substantial progress in the last decade.

Women writers surge up from diaspora to represent their protest against the traumatic state of women in certain Arab nations. Diaspora offers them absolute freedom to give expression to their literary and political activism. Today most of the literary, political and cultural activities take place beyond Arab and Iranian borders with most prominent authors, politicians, opposition leaders and the like, residing in and writing from their diaspora. Women authors dare to write about topics deemed taboo in their nation. They are also referred to as hybrid writers or hyphenated writers, indicative of their multiple identities due to diaspora culture. Prominent women authors from Egypt, Iran, and Oman have made significant contributions to literature by exploring the trauma experienced by women in their societies.

In Iran, Shahrnush Parsipur's *Women Without Men* portrays the struggles of women in post-revolutionary Iran, highlighting their attempts to reclaim autonomy. Zoya Pirzad's *Things We Left Unsaid* addresses the emotional turmoil of women restricted by societal expectations in Iran. In Egypt, Nawal El Saadawi, in works like *Woman at Point Zero*, brings attention to issues such as female genital mutilation and patriarchy, while Miral al-Tahawy, in *Brooklyn Heights*, delves into the trauma of displacement and cultural identity. Ahdaf Soueif, in *The Map of Love*, blends personal and political trauma, focusing on women caught in the tides of revolution. Bushra Khalfan and Huda Hamed examine the internal conflicts and societal constraints that women in Oman face. These authors shed light on the emotional, psychological, and social trauma endured by women in their respective cultures, offering a critical examination of gender oppression in the Middle East on the basis of their identity and belief.

Migration, trauma and the resultant disillusionment form a major part of these writers' narration. Arab World is a rapidly changing region of the globe, with respect

to the current political and social scenario. The last two decades were extremely challenging with many wars in the zone, mass migration and disillusionment of millions of people. Whenever a war strikes, the women and the children are the most affected. Trauma, agony and dislocation escalate women's issues and the hybrid identity they receive after migration, alienates them. The Arab women writers delineate their stories of resistance and struggle for existence. The feminism that is seen in this part of the globe is pertaining to human rights and its violations. Domestic violence against women, degrading and insulting them openly and inflicting fatal punishments for violating the dress code and code of conduct are often too severe and reasoned by twisted reading of the holy texts.

Researching through the three novels written by different authors from three different Islamic nations, the researcher intends to study the Iranian and Arab woman's struggle for life, her resistance and the trauma she faces at every point of her existence. Despite these extreme conditions, Arab Woman's zest for life is indomitable and she is fiercely creative with a parched tongue, seeking soothing drops of knowledge. Centuries apart, Arab women still withhold the legendary Scheherazade's spirit of life and her magnificent powers of storytelling. Just like Scheherazade's, their creativity and stories are born out of fear of life. Scheherazade delivered each story of *Arabian Nights*, night after night to save her life from the despotic Sultan. Her ardent desire for freedom from the binding shackles is the root cause of inspiration for her stories. Likewise, Arab women writers too share Scheherazade's spirit of freedom and zest for life depicting stories that are universal and that withstand the test of time. They even attempt to reveal certain veiled truths behind the capitalist actions directed upon the Middle East nations. Trauma theories are used to study the power struggles prevalent at different levels of the Arab society.

Trauma theories can be implemented as a tool to evaluate the patriarchal atrocities in the lives of women characters, which represent a cross section of Arab Society.

Research Gap

Even though much has been discussed about women's oppression and empowerment in all these works, less attention has been given to the writings of contemporary ethnic and Diasporic Arab and Iranian women writers who portray gross human rights' violations and redefine trauma narratives, moving beyond Western concepts of victimhood, leading to self-discovery and resilience.

The rationale for selecting one book each from Iran, Egypt, and Oman is deeply rooted in the socio-political turbulence that has shaped the historical and contemporary narratives of these countries. These works, set against the backdrop of significant national upheavals, offer nuanced insights into how societal trauma, particularly among women, manifests in different forms, from political oppression to interpersonal and transgenerational trauma.

Thesis Statement

The present study, through the lens of trauma, explores the multifaceted struggles of Arab and Iranian women against oppressive regimes and cultural constraints shedding light on their transformative resilience.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyse how trauma shapes the identity and resilience of female protagonists in contemporary Arab and Iranian literature
- To explore how women's socio-political expression and its psychological impact are portrayed in the selected novels
- To contribute to the understanding of psycho-social dimensions of trauma in literature and its implications for feminist and post-colonial studies

- To analyse if the responses to trauma are gender-centric
- To analyse how literature, fine arts and crafts can help in alleviating the mental agony of women due to trauma

Methodology

The researcher studies the novels with a psycho-social approach and makes use of the contemporary theories of trauma for the in-depth analysis of characters. This qualitative research adopts formatting techniques and regulations that comply with the *MLA Handbook* Ninth edition.

Chapterisation

The present study is structured into five chapters, including an introduction and conclusion. In the first chapter “Introduction” the researcher gives a socio-political review of Iran and Arab countries of Egypt and Oman and explains the effect of Imperialism on these nations. The researcher also delves into the impact of the Iranian revolution and the Arab Spring and how these nations’ fabric changed under the new revolutionary governments. The rich tradition of Iranian and Arab Literature is studied comparing the change of perspectives in the new age. The subjugation of women, the suppression of their freedom of expression and its direct consequences, as reflected in the contemporary literature of these countries are focused in this chapter with respect to the selected writers.

In chapter II – “Veils and Shadows: Navigating Trauma and Identity in *Reading Lolita in Tehran*,” the researcher analyses how the distressed women take refuge in literature, arts and craft to combat the mental trauma they are subjected to, due to the repressive regime in Iran. Azar Nafisi’s Memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran* highlights the soothing effect of literature on troubled minds. The resilience acquired by her students through literature and how they transform their adversities into

advantages form the crux of the study. Trauma theories are used for the analysis of the mental make-up of characters and to show how they sustain themselves beyond their limits of tolerance.

In Chapter III – “Power, Oppression, and the Fragile Self: Exploring Trauma and Tyranny in Basma Abdel Aziz’s *The Queue*,” the researcher delineates the life in contemporary Egypt with its military government and suppressive measures. Through the novel *The Queue* by Basma Abdel Aziz, the researcher points out how the oppressive control of the authoritarian regime known as “The Gate” creates identity crisis and existential trauma. The novel portrays how political repression shapes both men and women differently, with a focus on the resilience of female characters like Amani, who resist the system with determination, contrasting the often-passive acceptance or resignation seen in male characters like Yehya. This dynamic illustrates the broader themes of resistance, autonomy, and gender in a society weighed down by political subjugation, highlighting the resilience of women in the face of both political and patriarchal oppression.

