

Oppression in the Homeland: Yussef El Guindi's *Karima's City*

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Abstract

Oppression is one of the major destructive problems across all cultures, particularly for women of Arab origin. The aim of this research paper is to depict both the gender and sociopolitical oppression of the Egyptian women in Egypt in the Arab American playwright Yussef El Guindi's play Karima's City (2005). The idea of this play is an adaptation from Salwa Bakr's novel Thirty-One Beautiful Green Trees (1992) in her collection of stories The Wives of Men and Other Stories (1992). Yussef El Guindi was influenced by Bakr's effort in resisting the oppression that is exercised on the Egyptian women. In spite of the fact that Yussef El Guindi is an Arab-American playwright, his Egyptian spirit inspires him; therefore, he laments the oppression that faces the Egyptian woman, especially if she has a voice that she seeks to be heard. If Salwa Bakr's novel was a scream in the past time which was not heard, that is why El Guindi recalls the scream in the modern period for share the same goal of emancipating the Egyptian women. The paper illustrates the dilemma facing Egyptian women when gender oppression is interlocked with the disintegrated political conditions in the Egyptian society in the modern era. Since women are treated as inferior to men in most Arab communities, it would be critical and problematic for them to voice their disapproval against the prejudiced patriarchal ideology as well as the despotic regime. Arab women strive to emancipate themselves from all sorts of oppression, and seek freedom away from intolerances of any shape or form. In their quest for these hopes, they resist, cry, and write in an attempt to have higher levels of self-worth, and self-determination. Unfortunately, this is not an easy journey as they face more suffering by being rejected, outcast and condemned of madness.

The guiding impetus for this paper is to examine how patriarchal practices as well as repressive political and economic conditions serve in oppressing Egyptian women. Resisting these oppressive structures is the running theme in Yussef El Guindi's play *Karima's City*. The play explores postcolonial feminists' resistance against their oppression in national discourses that imprison women in traditional stereotypes. Drawing attention to the dynamic factors surrounding

these oppressive practices is the effort dedicated by the playwright Yussef El Guindi through his portrayal of the protagonist of *Karima's City*, Karima. Karima strives with her local Egyptian representations that work on repressing her personality. This study exhibits multi-faceted traumatic and psychological illness as the damaging responses to these oppressive structures on Egyptian women. Postcolonial feminism theory will be examined and applied to Yussef El Guindi's *Karima's City*, depending on postcolonial feminist concepts of marginalization, silencing and misrepresentation by postcolonial feminism theorists including Rosemary George (1961-2013) , Chandra Mohanty (1955-), Gayatri Spivak (1942-), Robert Young (1950-), Uma Narayan (1958-), and Judith Butler (1956-).

Postcolonial Feminism

Reading literature with the perspective of postcolonial feminism in mind makes us aware of the whole picture in which postcolonial women who are part of postcolonial nations are oppressed. It also provides us with the tools that help in representing women's conditions and describing their struggles.

Postcolonial literature is considered a reaction against the Eurocentric discourse adopted by both the Western writers and their regimes. Eurocentrism views postcolonial cultures only by the ethics and norms of its own culture. In fact, postcolonial feminism is inspired by the Western feminism movement. Yet, Rosemary George, the literary academic scholar, clarifies that the historical background of women all over the world creates essential discrepancies between them. In the West, especially at the beginning of the eighties, many feminist theories were developed to insist on the recognition of the existence of these discrepancies (220).

Despite the fact that several postcolonial women activists agree with many Western feminists on the emancipation of the oppressed women, they contend that there must be a feminist theory that can understandably embrace the common and differential issues among all women. Postcolonial feminists specifically have paid great attention to the themes of misrepresentation, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation

in and outside their countries (George 211). Even though both postcolonialism and postcolonial feminism share the same quest for "representation, voice, marginalization" and the relation between politics and literature (Lazarus 201), postcolonial feminism has originated to challenge both postcolonialism and Western feminism for their deficiencies in presenting an authentic picture of the postcolonial women's conditions. Rosemary George asserts that postcolonialism in its call for equal civil rights is intentionally blind to the rights of postcolonial women living in oppressive patriarchal societies. Meanwhile, postcolonial feminists are against their biased representations in the Western writings (George 211). By extension, George outlines the characteristics of postcolonial feminism theory as illuminating the guidelines for the global world about the position of postcolonial women. She intends to clarify to the whole world the authentic conditions behind oppressing the postcolonial women. She believes that this theory uncovers the motives beyond excluding and marginalizing those women, and represents what cannot be described in Western writings; besides it sheds light on "purely literary" representations of the experiences of postcolonial women (212). She insists that, most importantly, postcolonial feminism also displays the essential concealment of gender oppression in patriarchal cultures (212).

