

**"Voices Silenced: The Subjugation of Women
in Hammour Ziada's 'The Drowning'"**
الأصوات الصامتة: خضوع النساء في " الغرق " لزياد حمور

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Abstract

This study aims to shed light on the oppression and solitude faced by women in patriarchal societies, as portrayed in Hammour Ziada's novel "The Drowning," which underscores the deep-rooted societal issues prevalent in northern Sudan. Women in these communities are heavily restricted by familial obligations and societal norms, often encountering threats to their autonomy and well-being due to entrenched patriarchal attitudes. The novel serves as a lens through which to examine the intricate challenges faced by women and the power structures that govern their lives. The research question explores how familial ties and societal norms influence the experiences of female protagonists like Abir. The primary objective is to analyze the portrayal of oppression and solitude in "The Drowning" and understand the mechanisms that subjugate the victims. This study carries significant implications for comprehending the intersections of gender, culture, and power in northern Sudanese society. Through an exploration of themes such as oppression and solitude in the novel, it provides insight into the lived realities of women in patriarchal communities and the complexities of navigating familial expectations and societal constraints. Additionally, the study aims to underscore the importance of literature as a tool for critically examining and challenging societal norms and power structures.

Keywords: women, Oppression, masculine, victim

الملخص

هذا البحث يهدف لتسليط الضوء على الظلم والعزلة التي تواجهها المرأة في المجتمعات الذكورية كما صورت في رواية زياد حمور " الغرق " والتي تؤكد على القضايا الاجتماعية العميقة الجذور السائدة في شمال السودان. فالنساء في تلك المجتمعات مقيدات بشدة بالأعراف الاجتماعية والالتزامات العائلية. وغالبا ما يواجهن تهديد لصحتهن واستقلاليتهم بسبب المواقف الذكورية المترسخة. الرواية مثلت لنا العدسة التي من خلالها نفحص التحديات الصعبة التي تواجهها المرأة والقوة التي تتحكم بحياتهن. هذا البحث يوضح كيف ان الروابط الاسرية والتقاليد الاجتماعية اثرت علي حياة البطلة عبير. الهدف من البحث هو تحليل تصوير الظلم والعزلة في الرواية وفهم الميكانيكية التي خضعت لها البطلة. الرواية فيها تضمينات مهمة لفهم تداخل الجنس، الثقافة، والقوة في مجتمع شمال السودان. ومن خلال هذه الرواية تتضح الحقائق الحية للنساء في المجتمع الذكوري وتعقيدات التنقل للتوقعات العائلية والعوائق الاجتماعية. كذلك هذه الدراسة تهدف لتسليط الضوء علي أهمية الادب كوسيلة للفحص النقدي وتحدي التقاليد والعوائق الاجتماعية.

Introduction

Hammour Ziada's novel "The Drowning" is about Oppression and Solitude" unfolds in the village of Hajr Narty, in northern Sudan. The author initially presents the narrative as a historical account, asserting that the country seems to have emerged haphazardly, shaped by the whims of water, with a sky ready to respond at any moment. Ziada subtly weaves historical events into the narrative, challenging our understanding of history and culture in northern Sudan. The novel introduces us to a captivating mythic

storytelling world that shatters preconceived notions about the region's history and societal norms.

The female protagonists of the novel find themselves tragically subjugated, their lives dictated by the oppressive forces of familial ties. In this village, family interests take precedence over individual desires and opinions. The narrative unfolds in a society where men derive their manhood from the physical domination of their wives, emphasizing the subjugation of women within the community.

The story revolves around Abir who finds herself abused by the society. Abir is a victim of societal norms, bearing the burden of her mother's disdain. The narrative takes a poignant turn when Abir becomes pregnant and faces the threat of being killed. Abir presents the portrait of the oppressed women in such dominate society.