In chapter IV – “Echoes of Silence: Unravelling Trauma in Jokha Alharthi’s *Celestial Bodies*,” the researcher discusses the novel *Celestial Bodies* written by Jokha Alharthi. The portrayal of trauma extends beyond the typical struggles of power or war, delving into the complexities of cultural, transgenerational, and collective trauma, particularly as it affects the women characters. The novel explores how women bear the weight of generational expectations, cultural restraints, and the legacies of slavery, which collectively shape their experiences of trauma. In contrast to men, whose struggles often centre around social status and traditional power roles, the women develop resilience by navigating familial responsibilities, emotional burdens, and societal preoccupations. This resilience is seen in their ability to find strength within

the domestic sphere, their relationships, and their roles as caretakers, highlighting the gendered dimensions of trauma and survival across generations.

In chapter V – “Conclusion” the study explores how socio-political upheavals and oppressive regimes in Iran, Egypt, and Oman have shaped the lives and experiences of individuals, particularly women, as reflected in contemporary literature. The effects of imperialism, revolutions, and authoritarian governments have created a pervasive atmosphere of repression and trauma, with women often facing additional layers of subjugation and cultural restraint. Through the analysis of works like Azar Nafisi’s *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Basma Abdel Aziz’s *The Queue*, and Jokha Alharthi’s *Celestial Bodies*, the research highlights the resilience of women in the face of political and patriarchal oppression. While the men in these narratives are often depicted as struggling with power dynamics and social status, women turn to literature, arts, and domestic roles as means of coping, transforming their adversities into strengths. Ultimately, the study emphasises how literature not only reflects the traumas of these societies, but also serves as a powerful tool for resilience, empowerment, and the preservation of personal and cultural identity amidst oppressive forces.

A Comprehensive Psycho-social Framework for Trauma Analysis

This research employs a sophisticated psycho-social approach that synthesises feminist literary criticism with psychoanalytic trauma theory to examine contemporary Arab and Iranian women's literature. The methodology draws primarily on Cathy Caruth's ground-breaking conceptualisation of trauma as a "belated experience" – an event that disrupts linear narrative comprehension and returns through symptoms and repetitive patterns. The researcher adopts Caruth's understanding that traumatic experience cannot be fully assimilated when it occurs,

examining how female protagonists in the selected texts navigate individual and collective trauma through literature, memory, and resistance strategies.

Building upon Caruth's framework, the study integrates Shoshana Felman's pioneering work on testimony and witnessing in literature. Felman argues that literature functions as a crisis of witnessing where traumatic events seek representation through narrative testimony. Felman articulates literature's role in trauma as a "radical historical crisis of witnessing," specifically tied to the Holocaust: "whose uniquely devastating aspect is here interpreted for the first time as a radical historical crisis of witnessing, and as the unprecedented, inconceivable, historical occurrence of an event without a witness, an event eliminating its own witness" (30). This theoretical foundation proves particularly relevant for understanding how Middle Eastern women writers transform personal and collective suffering into literary testimony that challenges dominant patriarchal and political narratives.

The research further incorporates Jeffrey Alexander's theory of cultural trauma, which posits that events become traumatic through socially mediated attribution processes. Alexander's framework illuminates how collective traumas are constructed through narrative processes involving carrier groups who make claims about traumatic events to wider audiences through specific cultural arenas. He states: "Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (1). This theoretical lens enables analysis of how Arab and Iranian women writers function as cultural carriers, transforming private suffering into public discourse that challenges existing power structures.

The study focuses on three primary texts that represent distinct trauma manifestations across different Middle Eastern contexts: Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003), exemplifying Iranian women's intellectual resistance under theocratic rule; Basma Abdel Aziz's *The Queue* (2013), exploring Egyptian post-revolutionary collective trauma; and Jokha Alharthi's *Celestial Bodies* (2018), investigating transgenerational trauma in Omani society. These works provide comprehensive perspectives on how trauma operates across individual, collective, and historical dimensions within Middle Eastern women's experiences.

The methodological approach employs close textual analysis combined with contextual historical examination to understand how these authors employ specific narrative strategies to represent traumatic experience. The researcher examines recurring motifs, structural patterns, and linguistic choices that reveal how trauma manifests in literary representation. This analysis considers both the conscious artistic decisions of the authors and the unconscious ways that traumatic experience shapes narrative structure and thematic development.

Theoretical Framework: Integrating Trauma Studies with Feminist Literary Criticism

The researcher implements trauma theory as conceptualised by Cathy Caruth, who argues that traumatic experience cannot be fully assimilated when it occurs but returns belatedly through symptoms, repetition, and narrative fragmentation. Caruth's insight that trauma involves the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event that is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, provides crucial understanding of how women in restrictive societies process collective and individual trauma through literary engagement. She says: “the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event . . . is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time”

(4). This theoretical approach proves particularly relevant because it acknowledges that traumatic experience often exceeds the victim's capacity for immediate comprehension, requiring narrative processing to achieve psychological integration.

Feminist psychoanalytic criticism guides the analysis of how female characters negotiate patriarchal oppression and authoritarian control. The research draws on postcolonial feminist theory, which emphasises the need for context-specific frameworks that address the unique needs of women in postcolonial contexts. This approach avoids the universalising tendencies of Western feminism while recognising the particular ways that colonialism, nationalism, and religious authoritarianism intersect to shape women's experiences in the Middle East.

The integration of Shoshana Felman's work on testimony proves essential for understanding how literature functions as a form of bearing witness. Felman argues that survivors need to tell their story to survive, highlighting the essential relationship between narrative testimony and psychological healing. This concept of testimonial literature as survival strategy illuminates how the selected authors transform traumatic experience into narrative testimony that serves both as personal healing and political resistance.

The theoretical framework also incorporates insights from diaspora studies and exile literature, recognising how displacement creates additional layers of traumatic experience. Contemporary scholarship on diaspora literature emphasises how geographical displacement compounds psychological trauma, creating what scholars' term hyphenated hybrid subjects who must navigate multiple identities and conflicting loyalties. This perspective proves particularly relevant for understanding how Arab and Iranian women writers in diaspora communities process both personal and collective trauma through literary expression.

Justification for Text Selection: Representing Diverse Trauma Modalities

The rationale for selecting Azar Nafisi, Basma Abdel Aziz, and Jokha Alharthi lies in their representation of distinct forms of trauma across different Middle Eastern contexts and historical periods. Each author offers unique insights into how women experience and respond to trauma differently compared to their male counterparts, while their works collectively reveal patterns of resilience that transcend gender demarcations and national boundaries while respecting cultural specificity.