In other words, postcolonial feminism can be read as a supplementary of postcolonialism as both question the political and social rights that have followed independence. Nevertheless, postcolonial feminism focuses on the difficulties that face women living in ex-colonized countries. Robert Young states that those women suffer from the double oppression caused by "colonial legacy that was itself powerfully patriarchal-institutional, economic, political, and ideological" (*A Very Short Introduction* 116). These women not only fight to gain their position within a global world, but also struggle against different kinds of oppression such as: "domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, honour killings, dowry deaths, female foeticide, child abuse" (116) in their local sphere. Young pinpoints that the patriarchal societies grant men more privileges over women; if a Third World male is put in a lower position than that of the Western male,

subsequently, Third World women should be put in the lowest level in the social hierarchical ladder (*A Very Short Introduction* 116).

Furthermore, Uma Narayan, a Third World feminist scholar, refutes the Western feminist representations of Third World women that consolidate the colonial ideology towards the Third World countries. She opts for the term "information distortion" to describe the problematic misrepresentation of Third World women's struggles addressed in Western cultures. She views that the intentional "left out" of the historical backgrounds of these women, while imposing certain cultural and racial stereotypes, leads to distort the image of Third World culture in front of the world (103).

In other respects, Narayan elucidates that those Western feminists should be condemned for neglecting the interests and conflicts as well as deliberately forgetting the historical and political backgrounds of those women which in fact forge their experiences. Accordingly, she stresses that Western feminist theory cannot speak for Third World women owing to its inadequacies in true representations of the subjugation and prejudice that face non-Western women (44). She advises Western feminists that if they plan to represent the problems of Third World women, they should take careful consideration of the "colonial, political, and discursive background" of those postcolonial women that are once depicted as "backward and barbaric" nations in Western writings, while assuring presenting the 'Third World traditions' in its realistic trait (55).

Moreover, in an attempt to solve this issue of accepting and recognizing that has been associated with the colonial and racial relations of hegemony. Gayatri Spivak asserts this point in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" when she states:

Reporting on, or better still, participating in, antisexist work among women of color or women in class oppression in the First World or the Third World is undeniably on the agenda. We should also welcome all the information retrieval in these silenced areas that is taking place in anthropology, political science, history and sociology. Yet the assumption and construction of a consciousness or subject sustains such work and will, in the long run, cohere with the work of

imperialist-subject constitution, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization. And the subaltern woman will be as mute as ever. (295).

Spivak's argument explains the hegemonic relationship between the colonial discourses of the West and the chances of the Third World women to be represented through these Western discourses. In other words, she asserts that non-Western women need to be heard in lieu of speaking for them. According to Spivak, the real issue is the lack of voice given to Third World women as well as the failure of the West in representing the problems and rights of these impoverished women. She argues that in order to represent Third World women, Third World feminists need to thoroughly analyze the postcolonial discourse to know what is missing to be able to complete it. Responsibility and respect are conspicuous in Spivak's attempt to give voice to those downtrodden people whom she refers to as 'Subaltern' groups. Nevertheless, she is convinced that neither colonialism nor anti-colonialism can speak for subaltern groups, as they represent only what services their interests and ideologies. For that reason, Spivak is convinced that "the female as a subaltern is more deeply in shadow" (*Marxism and the Interpretation* 287). Accordingly, the subaltern cannot speak (Spivak 308).

According to Chandra Mohanty, "Western feminism discourse and political practice is neither singular nor homogeneous in its goals, interests, or analysis" (52). On the contrary, she notes that, "Western feminism is by no means intended to imply that it is monolith" (52). This has been Chandra Mohanty's concern in her essay "Under Western Eyes" (1991) in which she develops an indicative critique of the hegemonic colonial writings about Third world women, which are composed by the Western upper-class feminist writers in both the West colonial land and outside it.

Mohanty's essay intends to illustrate how colonization has controlled the way in which some Western works view the lives and complications of Third World women. She describes the feminist's scholarship position with global, political and economic agenda rules made by the first world. Mohanty considers most of the works that are created by Western feminists as an "authorizing signature of Western

humanist discourse" (53) which dominates the lives of those Third world women by portraying them as "singular third world women" (53) discarding their differences. She contends that the notion of universality that Euro-American feminists claim for all women is , in fact, looking for universal validity for homogenizing as well as changing the social reality of those women to fit aptly in the Western theoretical dimensions of integrity. By blurring the distinction between Western and non-Western women's complex experiences through overcoming the historical and political scenes of Third World women, fabricated identities of those women are established (69).