Problem of the Study is that the oppression and solitude experienced by women in patriarchal societies, as depicted in Hammour Ziada's novel "The Drowning," highlight the profound societal issues prevalent in northern Sudan. These women are constrained by familial expectations and societal norms, facing threats to their autonomy and even their lives due to entrenched patriarchal attitudes. The novel serves as a lens through which to examine the complexities face women and power structures. the study discussed the question: How do societal norms influence the life female protagonists like Abir? The primary objective of this study is to analyze the portrayal of oppression and solitude in "The Drowning" by Hammour Ziada and explore how subjugate the victim. This study holds significant implications for understanding the intersections of gender, culture, and power in northern Sudanese society. By delving into the themes of oppression and solitude in "The Drowning," it sheds light on the lived experiences of women in patriarchal communities and the complexities of navigating familial

expectations and societal constraints. Furthermore, To highlight the significance of literature as a tool for understanding and critiquing societal norms and power structures.

1- Literature Review

(Mokbel,2018) has discussed women who are subjected to exploitation and oppression in Najeeb Mahfouz's novels. He used the analytical method to achieve this aim. The researcher has found out that there is important lessons can be learnt from Mahfouz's treatment of the theme of oppression of women. The study makes a bridge between the past with the present and gives the reader a clear idea about the shared factors that affect and face Arab women.

Youssef (2017) has handled in his study the exploitation experienced by Arabic women, encompassing social inferiority, sexual oppression, gender discrimination, girls' circumcision (Khitan), sexual exploitation, and rape. Through the researcher's analysis, it becomes evident that Saadawi portrays the multitude of social injustices faced by women in Egypt. She vividly depicts their suffering, highlighting not only their physical and emotional needs but also the glaring discrimination they encounter in education and employment.

(Hammood & Janoori,2018) have focused on exploring the portrayal of female characters within the patriarchal framework of Bedouin society as depicted in the novels of Miral Al Tahawi, employing a radical feminist perspective. The study was guided by an acknowledgment of the pervasive influence of patriarchal structures on the lives of Bedouin women, illustrating their oppressed status and limited agency within such a system. Through critical analysis, the research sought to shed light on the

gender dynamics at play within this society, revealing how Al-Tahawi skillfully captures the suffering and oppression experienced by Bedouin women through her portrayal of female characters. It underscored the silent struggles and enduring patriarchal constraints faced by women in this cultural context.

After reviewing previous studies examining works of Arabic literature focusing on the status and exploitation of Arab women, the researcher identifies a gap concerning the lack of attention to the suffering described by the Sudanese author Ziada in his novel "The Drowning". Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by conducting a thorough analysis of Ziada's depiction of female suffering in "The Drowning" . Through an academic lens, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by Sudanese women.

2- Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, focusing on textual analysis of the novel "The Drowning" by Hammour Ziada. Qualitative analysis allows for an in-depth exploration of themes, characters, and societal contexts presented in the text.

The analysis will primarily utilize thematic analysis, focusing on identifying and examining recurring themes related to the subjugation of women portrayed in the novel. This approach enables the researcher to uncover underlying patterns and meanings within the text, particularly concerning the experiences of female characters and the societal norms shaping their oppression.

The primary source of data for this study is the novel "The Drowning" by Hammour Ziada. The researcher will conduct a close reading of the text, extracting passages and quotes relevant to the subjugation of women and the perpetuation of gender stereotypes.

This study draws on feminist theory, particularly the concept of gender stereotyping and victimization of women in society. The theoretical framework guides the analysis by providing insights into the ways societal norms and power structures perpetuate the marginalization and victimization of women, as depicted in the novel "The drowning".

3- Results and discussions

In her book "Sexual Politics," Kate Millett argues that masculine society often reduces women to objects of desire, stripping them of agency and autonomy. This objectification results in women being viewed as passive recipients of male dominance and serves to reinforce their subjugated status (Millett, 2000). According to Millett, masculine society imposes strict norms and standards regarding female sexuality, dictating how women should behave and present themselves. Women are often policed and judged based on their adherence to these norms, leading to their subjugation as they are expected to conform to male expectations.

cultural and social institutions perpetuate stereotypes about women, shaping societal perceptions and expectations. From childhood, women are conditioned to internalize these stereotypes, leading to their acceptance of subordinate roles within masculine-dominated societies (Ferguson,1999).