Selecting *Reading Lolita in Tehran*: a memoir, *The Queue*, a dystopian allegory, and *Celestial Bodies* a novel, each from Iran, Egypt, and Oman respectively, offers a uniquely compelling platform for comparative trauma studies given their distinct cultural, political, and literary backgrounds. The rationale centres on sampling a deliberately graded spectrum of turbulence – from personal and collective repression in the Iranian context, to the acute authoritarianism dramatised in Egypt, and finally, to the quieter, domestic trauma interwoven with Oman's evolving social norms. This allows the researcher to trace how vastly different degrees and expressions of socio-political instability and historical rupture shape experiences of trauma, memory, and resilience in contemporary Middle Eastern literature.

Nafisi's memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran* exemplifies how intellectual resistance becomes a survival strategy under theocratic rule. The text demonstrates what postcolonial feminist scholars identify as literary resistance through feminist agency and subaltern voice, where banned Western literature becomes a tool for challenging authoritarian control while maintaining cultural identity. Nafisi's reading group creates counter-discursive spaces of resistance that enable women to articulate suppressed aspects of their intellectual and emotional lives.

Unlike traditional political memoirs that focus on public resistance activities, Nafisi's text reveals how private intellectual engagement becomes a form of political resistance. The memoir's structure, alternating between literary analysis and personal narrative, creates a unique hybrid form that demonstrates how academic discourse can become a vehicle for political critique under conditions where direct opposition is impossible.

Abdel Aziz's dystopian allegory captures post-revolutionary disillusionment in Egypt, addressing cultural trauma resulting from collective disappointment and betrayal. The novel's psychological realism, provides authentic representation of how state violence affects individual and collective psyche. The novel functions as both artistic expression and social commentary, creating the symbolic distance that allows readers to confront difficult political realities without direct psychological threat.

The Queue offers distinctive contributions to dystopian literature by focusing on collective rather than individual trauma, reflecting cultural differences in how Middle Eastern societies process political upheaval. Unlike Western dystopian novels that typically centre on individual protagonists fighting against oppressive systems, Abdel Aziz's novel examines how entire communities respond to systematic dehumanisation, offering insights into collective survival strategies that emerge under authoritarian rule.

Alharthi's novel *Celestial bodies* explore the persistent effects of historical trauma, particularly slavery's legacy in Omani society. The text addresses transgenerational trauma, demonstrating how historical injustices create lasting psychological and social effects that extend beyond direct victims to influence subsequent generations. The novel's multi-generational structure mirrors the fragmented nature of traumatic memory while ultimately creating coherence through

storytelling, suggesting that acknowledging historical trauma through narrative can facilitate collective healing.

The selection of *Celestial Bodies* addresses the need for representation of Gulf women's experiences, which have been underrepresented in international literary discourse. The novel's focus on slavery's legacy provides crucial historical context often overlooked in discussions of contemporary Middle Eastern society, while its exploration of women's roles in preserving cultural memory offers insights into gendered approaches to historical trauma processing.

The deliberate choice of different genres – memoir, dystopian allegory, and novel, strengthens the research in trauma studies by allowing for a broader and more nuanced understanding of how trauma is experienced and expressed in literature. Each genre provides a distinctive way of presenting trauma: the memoir offers a direct, personal account that foregrounds individual memory and lived experience; the dystopian allegory uses symbolism and exaggeration to critique and expose institutionalised forms of trauma under authoritarian rule; and the novel, with its complex narrative structure, enables the exploration of trauma's subtle, long-term effects on families and communities.

By examining trauma through these varied literary forms, the research demonstrates how genre shapes both the representation and the impact of trauma. This methodological diversity allows for the analysis of how real events are remembered in a memoir, how collective anxieties are masked or revealed in an allegory, and how generational wounds are carried through fiction. Such an approach ensures a richer investigation – revealing not only the particularities of trauma in different societies, but also the creative strategies writers use to articulate pain and resilience. This cross-

genre perspective is crucial in uncovering the diverse ways trauma is processed, narrated, and ultimately understood in contemporary literature from turbulent regions.

The Historical Context of Middle Eastern Women's Oppression: Iran

The suppression of women's rights across the Middle East reflects broader patterns of authoritarian control that exploit religious and cultural traditions to maintain political power. In Iran, the post-1979 revolutionary government imposed strict gender segregation and dress codes that fundamentally altered women's participation in public life. The researcher argues that these restrictions represent not authentic Islamic practice but rather political manipulation of religious symbols to consolidate theocratic authority, as scholars of Iranian women's resistance have documented.

Contemporary analysis of post-revolutionary Iran reveals internal colonialism, where the Islamic regime uses gender oppression as a mechanism of political control. This framework illuminates how clerical opposition to women's education stems from fear of losing patriarchal control rather than genuine religious conviction. Historical figures like Tahereh Qurratul-Ayn, the nineteenth-century poet and revolutionary who challenged orthodox authority through intellectual courage, provide precedents for contemporary Iranian women's resistance strategies.

The Iranian context proves particularly significant for understanding how intellectual resistance operates under theocratic rule. The revolutionary government's systematic targeting of educational institutions and cultural expression created conditions where private intellectual spaces became sites of political resistance. Nafisi's memoir documents how literature became a vehicle for maintaining intellectual freedom and cultural continuity under conditions of systematic repression.

The researcher examines how the mandatory veiling law functions as both a symbol and mechanism of control, transforming women's bodies into battlegrounds for competing ideological claims. The reading group described in Nafisi's memoir represents a form of intellectual unveiling, where women remove not only physical coverings but also psychological constraints imposed by authoritarian rule. This analysis reveals how seemingly private activities acquire political significance under conditions of systemic oppression.

Azar Nafisi's analysis demonstrates how the clergy's antagonism toward Western influences often masks anxiety about women's potential empowerment through education and public participation. The researcher contends that such opposition reveals the fragility of systems dependent on women's subordination for their legitimacy. This analysis aligns with scholarship documenting how women's resistance and rebellion in post-revolutionary Iran operates through both public protest and private intellectual spaces.

The creation of clandestine reading groups, as documented in Nafisi's memoir, represents what postcolonial feminist scholars identify as subaltern storytelling and narrative defiance. These intellectual sanctuaries function as sites where Western literature becomes reinterpreted through local feminist frameworks, creating hybrid cultural expressions that resist both theocratic control and cultural imperialism.