Additionally, Mohanty agrees with Anouar Abdel-Malek when she contends that contemporary colonialism has a different form from that of the past. Nowadays, it does not seek to control others using "fire and sword"; nevertheless, it seeks to control the World's "hearts and minds" (54). She confirms that colonialism in the modern period is not based on colonial troops, but rather on economic globalization and cultural control. For her, these colonial ideologies could be easily delivered to the Third World countries through their writings. She adds that Western writings are, indeed, hegemonic discourses and political ideologies to picture the non-white women as oppressed creatures in their countries.

Just as postcolonial critics try to reevaluate the Western writings with respect to race, class, gender and history, this study is intended to elucidate how the play under study *Karima's City* by Yussef Elguindi is considered a rewriting attempt against the oppression exercised by both Western and Eastern practices to assert their hegemony on Egyptian women. Though it is a true depiction of the repression that faces Egyptian women in their society, the play is portrayed in favor of fighting these oppressive practices by focusing on their consequences on the well-being of the Egyptian women. El Guindi in his play criticizes the oppressive nature embodied in both the patriarchal ideologies and sociopolitical life. He explores the nature of the female world and he portrays the responses of Egyptian women to the experiences of suppression that face them in their homeland, Egypt.

Yussef El Guindi' Background

Yussef El Guindi was born in Egypt in 1960. He is as talented as his famous creative family; his grandmother is the actress and publisher Rose Al-Youssef; his grandfather is the director Zaki Toleimat and his uncle is the well-known writer Ihsan Abdel Koudous. El Guindi left Egypt when he was 3 years old to travel to London to be raised there. In the article "Yussef El Guindi: Staging the Egyptian-American Experience"(2012), he stated, "Egypt will remain a part of me — a large part of me — whether I like it or not. And generally speaking, I like it" (Qualey 1). El Guindi had to return to Egypt to receive his B.A from The American University in Cairo. After finishing his university education, El Guindi got his MA degree in playwriting from Carnegie-Mellon University in Pennsylvania. Afterwards, he moved to Seattle (1996) where he settled there and occupied several positions (Qualey 1). He is a resident playwright at the Silk Road Theatre Project; a literary manager for Golden Thread Productions in San Francisco; a dramaturge and lecturer at Duke University; and a dramaturge for Eureka Theatre and reader for The Magic Theatre (Hamos 1). His works are influenced by his Egyptian origin as well as his life in America, so his plays are written from an immigrant's point of view as they study the conflict of ethnicities, cultures and politics that encounter Arab-Americans.

Since 2001, El Guindi has written not less than 16 plays and won a lot of Theatre awards. Among his plays are *So Unlike Me* (2003), *Finishing School* (2003), *Acts of Desire* (2005), *Karima's City* (2005), *Such A Beautiful Voice is Sayeda's* (2005), *Back of The Throat* (2005), *Ten Acrobats In an Amazing Leap of Faith* (2006), *Jihad Jones and the Kalashnikov Babes* (2009), *Hostages* (2010), *Language Rooms* (2010), *Pilgrim Musa and Sheri in the New World* (2010), *The Ramanaya* (2012), *Our Enemies: Lively scenes of Love and Combat* (2008) and *Threesome* (2015) (Schooler).

Both *Such a Beautiful Voice is Sayeda's* and *Karima's City* were adapted from Salwa Bakr's two short stories *Such a Beautiful Voice* and *Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees* respectively and were staged in Cairo. They demonstrate the suffering that the Arab women face

within their societies whether they are married, like Sayeda, or unmarried like Karima.

Karima's City

El Guindi's *Karima's City* is related to the period of Mubarak's era where the Egyptian society was economically insecure. *Karima's City* illustrates El Guindi's depiction of the deteriorated conditions in the Egyptian society as well as its malicious ramifications on the public and private lives of the Egyptian people in general and the Egyptian women in particular. In brief, the political and economic oppressive lives of the Egyptian people during Mubarak's era have shaped their characters and experiences; the political policy adopted by his regime led to his downfall in January 2011 (Nagarajan 22). As a result of all these past deteriorations in the political, economic and social domains in the Egyptian city, the Egyptian people were greatly affected. El Guindi through his play confirms Mohanty's refusal to the monolithic Western representation of women all over the world which intends to unify women's problems overlooking their racial, historical and cultural backgrounds (52). In *Karima's City*, El Guindi elucidates the pitfalls and clashes between the society and the individual's will. The play is set in the Egyptian society which is governed by an imperial background, conservative behavior and mood of mindset.

El Guindi provides the social environment of Karima's city with its deterioration, and skillfully links her surroundings to the setting of the play to elucidate the relation between the public and private life as well as to highlight its impact on people's psychology. Narayan clarifies that Third World feminism should not be viewed without putting into consideration the "political location" and the historical background that frame the struggles and personalities of those women (20-21), as they fashion their lives as well as their experiences. Consequently, the massive economic and political changes that occur in the life of Egypt, in recent years, have incited Karima to rebel against them. Failing to change her surrounding, she ends up in a mental hospital symbolizing the difficulty facing Egyptian women to find a place for themselves as independent human beings.