In the novel "The Drowning", Ziada portrays an image of the vulnerable woman who is exploited by the patriarchal society, resulting in the theft of her autonomy and freedom. Through the characterizations and plot developments, Ziada illustrates the systemic oppression faced by women within the male-dominated societal structure. The female characters in the novel are depicted as lacking agency and subjected to the whims of the male characters, who wield power and control over their lives:

In the text "Abir had no official father, but Fayit Niddu knew that the whole village knew (p:26)". The excerpt depicts the societal oppression experienced by Abir, a girl whose mother was a servant or concubine, resulting in Abir not knowing her father. The community views her with disdain and imposes upon her the same occupation as her mother, namely, being available for sexual relations with all the men in the village. This societal expectation denies Abir the opportunity to become a respected woman and perpetuates her status as a servant. Furthermore, she is seen as cheap and lacking in respect, solely because of her mother's occupation and the absence of knowledge about her father.

This text illustrates the intersection of gender and class oppression, as Abir's marginalized status is reinforced by both her gender and her mother's occupation. It reflects the patriarchal power dynamics within the community, where women are exploited and devalued, and their identities are defined by their relationships with men. Additionally, the passage highlights the cycle of oppression, as Abir is trapped in the same circumstances as her mother, with no prospects of breaking free from the societal constraints imposed upon her.

As in "Abir and her mother were surrounded by oppression in the dark room"(p:28). vividly portrays the oppressive conditions endured by Abir within the context of a dark room. The use of the metaphorical "dark room" evokes a sense of confinement, obscurity, and isolation, symbolizing the suffocating environment in which Abir finds herself. The darkness suggests a lack of visibility and clarity, reinforcing the idea of being trapped within a space devoid of hope or escape. Furthermore, the phrase

"surrounded by oppression" implies a pervasive and inescapable atmosphere of oppression that envelops Abir and her mother, indicating that they are constantly subjected to the dominance and control of external forces. This depiction highlights the power dynamics at play, positioning Abir and her mother as the marginalized and disenfranchised individuals who are subjected to the dominance and exploitation of a male-dominated society. Moreover, text effectively conveys the oppressive conditions faced by Abir, painting a stark picture of her plight within the confines of the dark room.

"Abir was his eighth experience with women. He pushed the girl on rolled-bed. He couldn't see the girl but her mere presence filled him with lust like a flood, he embraced her and kissed her impetuously, wherever his lips fell, he licked"(p:82). The text depicts a troubling scene characterized by the sexual exploitation and objectification of Abir, illustrating broader themes of power dynamics and gender inequality within patriarchal societies. Through the actions of the male character, the passage showcases the pervasive disregard for women's agency and autonomy, with Abir reduced to a mere object of male desire. The use of language, such as describing the man's lust as a flood and his impulsive actions, conveys the overwhelming and uncontrollable nature of his sexual impulses, emphasizing Abir's vulnerability in the face of male dominance. This scene underscores the systemic oppression faced by women, where they are often relegated to subordinate roles and treated as disposable objects for male gratification. Moreover, the absence of Abir's consent highlights the normalization of sexual violence and exploitation within patriarchal structures, perpetuating a cycle of gender-based oppression and reinforcing societal attitudes that devalue and demean women.

"Rashad could no longer do without Abir, not a day went past without him laying in wait for her. He dragged her to his house, shut the pair of them inside, mounted her, then flew off. She came out to be met by Ahmad Shigrib, who dragged her to the surgery, shut the pair of them inside, embraced her then flew off. Abir bore both of them to heaven, like a mythical horse that spread its wings and flew. She let them taste all sorts of pleasure, unheard types of delight." (p:134).