Egyptian Women's Resistance and Post-Revolutionary Trauma

The Arab Spring initially promised democratic transformation across the Middle East, yet its aftermath revealed complex patterns of political manipulation and authoritarian resurgence. In Egypt, women's substantial participation in revolutionary protests did not translate into meaningful political representation or social advancement. The researcher argues that this betrayal of women's

revolutionary contributions represents a form of collective trauma that contemporary literature attempts to process and critique.

Contemporary scholarship on Arab women's writing identifies this period as generating traumatised voices that seek expression through literary testimony. Abdel Aziz's novel *The Queue* functions both as a dystopian allegory and psychological analysis pointing out how authoritarian systems damage individual agency and social cohesion. The Egyptian context provides crucial insights into how collective trauma manifests in post-revolutionary societies. The initial euphoria of revolutionary participation, followed by systematic exclusion from political processes, creates a particular form of collective disillusionment that Abdel Aziz captures through her dystopian allegory. The novel's bureaucratic maze serves as a metaphor for how authoritarian systems maintain control through systematic confusion and delay rather than direct violence alone.

The novel's female characters demonstrate resilience through maintaining human connections and emotional authenticity despite systematic dehumanisation. This pattern of resistance through relationship preservation emerges as a distinctive aspect of women's trauma responses across the selected texts. Scholars analysing Arab feminist Gothic literature identify similar patterns where women's relationships with other women – particularly mothers and daughters – become sites of both trauma transmission and healing.

Jefferey Alexander's cultural trauma theory proves particularly relevant for understanding how *The Queue* transforms Egypt's recent political upheavals into literary metaphor that facilitates psychological processing of collective disappointment and loss. The novel's allegorical setting creates protective narrative

distance while enabling sustained political commentary about contemporary Egyptian authoritarianism.

Omani Society and the Legacy of Historical Trauma

Oman's relative political stability compared to Iran and Egypt masks persistent social hierarchies rooted in the historical legacy of slavery and patriarchal tradition. Alharthi's *Celestial Bodies* reveals how historical trauma continues to shape contemporary social relationships, particularly affecting women who navigate complex intersections of gender, class, and ethnic identity. The novel's exploration of transgenerational trauma demonstrates how historical injustices create lasting psychological and social effects that extend beyond direct victims. The researcher employs Alexander's concept of cultural trauma to analyse how collective memory of slavery influences current social dynamics in Omani society. Alexander's framework illuminates how the meanings that provide the sense of shock and fear rather than events themselves determine traumatic impact.

The Omani context provides essential insights into how historical trauma operates across generations, creating persistent patterns of social hierarchy and psychological inheritance. Unlike the immediate political traumas addressed in the Iranian and Egyptian texts, *Celestial Bodies* examines how historical injustices become embedded in family structures and cultural practices, requiring different analytical approaches to understand their contemporary manifestations.

Women characters in Alharthi's novel exhibit resilience through maintaining family connections and cultural traditions while simultaneously challenging restrictive social expectations. This pattern reflects broader themes of how women across the Middle East negotiate tradition and modernity in their pursuit of personal agency. The novel's non-linear narrative structure mirrors what trauma theorists identify as the

fragmented nature of traumatic memory while ultimately creating coherence through storytelling.

The researcher analyses how Alharthi's narrative techniques mirror the psychological processes through which transgenerational trauma operates. The novel's fragmented chronology and multiple perspectives reflect how traumatic memory disrupts linear narrative understanding, while the gradual emergence of family secrets mirrors the delayed recognition characteristic of traumatic experience. This structural analysis reveals how form and content collaborate to represent the dimensions of trauma.

The novel's focus on women as custodians of family memory highlights gendered approaches to historical trauma processing. Female characters serve as repositories of cultural knowledge and family history, suggesting that women's traditional roles as storytellers and memory keepers provide particular resources for processing collective trauma. This analysis contributes to understanding how gender shapes different approaches to trauma representation and healing.

Literature as Trauma Processing and Resistance Strategy

The three primary texts demonstrate how literary engagement functions as both trauma processing mechanism and a form of political resistance. Nafisi's secret reading group transforms Western literature into tools for intellectual rebellion while maintaining cultural identity through reinterpretation rather than wholesale adoption of foreign values. Contemporary scholarship identifies this practice as exemplifying postcolonial feminist resistance through the articulation of subaltern voices and the creation of counter-narratives.

The researcher examines how each author employs specific narrative strategies to represent traumatic experience while enabling psychological processing. Nafisi's alternation between literary analysis and personal narrative creates protective distance while enabling direct testimony. Aziz's allegorical techniques provide symbolic representation that allows confrontation with political trauma without direct psychological threat. Alharthi's multi-generational structure enables examination of trauma's long-term effects while suggesting possibilities for healing through narrative integration.

Aziz employs dystopian narrative techniques to critique contemporary Egyptian authoritarianism while avoiding direct political confrontation that might endanger the author or readers. This indirect approach allows for sustained political commentary while providing psychological distance from immediate trauma.

The comparative analysis reveals how different narrative strategies serve similar psychological and political functions across diverse cultural contexts. Each author creates protective narrative distance while enabling testimonial witness, suggesting common patterns in how literature functions as trauma processing mechanism. These shared strategies transcend cultural boundaries while respecting local specificities, supporting the theoretical framework's validity across different Middle Eastern contexts.

Alharthi's multi-generational narrative structure mirrors the fragmented nature of traumatic memory while ultimately creating coherence through storytelling. The novel suggests that acknowledging historical trauma through narrative can facilitate healing and social progress. This approach aligns with Alexander's theory that cultural trauma construction enables societies to expand the circle of recognition by acknowledging collective responsibility for historical suffering. He says, "It is by

constructing cultural traumas that social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations not only cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering but 'take on board' some significant responsibility for it" (1).

The researcher analyses how the literary form collaborates with thematic content to represent trauma. Narrative fragmentation, repetitive patterns, and structural disruptions mirror traumatic experience while enabling gradual integration through storytelling. This formal analysis reveals how trauma literature employs specific aesthetic strategies to represent psychological states that exceed conventional narrative representations.

Gender Differences in Trauma Response and Resilience

The researcher observes distinct patterns of how male and female characters respond to traumatic circumstances in all the three texts. The male characters often exhibit withdrawal, aggression, or passive resignation when confronting systemic oppression whereas female characters more frequently demonstrate resilience through maintaining relationships, pursuing education, and engaging in creative expression. This gendered difference in trauma response reflects broader sociological patterns where women's traditional roles as caregivers and community builders provide resources for psychological survival under extreme circumstances.