In fact, there is a parallel relationship that connects women to their nations and communities. What happens to the nation corresponds to what happens to the female character. According to the oppression that exists in the postcolonial cultures, some women living in these societies intend to resist their persecution by resorting to illusionary worlds where they create dialogues, characters and events that would satisfy their needs to vent out their oppressive conditions. Others resort to hysterical breakdowns that reflect their incapability of accepting their repressive surroundings. As a reaction to the oppression that exists in the rampant ideologies of the Egyptian society, Karima goes to the extreme in expressing her resistance to such oppression. She is distressed due to the society that acts indifferently to the degradation that perturbs her city. From the onset of the play, the audience can witness the protagonist's insanity where she has conceived imaginary characters listening to her miserable experience, " I am going to presume you're out there...it would be nice if you are. Listening ...keeping me company...And you over there. Because I'm not going anywhere so why not imagine you're here." (31). Her oppression and sense of alienation push her to fantasize other people whom she could speak with due to the marginalization that is imposed on her from her society. Describing her status, Madeleine Shaner delineates:

Karima also has severe problems with keeping her mouth shut when she's expected to defer to her male co-workers; inflated political stuffed shirts; the defoliation of her neighborhood; and modern life in general-to the point where we meet her in a madhouse, compressed between walls that are closing in on her, reducing her natural curiosity, joy, and wonderfully free spirit to a sadly hopeless disenfranchisement.

El Guindi makes his protagonist create these illusions to show the negative influences of the political and economic changes on Karima's psyche.

El Guindi has employed Salwa Bakr's technique in using the metaphor of madness as a way of highlighting the damaging influences of oppression on Arab women. Utilizing this technique deepens El Guindi's endeavor in liberating Egyptian women through highlighting

their complex situation. Frantz Fanon in his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, contends that madness is the aftermath of the colonized inability to cope with the claim of modernization that has been associated with colonialism as he explains, "[t]he colonized peoples, these slaves of modern times, have run out of patience. They know that such madness alone can deliver them from colonial oppression" (34). Respectively, distorted identity and madness are the inevitable consequences of the native person's failure to welcome capitalism, which is another frame of colonialism in the modern world. For Salwa Bakr, madness is a way of resisting oppression, escaping from the unbearable stress, desperate struggles and most importantly, declaration of refuting social prejudice (qtd. in "The Madness of Non-Conformity" 381). Karima's failure to grasp the reality around her denotes her deep traumatization. For her, thinking about what is happening to her and her society drives her more to insanity "would just get me too mad to speak" (32).

Equally important, Karima's madness is not only the outcome of the damages that occur in her city, but also the aftermath of her unyielding to the patriarchal notions of femininity ,as El Guindi declares, "[w]hen a city feels under siege, patriarchy kicks in" (The Political Act). Since gender is a strategy where the situation of duress under which gender performance always and variously occurs (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 139), with her rebellious nature, Karima refuses to conform to her cultural patriarchal definition of femininity. Allan Johnson argues that women's femininity, according to male dominated cultures, is significantly valued. In a sense, as long as women are able to preserve their attractive appearance for satisfying men's desires, they are cherished (7). Judith Butler agrees with Johnson about the concept of femininity as she states that "femininity is not the product of choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation and punishment" (*Bodies that Matter* 232). She adds that in order for a female to be 'viable' within her society, she "is compelled to cite" her society's norms (232). Instead of adhering to her culture's ideologies, Karima resists her mother's opinion regarding appearance and clothes when her mother clarifies, "[f]orget the street, worry about yourself. Make use of the mirror and change what looks back at you...You're

fat" (37). For Karima, these norms are nothing more than constraints that conceal women's identity. (Rashad 234). Additionally, Butler clarifies that any gender identity "has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality "(*Gender Trouble* 136). For her, these acts are introduced through social and public discourses (136). Consequently, her mother's words, "[n]o wonder nobody invites you out anymore. How is anyone going to want you looking like that?" (37) deny Karima's right of choosing the one with whom to spend her life. Karima refutes the cultural norms of her society that oblige women to be beautiful to get married.

More importantly, El Guindi intends to break all the stereotypical representations of both men and women that are created by their male dominated society to oppress women and praise men. Karima's story with the suitor echoes Mohnaty's claims that, "women in the Third World have somehow been more oppressed by an indigenous patriarchy than women in the West" (*Third World Women* 321). He intentionally portrays Karima's "suitor" as a hesitant and shy man – which in fact are traits that are attributed to women's personality in patriarchal ideologies- who is afraid to ask Karima to go out with him. In contrast to his weak personality, Karima's portrayal signifies her courageous nature as a woman of a free will who knows what she wants as it is demonstrated in the dialogue between her and the suitor.