The excerpt depicts a disturbing narrative of sexual exploitation and objectification, illustrating the pervasive gender dynamics and power imbalances within patriarchal societies. Rashad's relentless pursuit of Abir, followed by Ahmad Shigrib's similar actions, highlights the manipulation and control exerted by men over Abir, reducing her to a mere object of their desires. The imagery of Abir being "mounted" and "embraced" underscores her role as a sexual object, perpetuating the notion of women as commodities for male gratification. This portrayal emphasizes the absence of Abir's agency and consent, highlighting the normalization of sexual violence and exploitation within patriarchal structures. In General, the passage serves as a poignant commentary on the systemic oppression faced by women, where they are subjected to objectification, exploitation, and violence in male-dominated societies.

"Rashid denied fatherhood of the baby and told Abir to have abortion but she cried in fury" "I will die before that... Abir's belly was growing larger and with it the scandal. (161) The text portrays a deeply troubling situation where Rashid denies fatherhood of the baby conceived with Abir and pressures her to have an abortion. Abir's defiant response, declaring that she would rather die than terminate the pregnancy, underscores her determination and the gravity of her situation. Rashid's refusal to acknowledge his paternity and insistence on abortion highlight the gender power dynamics and lack of

accountability prevalent in patriarchal societies, where men often evade responsibility for their actions at the expense of women's autonomy and well-being. The reference to Abir's "belly" growing larger and the ensuing scandal further emphasizes the societal stigma and consequences faced by women in similar situations, illustrating the pervasive judgment and victim-blaming faced by those who challenge traditional gender norms. In the analyzed texts, the protagonist Abir is depicted as enduring societal oppression, particularly stemming from patriarchal norms that strip her of agency and render her a victim of exploitation to satisfy the desires of a paternal figure. This analysis highlights the multifaceted nature of Abir's suffering within the patriarchal framework, elucidating how she becomes marginalized and silenced by the dominant male figures in her life.

Abir's experience of societal oppression is evident through Rashad's denial of paternity and subsequent pressure for her to undergo an abortion. This denial of responsibility not only dismisses Abir's agency but also underscores the societal norm of holding women accountable for unplanned pregnancies while absolving men of responsibility. Rashad's insistence on abortion demonstrates how women's reproductive rights are subjugated to male desires and preferences, perpetuating the cycle of gender-based oppression.

Furthermore, Abir's response, vehemently refusing Rashad's demand and asserting her agency by declaring "I will die before that," underscores her resistance to patriarchal control and determination to assert her autonomy. Despite facing immense pressure to conform to societal expectations, Abir refuses to acquiesce, highlighting her resilience in the face of oppression.

Additionally, the reference to Abir's growing belly and the ensuing scandal further exemplifies how patriarchal societies subject women to public scrutiny and judgment, exacerbating their vulnerability and marginalization. The societal stigma attached to unwed pregnancy further silences Abir's voice and reinforces her status as a victim of patriarchal oppression.

4- Conclusion

The result of the analysis demonstrates the multifaceted oppression experienced by Abir as a woman whose paternity is unknown, likely due to her mother's status as a concubine or servant, which subjects her to exploitation. Abir's coerced labor as a maid and her subsequent victimization underscore the pervasive influence of patriarchal norms, wherein women like Abir are marginalized and silenced. This aligns with Kate Millett's theory in *Sexual Politics*, wherein she posits that men exploit women for their own benefit. Abir's experiences exemplify how patriarchal societies perpetuate gender-based inequalities and deny women agency, reinforcing the notion that women are often treated as commodities to be used and discarded by men for their own gain.

Indeed, Abir's narrative is emblematic of a larger paradigm wherein women are commodified, their bodies and labor reduced to objects of utility for male benefit. In the eyes of society, she exists solely to serve the whims of her male overlords, her humanity obscured by the pervasive misogyny that permeates every facet of her existence. Through her story, we are confronted with the harsh reality of gender-based inequalities, compelling us to challenge the systems of oppression that seek to deny women like Abir their inherent dignity and autonomy.

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