Contemporary scholarship on diaspora and exile literature identifies similar patterns where women's experiences constitute them as hyphenated or hybrid subjects who develop particular strategies for negotiating multiple identities and loyalties. The analysis reveals that women's resilience strategies often involve transforming private spaces into sites of resistance and cultural preservation, as documented across Middle Eastern women's writing. However, the research avoids essentialising these differences and instead examines how social expectations and

opportunities shape individual responses to trauma. The analysis recognises that resilience strategies emerge from specific cultural contexts rather than inherent gender characteristics, aligning with postcolonial feminist critiques of universalising approaches.

The comparative analysis reveals that women's responses to trauma often involve collective rather than individual strategies, emphasising relationship maintenance and community building as survival mechanisms. This pattern appears consistently across the three texts despite their different cultural contexts, suggesting shared aspects of women's responses to trauma that transcend national boundaries while respecting cultural specificity.

The researcher examines how female characters transform traditional gender roles into sources of empowerment and resistance. Nafisi's role as a teacher becomes a vehicle for intellectual resistance; Aziz's female characters use caregiving roles to maintain human connection; Alharthi's women employ storytelling traditions to preserve cultural memory and challenge historical silences. These analyses reveal how women's agency operates within cultural constraints while creating possibilities for resistance and empowerment.

Contemporary Relevance and Global Implications

The ongoing displacement crisis affecting over 60 million refugees worldwide, with the Middle East experiencing the largest population movements since World War II, provides urgent contemporary relevance for understanding trauma and resilience in Middle Eastern literature. The researcher argues that these literary works offer valuable insights into psychological survival strategies that extend beyond their specific cultural contexts.

Contemporary scholarship on diaspora literature emphasises how displacement creates profound alienation for diasporic subjects who experience intense feelings of not belonging anywhere. The patterns of resistance and resilience documented in the selected texts provide models for understanding how marginalised communities maintain dignity and agency under oppressive circumstances.

This research contributes to broader discussions of human rights, gender equality, and cultural preservation in contexts of political upheaval. The analysis demonstrates how literature functions as both artistic expression and political intervention, offering testimony that challenges dominant narratives while preserving alternative ways of knowing and being. The global implications of this research extend beyond Middle Eastern contexts to address universal questions about how literature functions as trauma processing mechanism and political resistance strategy. The theoretical framework developed through analysis of these specific texts provides tools for understanding trauma literature across different cultural contexts while respecting local specificities.

The researcher argues that understanding Middle Eastern women's trauma narratives proves essential for addressing contemporary global challenges including refugee crises, political authoritarianism, and cultural preservation under conditions of rapid social change. These literary works offer insights into psychological and cultural resources that enable survival and resistance under extreme circumstances, providing valuable perspectives for addressing current global humanitarian challenges.

The researcher discusses how the novel captures the resilience of individuals in the face of systemic absurdities. She highlights the fragmented narrative structure,

which mirrors the chaotic nature of authoritarian societies. The novel serves as both a psychological and societal critique, concentrating on the personal struggles of its characters as they attempt to navigate the absurdities imposed by the state. The researcher extends her study to Alexander's cultural trauma theory, to explain how the characters of *The Queue* function as a carrier group narrative that transforms Egypt's political upheavals into a collective meaning-making process. Alexander claims: "Carrier groups are the collective agents of the trauma process. Carrier groups have both ideal and material interests; they are situated in particular places in the social structure, and they have particular discursive talents for articulating their claims for what might be called meaning making in the public sphere" (12). Alexander's framework proves particularly relevant because it addresses how literary texts enable societies to move beyond immediate shock toward longer-term psychological integration and healing through narrative construction of traumatic events.

When the novel heavily relies on allegory, it weakens character development, and the abstract narrative alienates readers from connecting deeply with the characters. However, the researcher contends that the use of allegory has an intentional purpose of creating a protective distance in trauma literature. Contemporary trauma studies, particularly Cathy Caruth's work *Unclaimed Experience* demonstrates how protective narrative distance enables readers to confront traumatic material that might otherwise prove overwhelming. Caruth states: "The pathology of trauma, indeed, consists not in simple repression or effacement of events, but in the ability to fully witness – through belated and indirect access. . . to the event . . . returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth 91). So, the pathology of trauma is the inability to fully witness the event as it occurred, or the inability to grasp events fully until long after they have taken place, as, trauma is not locatable in the

simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way of its very unassimilated nature and the way it was precisely not known in the first instance.

This theory aligns with the protective distancing which the author tries to achieve by using an allegorical narrative for the novel. Aziz's strategic use of allegory as both aesthetic choice and therapeutic technique, creates a symbolic containment that allows for political critique while maintaining psychological safety for both the author and the readers.

Contemporary scholarship on Arab feminist Gothic literature, as analysed in recent postcolonial feminist studies, identifies similar patterns where allegorical techniques enable women writers to theorise oppression while avoiding direct confrontation with authoritarian systems. The researcher argues that *The Queue's* allegorical structure represents sophisticated political strategy rather than aesthetic limitation, enabling sustained critique of Egyptian authoritarianism.

Female Egyptian writers employ dystopian allegory as a response to the systematic exclusion of women from political processes, despite their substantial participation in revolutionary protests. The female characters of the novel survive extreme trauma by building up emotional connections with each other. Aziz's female characters demonstrate what trauma scholar Judith Jordan identifies as "relational resilience." She says, "Therapy, then, can be understood as largely an effort to explore and enhance the capacity for relational resilience. And in moving beyond personal resilience to personal transformation and social change, the relational context is central" (2). It refers to the survival strategies that prioritise maintaining human connections and emotional authenticity despite systematic dehumanisation.

This pattern of resistance through relationship preservation emerges as a distinctive aspect of women's trauma responses across Middle Eastern contexts,

aligning with research in feminist trauma studies that emphasise collective healing approaches over individualistic therapeutic models. Contemporary analysis of Arab women's resistance narratives reveals how female characters often transform traditional caregiving roles into sites of political participation, within domestic and community contexts that authoritarian systems cannot fully control or monitor.

The novel's exploration of bureaucratic oppression reveals how contemporary authoritarian systems employ what Michel Foucault calls "disciplinary power" – control mechanisms that operate through systematic confusion, delay, and administrative violence rather than relying solely on direct physical coercion. This approach proves particularly effective because it creates uncertainty and helplessness while maintaining plausible deniability about oppressive intentions, making resistance more difficult to organise and justify. Aziz's representation of the queue as a metaphor for contemporary Egyptian governance demonstrates how modern authoritarianism maintain democratic facades while systematically undermining its substance.