Suitor: Karima....I wonder if you would like to, er...Would like to...

Karima: Yes?

Suitor: You know – whether or not...Perhaps...

Karima: Yes?

Suitor: On the way home...after work...

Karima: Yes?

Suitor: You know....

Karima: (to audience) He was very shy.

Suitor: Never mind. (Suitor starts to walk away.)

Karima: Yes, I would. Thank you. (38)

Patriarchal values promote the superiority of men which, in fact, is not genuine. The suitor's character exemplifies El Guindi's challenge to these norms. The pauses in the suitor's talk indicate his wavering and lack of confidence. His incomplete sentences oppose the complete ones of Karima. The audiences witness the real difference between a man who embraces the fake patriarchal ideas and a woman who believes in herself as an independent one. Karima lives in a society that believes a girl's desire is a dangerous thing for her. El Guindi goes to the extreme in drawing Karima's character; he aims to show the audience what would happen if a woman shows her admiration to a man and expresses her affection to him loudly. He draws a reversal of roles between the suitor and Karima in the Egyptian society. As a stereotypical image of an Egyptian woman, Karima is portrayed as a naïve woman in her attempt to kiss the suitor (Shaner). For that reason, she is accused of being "crazy" and having "no shame" (40), when she expresses her admiration to the suitor by kissing him. The suitor refuses her behavior and most importantly, he regards it as an act of disgrace and dishonor on her behalf.

Concurrently, El Guindi is inspired by Butler who draws a link between gender oppression and identity politics which forge different behaviors and desires between both men and women depending on the power structure of the society. For Butler, "[t]he displacement of a political and discursive origin of gender identity onto a psychological core precludes an analysis of the political constitution of the gendered subject and its fabricated notions about ineffable interiority of its sex or of its true identity" (136). Indeed, the suitor's reaction is a political action where his authority as a man grants him the right to judge Karima's behavior according to his cultural norms. For that reason, Butler asserts that gender behaviors are performative where "acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (136).

From a different angle, Johnson marks that when a woman acts against the stereotypical role of femininity, she threatens a man's sense

of masculinity. All of a sudden, a disorder is created in their relationship (Johnson 61). As a result, the suitor ends his meeting with Karima by abandoning her alone in the garden, for she is seen as a loose woman who deserves to be punished by abandoning. Summing up the situation of a postcolonial woman in her society, Butler, in her book, *Undoing Gender*, raises some rhetorical questions to express her doubts as a female living in a patriarchal society which resembles Karima's plight "[i]f I am a certain gender, will I be regarded as part of the human? Will the human expand to include me in its reach? If I desire in certain ways, will I be able to live? Will there be a place for my life, and will it be recognizable to the others upon whom I depend for social existence" (2-3).

Postcolonial women have chosen to document their struggles and experiences that declare their peculiarity as well as their differences. Karima has documented all what had happened to her, hoping that one day someone would read and comprehend the oppressive conditions that Egyptian women live in and help them in their liberation struggle. She states, "[P]ut it on paper for that future audience you'll surely have — if everything you've gone through is ever to make sense. Someone will read it — and see how you were wrongly..." (31). Living what she writes, Karima understands that sharing the truth would connect her to the greatest human reality of longing, abandonment, security, hope, wonder, prejudice, and mystery. For her, it will lead to her self-discovery as an independent female.

Equally important, the essential task of many postcolonial theorists who aim to rewrite their own literature is not only to resist the colonial hegemonic power, but also to cherish their past and assert their effective existence that has been concealed by the tyrannical colonizer for decades (Mohanty, *Third World Women* 13). Living in a postcolonial city, narration is Karima's influential practice in resisting her patriarchal and capital traditions through forging fragmented pictures wavering between reality and fantasy, past and present (Rashad 233). El Guindi portrays Karima utilizing the act of writing to express herself and urge the world to pay attention to her suffering. She writes to find meaning for her life and a place for herself after being forced to be marginalized. Karima writes her story like many

postcolonial feminists who address the subaltern problems in their writings in favor of discussing what is meant to be hidden for decades about the subaltern group.

By writing her story, Karima also resists her own sliding into depression and madness. Finding herself going through a traumatic experience, the devastating consequences of which she tries to resist its, she decides to narrate her own experience. As Shahrazad used to express her oppression through her collection of stories, *The Thousand and One Nights*, Arab women deploy the same technique of self-narration as a way of challenging as well as liberating themselves from the sociopolitical oppression represented in both the patriarchal and imperial notions imposed on their psychological identity (Golley xiv-xv). Salwa Rashad asserts that El Guindi's intention is both to liberate those long oppressed voices from all the limits and stagnant beliefs that tend to enchain women's potentialities and to incite them to cross all the borders of narration that are imposed on their voices (234).

The changes happening around Karima are considered chaos: "the world around me is changing horribly", she complains (32). If capitalism arrives with a promise of global prosperity, for Karima, it is an unfulfilled promise; such changes are not doing any development. On the contrary, they "block out everything beautiful" (32). Through insisting on the peculiarity of the Third World women's experiences, more than generalizing them, Mohanty challenges these practices that aim to create a singular representation of Third World women denying their inherent differences for the sake of reinforcing the Western clutches on the postcolonial countries (*Third World Women* 53). Karima resembles these economic and political changes to "deluge" (33) that "washed away" (33) everything that comes across.

Helpless and disappointed, Karima witnesses the destruction that predominates her city marked by the uprooting of the trees. She considers that these modern developments signify the corrupting influences of capitalism which leads to her traumatic oppression: "then one day walking to work, I found the tree lying on the street....Then I saw it had been uprooted. Completely torn out...And

no act of nature had done this but a human act....That's when I began to feel the changes in me. Little headaches at first. Then big ones", Karima says (35). Judith Herman states, "[e]fforts to seek justice or redress often involve further traumatization" (72). El Guindi is interested in representing women's oppression in a direct connection to nature's destruction. For Karima, the real catastrophe is when she witnesses the death of the thirty one trees that used to decorate not only her street, but also her life along her way to work. The relation between man and environmental plight is highlighted to indicate Karima's turning point (Rashad 236).

Oppressing Third World women is deepened when Western feminists impose their model of feminism through their calls of sisterhood to embrace both Western and Middle Eastern women, yet this universality would never achieve its target in liberating postcolonial women, for the struggles of these women vary according to their backgrounds (Hooks 3). Another compelling evidence that illustrates the devaluation that touches every aspect in Egypt is manifested in the corruption that has reached the political life embodied in the election campaigns. Even though election days are days of freedom where people exercise their right in choosing whom they consider can speak for them, for Karima, this election day is regarded as an "imprisonment day" (48), for the reason that it is the day when she is accused of madness and imprisoned just for criticizing the government. El Guindi portrays the scene of the election day to emphasize to what extent the rampant corruption kills any hope for finding a solution to the miserable condition that exists in the Egyptian city. Karima's comments on the elections " [w]hen it came to picking candidates...my interests never helped me in finding someone worthy of my vote" (48) do not only reflect the scale of corruption, but also mirror her desperation in finding an outlet for the Egyptians' crisis. For her, the candidates' slogans mirror the political dishonesty of the government:

Candidate 1: Read this. Our record speaks for itself.

Candidate 2: His record may speak for itself, our party speaks for you.

Candidate 3: Vote for us and you will see the changes.

Candidate 4: His record is empty rhetoric and wishful thinking; our actions speaker longer, louder and will provide three nutritious meals a day.(48)

As illustrated in the above lines, the government does not really care about the welfare of its people. On the contrary, it deals with them as if they were animals which hurry to satisfy their hunger. These politicians do not mean what they claim. Their slogans of protecting people's dignity and fighting against social injustice for the emancipation of the Egyptian people are just allegations to win people's votes in the elections. Karima as a revolutionary woman is convinced that all their mottos are for deceiving people. Her words to the candidates face them with their truth:

I see how you've allowed the trees to be hacked down and left in the street to rot- and replaced with cement monstrosities that rise up and kill the joy in our hearts. I'm looking! I see the light in people's eyes die out as they lose hope of anything ever changing. What are you doing about that? What exactly are you doing to make our hearts sing, or is that not important? Sing with the joy of being proud to live in this city and be alive and be human, just to be human. Do you have a policy on any of that? (49)

Karima finishes her argument with the candidates by questioning their real motives which, in its turn, implies her awareness of their ingrained corruption. Keeping up with the current problems of their society is the pivotal concern for the Third World feminists' endeavor in an attempt to fix these problems as well as to assist Third World women in their battles (George 211). Spivak ,in her discussion on the postcolonial countries, affirms that in their pursuit to emancipate their countries, national activists have led their countries to be oppressed the same as they were under the colonial supremacy; both the national and colonial ideologies have overlooked the poor situation of unprivileged groups. Henceforth, neo-colonialism is the only term that defines the status of the postcolonial countries in the modern ages. ("A literary Representation of the Subaltern" 338). For that reason, El Guindi declares that in Third World countries, freedom is nothing

more than slogans and clichés that are replicated in elections to deceive people to do what others want from them.