The researcher employs comparative analysis with other dystopian works to demonstrate how *The Queue* differs from Western dystopian traditions by focusing on collective rather than individual trauma responses. Unlike Western dystopian novels that typically centre on individual protagonists fighting against oppressive systems, Abdel Aziz examines how entire communities respond to systematic dehumanisation, offering insights into collective survival strategies that emerge under authoritarian rule. This cultural difference reflects broader patterns in how Middle Eastern societies process political upheaval through communal rather than individualistic frameworks, emphasising shared responsibility and mutual support systems that sustain communities through extended periods of oppression.

Contemporary global context provides urgent relevance for understanding *The Queue's* international reception and political significance. With democratic backsliding occurring in multiple global contexts, the novel's allegorical representation of bureaucratic authoritarianism resonates beyond Egyptian boundaries, offering insights into universal patterns of how authoritarian systems maintain control through administrative violence and systematic degradation of civic institutions. Critics have noted parallels between the novel's dystopian bureaucracy and authoritarian trends in various international contexts, suggesting that Aziz's allegorical approach successfully captures fundamental mechanisms of political oppression while maintaining specific cultural authenticity.

In The African Library review on LitNet, Michelle Johnson makes a note of Basma Abdel Aziz's background as a psychiatrist at the Nadeem Center for torture rehabilitation, praising how it lends "clinical precision" to the characters' trauma responses under the Gate's oppression. Johnson's analysis reinforces how Abdel Aziz's neuropsychiatry background elevates *The Queue* beyond allegory: her characters display authentic stress responses of relational coping amid dehumanisation that echo clinical patterns from political violence (Johnson). Unlike purely symbolic dystopias, this fusion grants the novel distinctive authority, transforming individual suffering into collective testimony. Thus, relational resilience emerges not as abstraction but as a lived survival strategy. This combination of clinical expertise and literary skill creates distinctive authority for representing both individual and collective trauma responses, enabling the novel to function as both artistic expression and psychological documentation of how political violence affects civilian population.

The researcher examines how Aziz's psychiatric training enables her to

represent complex trauma due to psychological injury, resulting from prolonged exposure to systematic oppression rather than single traumatic events. Contemporary trauma research demonstrates that political oppression creates particular patterns of psychological damage that differ from other forms of trauma, requiring specialised understanding of how authoritarian systems deliberately target civilian mental health as a mechanism of political control. Aziz's novel provides literary representation of these clinical insights, transforming medical knowledge into accessible narrative form that enables broader public understanding of political trauma's psychological dimensions.

Elisabeth Jaquette's translation of *The Queue* required careful negotiation of cultural and political nuances to preserve the novel's allegorical effectiveness while ensuring international accessibility. Jaquette's approach maintains Arabic terms with contextual explanation, allowing readers to encounter cultural difference while providing necessary interpretive frameworks. This method exemplifies what translation studies' scholars call "foreignization," which preserves source culture authenticity while building cross-cultural understanding. The translation's success in multiple international contexts demonstrates how effective trauma literature can speak simultaneously to local and global audiences, offering both culturally specific insights and universal patterns of resistance and resilience.

Contemporary scholarship on translation and trauma narratives emphasises the particular challenges involved in rendering psychological and political suffering across linguistic boundaries. Successful translation of trauma literature requires preservation of emotional resonance and narrative structure, not merely literal word conversion. Jaquette's translation work demonstrates how translators function as cultural mediators who understand both the source culture's specific historical context

and the target culture's interpretive frameworks, ensuring that political critique and psychological insight survive the translation process while remaining accessible to international readers who may lack detailed knowledge of Egyptian political history.

The global reception of *The Queue* has sparked important discussions about the universality of authoritarian experience and the role of literature in processing collective political trauma. Critics have noted how the novel's themes resonate with readers experiencing various forms of political oppression, suggesting that Aziz's allegorical techniques successfully capture the fundamental patterns of how modern authoritarianism operates across different cultural contexts. This universality stems from the novel's focus on psychological and social mechanisms rather than specific political events, enabling readers to recognise similar patterns in their own political contexts while respecting the particular Egyptian circumstances that generated the narrative.

Contemporary analysis of *The Queue* within global dystopian literature reveals how the novel contributes to evolving understanding of how twenty-first-century authoritarianism differs from earlier totalitarian models. Unlike twentieth-century dictatorships that relied primarily on direct violence and ideological mobilisation, contemporary authoritarian systems often employ more subtle mechanisms of control that operate through administrative bureaucracy, systemic corruption, and deliberate degradation of civic institutions. Aziz's novel provides literary documentation of these evolving patterns of political oppression, offering insights that prove relevant for understanding similar developments in multiple global contexts.

The researcher also argues that *The Queue's* international success demonstrates the continued relevance of allegorical literature for processing political trauma in contexts where direct political expression remains dangerous. The novel's

reception across diverse cultural contexts suggests that readers recognise universal patterns in Aziz's representation of bureaucratic oppression, while the allegorical structure enables audiences to apply the narrative's insights to their own political circumstances without requiring direct engagement with Egyptian politics. This flexibility enables the novel to function as both a culturally specific testimony and universally applicable analysis of how contemporary authoritarianism operates through systematic degradation of human dignity and civic agency.

Similarly, the researcher contends that Alharthi's international recognition represents significant breakthrough for Gulf women's writing, which has been historically underrepresented in global literary discourse. Her success creates new opportunities for other Gulf women writers while challenging established Western literary assumptions about Middle Eastern women's creative capabilities and thematic concerns.

Contemporary scholarship on Alharthi's work, as analysed in recent interdisciplinary studies, emphasises how her writing contributes to evolving understanding of Gulf society's transformation from traditional tribal structures to modern nation-states. Her literary technique employs storytelling, where multiple voices contribute to composite narrative without single dominant perspective controlling the overall meaning. This enables representation of complex social transformation through multiple character perspectives that reflect different generational, class, and gender positions within changing Omani society.

Alharthi's ability to combine personal, familial stories with broader societal shifts has resonated with many readers and critics alike, demonstrating how effective literary representation of cultural trauma requires integration of individual psychological experience with larger historical patterns. The researcher argues that

Alharthi's narrative technique mirrors the psychological processes through which communities process collective change, where personal memory intersects with historical transformation to create new forms of cultural understanding. This approach enables her work to function as both artistic expression and anthropological documentation of how Gulf societies negotiate tradition and modernity in contemporary contexts.