Whenever Karima speaks the truth about the desperate plight of the Egyptian life, the society "turns back to working the audience, hanging them fliers, speaking to them, while ignoring Karima as she addresses them" (49). El Guindi shows his audience the reaction of her people once somebody, especially a woman, impels to break the society's rules. At the beginning, they were addressing her, but after she contradicts them, they start neglecting her.

The society has mastered the art of making a woman look mad when she rationally questions things that are erroneous. Simone de Beauvoir affirms that when women try to participate in the political world, they will be considered as the 'Other' whose opinions are regarded as trivialities (20). In every situation Karima tries to express her opinion, she is faced with opposition from her society. She chastises their "fat necks on bloated bodies and waddle around like you have swallowed a cow"(50) to emphasize their greediness as a consequence of their corruption. She also criticizes their policy that no woman has a role in the election. Accordingly, the candidates treat her as the 'Other'; she is considered as an opponent to the government. Subsequently, she is a mad woman who should be alienated and marginalized firstly, by ignoring her words, and secondly, by depriving her of everything that proves her existence as a human being who has the right in voicing her opinion as they say to her, "you have no right" (51). Rashad emphasizes that the relation between 'Self' and 'Other' originates from the diverse and spontaneous "divisions of character/performer/audience, real/fictional, national/foreign, local/global, human/nonhuman, as well as masculine/feminine "(238). Karima's society puts itself in the position of 'Self', while anyone who does not adopt its beliefs as the "Other". Her society has established conservative images of itself, whereas those who are different destabilize the hierarchal structure of their communities.

In commenting on women's distressed position, Spivak posits, "[t]he subaltern as female cannot be heard or read" (*Marxism and the Interpretation* 308). Although, they are calling for granting people their rights, the government deprives Karima this right by taking her

identity card from her, for she is against them and their policy. This demonstrates the repressive atmosphere that prevails in the society which intensifies Karima's oppression.

The absence of freedom and democracy in the political domain mirrors the harsh reality that surrounds the Egyptian life in the modern era under the name of globalization. Karima's fight with the candidates illustrates Spivak's argument that the intellectual cannot represent or speak for the oppressed groups as she states, "no theorizing intellectual ... [or] party or ... union can represent those who act and struggle" (*Marxism and the Interpretation* 275).

Throughout the whole play, the audience observes Karima's courage, who strongly struggles for the freedom of her city. Her challenging and brave personality empowers her to resist the deep rooted sociocultural principles that are adopted by her Egyptian people. Her firmness in denying these traditions to fit with the universal model of a female has added to her alienation from her people (Rashad 234). Karima's insistence on asserting herself is reflected in her perseverance "I'm voicing my opinion" (50) and "I want my card back...It's mine! Give it back to me! It belongs to me"(51) Karima's feeling neglected and ignored oppresses her more. In every time she speaks, she has to be silenced by the ossified colonial and patriarchal ideologies that consistently marginalize her role.

Ridiculing and taking Karima to be prisoned in the mental hospital is considered a clear evidence of the Egyptian culture's failure to accept being criticized by a woman. Salwa Bakr has illustrated, "[m]any women feel victims to this political illusions and ended up with psychological problems- they drifted towards madness, attempted to suicide..." (qtd. *In the House of Silence* 37). Karima is considered a mad woman because she lives in a society that does not accept women to speak even in politics. Karima's struggle affirms Nayaran's premise that Third World women's experiences are the logical consequences of the struggles that face their countries firstly and them secondly (13).

If Karima's disappointment has led her to psychological madness at the beginning of the play, definitely, it has driven her to physiological self-abuse by cutting her tongue at the end of the play. Being

discarded and marginalized from her society accompanied by her sense of despair mixed with a realization that she is defeated, Karima chooses to adhere to her society's principles by cutting off her tongue which she concludes is the root of all her misery. (Rashad 234). Her tongue signifies her tool in expressing herself; "cutting it out once and for all" (31) means depriving herself of her only weapon. Most importantly, it signifies her society's triumph in silencing her. She is torn between her desire to resist and her oppressive surrounding. Karima ends the play like Oedipus; both of them attempt to escape from their reality; Oedipus by gouging his eyes and Karima by cutting her tongue; both are driven by their self-hatred to hurt themselves. If Oedipus in a desperate act blinded himself, for he thought that he was unable to grasp the reality around him concerning his parents, in addition to his inability to prevent the crimes predicted by the gods, Karima's cutting her tongue would be for her hopelessness in fixing the drastic sociopolitical degradation that has occurred to her country. Karima's real pain is not only a physical one, but her psychological torment of being pushed to be silenced is the pivotal reason of her agony.