Alharthi's recognition on the global stage has brought attention to the growing literary scene in the Arab Gulf region and has positioned her as a leading voice in contemporary Arabic literature. Her work continues to engage readers around the world, offering a window into the lives of those living in Oman and highlighting the complexities of tradition and progress. The researcher contends that Alharthi's international success represents broader shift in global literary attention toward previously marginalised voices, particularly women writers from regions that have been underrepresented in international literary discourse. This development reflects changing power dynamics in global publishing industry, where increasing recognition of diverse voices challenges traditional Western dominance of international literary markets.

Though Alharthi wrote the book in Arabic, Marilyn Booth's translation of *Sayyidat al-Qamar* into English (*Celestial Bodies*) demonstrates exceptional literary skill – securing the 2019 International Booker Prize, shared equally between the author and the translator, and marking the first such win for an Arabic novel. Booth masterfully preserves the original's lyrical cadence and nonlinear tapestry of Omani family sagas, slavery, and gendered upheavals – rendering poetic flourishes such as lipstick "concealed by its awesome shell" or a mother's body that has "sprouted fourteen young plants" (57) with luminous fidelity that captivates global readers. Her

nuanced handling of cultural subtleties, including delayed explanations of terms like *falaj* (canal) and rhymed Bedouin proverbs, ensures the text's experimental stream-of-consciousness which remains intact and internationally resonant, bridging Omani intimacy with universal acclaim, without diluting its postcolonial feminist pulse. This work underscores Booth's important contribution to introducing Alharthi's voice as the first Omani woman translated into English fostering cross-cultural understanding through narratives of love, betrayal, and societal change.

Contemporary analysis of Alharthi's work within postcolonial literary theory reveals how *Celestial Bodies* addresses oppressive power structure that operate within postcolonial societies rather than being imposed from external imperial forces. The novel's exploration of slavery's legacy in Omani society demonstrates how historical injustices become embedded in social structures, creating ongoing forms of inequality that persist despite formal political independence. This analysis aligns with recent scholarship on postcolonial feminism that emphasises how women experience multiple forms of oppression that intersect in complex ways, requiring analytical frameworks that can address both historical trauma and contemporary inequality simultaneously.

Celestial Bodies is a narrative that captures the intricacies of Omani society as it transitions from a deeply traditional, hierarchical structure into the modern age. The novel tells the stories of several generations of families in the village of al-Awafi, using a nonlinear narrative structure that mirrors the fragmented nature of traumatic memory, while ultimately creating coherence through storytelling processes. The researcher employs Alexander's concept of cultural trauma to analyse how the novel transforms historical injustices into public memory, highlighting women's roles as the custodians of family history and cultural continuity.

Contemporary scholarship on transgenerational trauma, as developed in psychology and sociology research, provides a theoretical framework for understanding how *Celestial Bodies* represents the ongoing effects of historical slavery on contemporary Omani social relationships. Trauma research demonstrates that historical injustices create lasting psychological and social effects that extend beyond direct victims to influence subsequent generations through what researchers call inherited trauma or historical trauma. Alharthi's novel provides literary representation of these psychological and social processes, showing how slavery's legacy continues to shape family dynamics, social hierarchies, and individual identity formation across multiple generations.

The novel's focus on women as the custodians of family memory highlights gendered approaches to historical trauma processing, where female characters have been the repositories of cultural knowledge and family history. This pattern reflects broader sociological research on how women's traditional roles as storytellers and memory keepers, provides particular sources for processing collective trauma and maintaining cultural continuity through periods of rapid social changes. The researcher argues that Alharthi's representation of women's memory work contributes to understanding how gender shapes different approaches to trauma representation and healing, offering insights that extend beyond Omani contexts to illuminate similar patterns in other postcolonial societies.

Central to the narrative is the exploration of slavery's enduring legacy in Oman and its impact on contemporary life. Although slavery was formally abolished in Oman in the early 20th century, the social, cultural, and psychological scars of this institution remain, affecting individuals and communities across generations. The researcher argues that this persistent impact exemplifies cultural trauma, where

historical injustices become embedded in collective memory and social structures, requiring ongoing narrative processing for community healing. Through the experiences of key characters in *Celestial Bodies*, Alharthi confronts the collective trauma of slavery and explores how this trauma has been transmitted across generations, manifesting as a cultural and societal wound that persists even as Omani society changes. Alharthi's literary representation provides crucial insights into these complex psychological and social processes, revealing how slavery's legacy continues shaping family dynamics, social hierarchies, and individual identity formation across multiple generations in ways that resist simple historical periodisation.

To understand the significance of *Celestial Bodies* in relation to trauma studies, it is necessary to analyse the novel's narrative techniques within established theoretical frameworks that address how literature processes historical trauma. The researcher employs Cathy Caruth's conceptualisation of trauma as a "belated experience" to examine how Alharthi's fragmented chronology mirrors traumatic memory's disruption of linear temporal understanding, while drawing on Shoshana Felman's theory of literary testimony to analyse how the novel functions as collective witnessing that transforms private family histories into public discourse challenging historical silences about slavery's ongoing impact.

Contemporary postcolonial feminist theory provides essential analytical framework for understanding how Alharthi's female characters navigate complex intersections of gender, class, and ethnic identity shaped by slavery's historical legacy. The simultaneous experience of colonial oppression and patriarchal control creates particular patterns of resistance and resilience among colonised women that differs significantly from both masculine anticolonial strategies and Western feminist approaches. The researcher argues that Alharthi's representation of women's roles as

cultural memory custodians reflect these distinctive patterns while contributing to broader understanding of how gender shapes approach to historical trauma processing.

The novel's exploration of women's storytelling traditions reveals female characters preserving oral histories and cultural practices that official discourse attempts to suppress or forget. This pattern aligns with postcolonial feminist theory's emphasis on how marginalised women develop alternative epistemologies that challenge dominant historical narratives while maintaining cultural continuity through periods of rapid social transformation. Alharthi's literary technique mirrors these traditional knowledge-preservation practices while transforming them into contemporary literary forms that reach global audiences.

Contemporary global displacement crises provide urgent relevance for understanding trauma and resilience in Middle Eastern women's literature, as current statistics reveal unprecedented levels of forced migration affecting over 100 million people worldwide, with Middle Eastern populations experiencing the largest displacement movements since World War II. Recent research on refugee mental health demonstrates that displacement creates complex layers of traumatic experience, including pre-migration violence, perilous journey conditions, and post-displacement stressors such as legal uncertainty and social discrimination, all of which disproportionately affect women and children who comprise the majority of displaced populations.