Karima's intention in cutting her tongue to get rid of her misery forever declares the triumph of the patriarchal society that is considered the real reason beyond Karima's oppression. El Guindi's portraying to this scene of cutting her tongue with scissors emphasizes how conforming to a patriarchal notions would destroy women's inner-confidence. The audience could comprehend that her crime is that she wanted to silence herself after being rejected from her people for criticizing them. *Karima's City* confirms Jasmine Zine's words that Arab women's "ability throughout decades of war and hardship to survive adversity with tenacious resistance was lost in the attempt to cast them as voiceless victims" ("Between Orientalism" 35).

If *Karima's City* has ended on a pessimistic tone, still the protagonist has hope in writing her story, so " I'm also writing. In the hope some of this [writing] will make sense to me one day" (52). The play has a circular structure; it begins in the mental house, then drifts away from that place in the protagonist's imagination, only to circle back at the end of the play to the same setting of the beginning in a mental

hospital. In this one-act play, El Guindi's implicit message is that Karima's plight is repetitive in every era having a dictatorial regime denying women's rights. El Guindi did not offer any solution either to Karima or to her city; he lets his audience figure the solution by themselves. Dramatic sense is heightened by El Guindi's artistic talent in overlapping fear, resistance, gender oppression, and political deterioration in his *Karima's City*. Karima clings to the memories of the past with its glory for self-security when she visualizes "I would like to see it again ... Walk down the street I loved... See the vendors. Smell the scents of what they're selling ... Wave to people. How I wish I could see those thirty-one beautiful green trees again" (52). The play links the past with the present to elucidate a well-defined comparison between the two lives intending to demonstrate the ramifications of both on the psychological well-being of the Egyptian people. Karima's end in the mental hospital echoes Spivak's conclusion," between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization" (*Marxism and the Interpretation* 306).

Karima in *Karima's City* is seen as a mad woman who boldly questions the sanity of her people who passively accept seeing the destruction that accompanied the modern changes under the name of globalization which has wreaked her city. The loss of beauty for Karima is observed when the past with its prosperity is replaced with the present with its disintegration manifested in various levels of the Egyptian lives whether in the decline of morals, the disappearance of the common social sense, or political sight with the supremacy of capitalism on the national level. Documenting as well as narrating her painful experience is Karima's tactic in challenging her society after ending up imprisoned in a mental hospital being accused of madness for her attempt to silence herself by cutting her tongue conforming to her society's wish of silencing her. Along with narrating her story, Karima narrates the historical background of her country from the past till the present.

Conclusion

The researcher's aspiration in this paper has been depicted the various oppressive practices on Egyptian women from national and Western perceptions and how these representations contribute in oppressing Egyptian women who courageously strive to present their authentic reality in an attempt to assert their individuality. The examined play is related to the Arab-American canon although it is adapted from Egyptian literature, as it is written by the Egyptian-American playwright, Yussef El Guindi, whose Arabic origin is echoed in his play.

After analyzing *Karima's City*, it is clear that El Guindi has devoted his efforts in refuting the oppression exercised on Egyptian women depicted in the oriental and national mainstream ideologies which aim to silence and marginalize them. He successfully dramatizes the ways in which various forms of oppression faced Arab women in general and Egyptian ones in particular urge them to lose their self-esteem building on several concepts of postcolonial feminists including Chandra Mohanty, Robert Young, Gayatri Spivak, Uma Nayaran, and Judith Butler. The play under examination is El Guindi's vantage point towards the critical situation of the Arab women. Hopes disrupted with doubts are what enrich El Guindi's conversations.

Oppression and resistance are the driving themes that control El Guindi's *Karima's City*. Oppression echoes the lack of freedom and democracy in the Arab countries. In other words, the more oppression is exercised on women, the less freedom is achieved in their lives. *Karima's City* emphasizes that Arab women resist their oppressive and stereotypical representations. Symbolically, Karima resembles the majority of the Arab women in their struggles. In *Karima's City*, El Guindi creatively portrays the imperial effects that forge the struggling experiences of the Egyptian women in the postcolonial countries. He directly associates the history of the Egyptian country to the current oppressive atmosphere where he denies the modern developments that have led to the degradation in the economic and political spheres in the Egyptian country. He refutes also the outdated sexist ideologies that oppress women's potentiality. El Guindi uses the extreme in portraying the consequences of the oppressed status of his female

protagonist to provoke the Egyptian society to have a profound and objective look to the conditions of these subjugated women. Karima madness has stemmed not only from her direct refusal to being silenced, humiliated hidden, misrepresented, and oppressed, but also from El Guindi's intention to deliver his message to the Arab world that the Arab women's fight in gaining their rights is a fierce one.

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