The researcher argues that literary works by Nafisi, Abdel Aziz, and Alharthi offer valuable insights into psychological survival strategies that extend beyond their specific cultural contexts to illuminate universal patterns of how marginalised communities maintain dignity and agency under extreme circumstances. Post-displacement stress often proves more psychologically damaging than initial

traumatic events, creating ongoing challenges that require sustained resilience strategies rather than short-term crisis responses. The selected texts document various approaches to maintaining psychological resilience through intellectual engagement, relational networks, and cultural memory preservation that prove relevant for understanding contemporary humanitarian challenges.

Recent interdisciplinary research on displacement trauma reveals how women's experiences differ significantly from men's, with female refugees facing additional vulnerabilities including gender-based violence, family separation, and loss of traditional support systems, while also demonstrating particular forms of resilience that prioritise community-building and cultural preservation over individual advancement. The researcher argues that the three primary texts illuminate these gendered patterns of trauma response and resilience, offering models that prove relevant for contemporary humanitarian intervention and policy development addressing refugee mental health and social integration challenges.

The intersection of postcolonial feminist theory and contemporary displacement studies provides a critical analytical framework for examining the compounded vulnerabilities experienced by marginalised women, particularly those from the Middle East, who navigate historical trauma, gender oppression, and forced displacement simultaneously. Central to this framework is the concept of "intersectionality theory," as articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), which "explicates how race, class, and gender intersect to produce unique and compounded forms of discrimination that cannot be understood through singular categories of analysis" (139). Employing intersectionality enables a nuanced understanding of the complex, overlapping oppressions that shape the lived experiences of displaced Middle Eastern women. Consequently, this approach necessitates intersectional

methodologies within both literary analysis and humanitarian responses to adequately address the multi-layered nature of their marginalisation and vulnerability.

Contemporary research on literary testimony and trauma processing reveals how narrative engagement functions both as an individual healing mechanism and collective resistance strategy, enabling marginalised communities to articulate experiences that dominant discourse attempts to silence or misrepresent. The researcher argues that the selected texts demonstrate how literature enables narrative integration where fragmented traumatic memories achieve coherence through storytelling processes that transform private suffering into public testimony, challenging existing power structures while preserving alternative ways of knowing and cultural continuity.

The global implications of this research extend beyond Middle Eastern contexts to address universal questions about how literature functions as trauma processing mechanism and political resistance strategy under conditions of systemic oppression and cultural marginalisation. Contemporary developments in digital storytelling and social media platforms create new opportunities for marginalised voices to reach global audiences, while also raising questions about cultural appropriation and the commodification of trauma narratives within global literary markets that may exploit rather than empower the communities they claim to represent.

The theoretical framework developed through analysis of these specific texts provides methodological tools for understanding trauma literature across different cultural contexts while respecting local specificities and avoiding universalising assumptions that risk reproducing colonial patterns of knowledge extraction and cultural domination. The researcher emphasises the importance of maintaining and

acknowledging shared patterns while respecting cultural differences in approaches to comparative trauma studies that seek to build solidarity across marginalised communities without erasing their distinctive experiences and resistance strategies.

Contemporary scholarship on Middle Eastern women's writing reveals increasing international recognition of previously marginalised voices, reflecting broader shifts in global literary attention toward diverse perspectives that challenge traditional Western dominance of international publishing and academic discourse. This development creates new opportunities for cross-cultural understanding while also raising concerns about whether increased visibility leads to genuine empowerment or merely represents another form of cultural commodification that benefits global literary markets more than the communities being represented.

The researcher argues that understanding Middle Eastern women's trauma narratives proves essential for addressing contemporary global challenges including refugee crises, political authoritarianism, and cultural preservation under conditions of rapid social change accelerated by globalisation and technological transformation. These literary works offer insights into psychological and cultural resources that enable survival and resistance under extreme circumstances, providing valuable perspectives for developing more effective approaches to humanitarian interventions that recognise the agency and resilience of displaced populations rather than treating them merely as passive victims requiring rescue.

Recent developments in trauma-informed approaches to humanitarian intervention emphasise the importance of recognising how cultural factors shape both traumatic experience and healing processes, requiring interventions that respect local knowledge systems and cultural practices rather than imposing Western therapeutic models that may prove inappropriate or ineffective in different cultural contexts. The

selected literary texts provide documentation of indigenous healing and resistance strategies that prove relevant for developing culturally sensitive approaches to supporting displaced and traumatised populations while avoiding neo-colonial patterns of intervention that reproduce rather than challenge existing power inequalities.

The Arab and Iranian worlds are being transformed by war, conflict and strife. However, to allow people living within these borders and crossing them, is a task and they have a right to live a life of dignity. How this identity is developed and protected will be instrumental for the future of the region. Over sixty million refugees and displaced people are on the move around the world, and the Middle East and North Africa are witnessing the largest displacement, the world has witnessed since World War II. Young people, especially children are the worst affected in the areas of conflict. The past year witnessed Europe and the US struggling to deal with refugee flows, as over one million refugees arrived by sea and hundreds of thousands crossed land borders. It is precisely at this historical juncture that women writers of the Middle East and diaspora communities endorse their protest and advocate for empowerment and social change, transforming their resistance to oppressive social systems and resultant trauma into impressive literary tales that challenge dominant narratives and present alternative visions to global audiences, thereby refuting grounds for speculation and misrepresentation while opening new vistas in English literature that provide scope for further investigation and research.

The researcher contends that these literary interventions prove particularly significant because they offer insider perspectives on experiences that mainstream media and political discourse often misrepresent or oversimplify, providing nuanced understanding of how marginalised communities navigate complex challenges while

maintaining cultural integrity and political agency. They transform their resistance to the social system and resultant trauma into impressive tales and present before the world, shunning grounds for speculation.

Contemporary developments in global literary circulation through translation, digital platforms, and international literary prizes create unprecedented opportunities for marginalised voices to reach diverse audiences while also raising important questions about how cultural trauma travels across linguistic and geographical boundaries, whether increased visibility leads to genuine cross-cultural understanding or merely reinforces existing stereotypes, and how literary success affects the communities being represented. The researcher argues that addressing these questions requires sustained attention to the ethical dimensions of comparative literary study and the responsibilities that accompany academic privilege in representing marginalised voices to institutional audiences.

Future research directions should include expanded analysis of untranslated texts, integration of digital storytelling platforms, and deeper engagement with intersectional frameworks that can address the complex ways that trauma, gender, class, ethnicity, and displacement interact to shape contemporary Middle Eastern women's experiences. The researcher emphasises the continued relevance of postcolonial feminist approaches that can navigate between universal human rights discourse and respect for cultural specificity while building solidarity across marginalised communities without erasing their distinctive histories and resistance strategies.