

A Comparative Study of the Female Character as the ‘Other’ in Doris Lessing’s *The Fifth Child* and Belgheis Soleimani’s *Khale Bazi*

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Abstract

This study seeks to examine two female characters from different cultural contexts in terms of the women’s issue which is not confined to geography, culture, race, or nationality. Moreover, the study attempts to compare Belgheis Soleimani’s *Khale Bazi* and Doris Lessing’s *The Fifth Child* in the light of Butler’s notion of performativity which reveals how human beings are shackled by gender binaries, gender norms, and heterosexual hegemony. Each individual was born within such limitations and raised in a way to reproduce them in a repetitive pattern to guarantee heterosexuality. In the same fashion, the main female characters in novels under scrutiny are expected to shape and reshape gender binaries and heterosexual norms emanating from such contexts. There is a discrepancy between what society expects from women and what women, as human beings, expect from themselves in practice. The dichotomy between one’s true self and social norms and expectations exerts too much pressure on the women’s psyche. Both main female characters move toward an abstract idea, namely, sanctity in their specific ways desiring to be holy and sacred. **Keywords:** Performativity, Feminism, Comparative Studies, Otherness, Motherhood

دراسة مقارنة للشخصية الأنثوية كما " الغيرية (او الآخر) " في الروايتين *الطفل الخامس* لدوريس ليسينغ و *لعبة المنزل* لبلجيس سليمانى

الملخص

في هذه الدراسة ، الباحث، في ضوء نظريات جوديث بتلر حول المسألة الجنسانية، تحاول على استكشاف وفحص شخصيتين أنثويتين من سياقات ثقافية مختلفة من حيث قضية المرأة كمفهوم الذي لا يرتبط أبدًا بالجغرافيا أو الثقافة أو العرق أو جنسية. هذه الدراسة يتحاول على المقارنة بين الروايتين "لعبة المنزل" لبلجيس سليمانى و"الطفل الخامس" لدوريس ليسينغ في ضوء مفهوم بتلر عن "الأدائية". يميل نحو نظرية "الأدائية"، وقد تم الكشف عن كيفية تكبير البشر من خلال الثنائيات بين الجنسين، والمعايير الجنسانية، والهيمنة على الأفراد المغايرين جنسياً. يولد كل فرد في ظل هذه القيود ويتم تربيته بطريقة لإعادة إنتاجها في نمط دوري لضمان الاختلاف الجنسي. وبالمثل، يُتوقع من الشخصيات النسائية الرئيسية في هاتين الروايتين بناء على تشكيل وإعادة تشكيل الثنائيات بين الجنسين والأعراف بين الجنسين التي تنبثق من مثل هذه السياقات. هناك تناقض بين ما يتوقعه المجتمع من مجرد النساء وما تتوقعه النساء كيشر من أنفسهن عملياً. يشكل الانقسام بين الذات الحقيقية للفرد والأعراف والتوقعات الاجتماعية ضغطاً كبيراً على نفسية المرأة. تتجه كلتا الشخصيتين الرئيسيتين نحو فكرة مجردة مثل القداسة بطريقتها الخاصة وتصبحا مقدسة.

الكلمات الرئيسية: الأدائية، النسوية، الدراسات المقارنة، "غيرية"، الأمومة

1.Introduction

Although feminism has brought many blessings to women across the world, there are still unresolved issues for women in patriarchal societies. There are still many women who are unable to perceive the underlying cause of their constant desperate feelings. Men inundate them with daily routines and make them more feminine and obedient, thus they cannot escape their subjugation. They suffer from inferior status and lack of identity. According to the Hegelian dichotomy, women are considered the other, that is, objects of men's pleasure. In other words, "In a patriarchal society, the objectification of a woman's body, *la chair*, is in opposition to the activity of the male body, the living body, *le corps*. The body of a man is a subject, while a woman's body is an object" (Tiukalo, 2012, p. 79). In this regard, disobedient women, those who are unwilling to remain an object, are not praiseworthy in a society dominated by men. Therefore, the majority of women might unconsciously act in a way to please men or reduce the social and familial violence toward themselves. On the other hand, although conformist women are praised by the patriarchal society, they may simultaneously seem naïve and submissive. This, to a great extent, is due to their inability to speculate about other possibilities – such as being a separate entity from a powerful subject, something more than a wife and a mother. Throughout history, the majority of women, without being aware of their power, have been puppets on the stage of their lives. The idea that women are culturally and socially constructed is in sharp contrast to essentialists' belief that our gender is biologically determined, while it is close to Judith Butler's theories of "performativity" and

“subjection” that can transparently be applied to fictional works such as Belgeis Soleimani’s *Khale Bazi* and Doris Lessing’s *The Fifth Child*. In her *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler argues that “gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (1990, p.25). The system, discourses, and ideologies of a government lead women in certain ways. Laws are already out there, and women are born within such frameworks. Hence, Butler asserts that gender is different from sex, the latter being a concept related to a human's biological features while the former is socially and culturally constructed and might not correspond to an individual's biological sex (ibid.). Considering such a distinction, it is plausible for a woman to live against patriarchal wishes and do things that used to be known as manly. Being dependent, passive, nurturing, and lovely is not confined to women, although many have been convinced by patriarchal societies that being a woman means having such soft characteristics. Following Foucault’s concept of subjection, Butler (1999) argues that women can resist the dominant power. Hence, by demolishing the power that has constructed their identity, the subjects can destroy their identity. The subjects should choose either an identity based on subordination or a lack of any identity. The patriarchal system wants female subjects to choose subordinated positions. Butler (1999) believes that subjects have relative autonomy through which they can substitute power with power and can then thus resist the initial power that imposed a particular identity on them. Indeed, Butler points to the possibility of liberation from the patriarchal society since the patriarchal regime cannot have total control over its female subjects. Similarly, Allen echoes Butler: “It is this inability of the regulatory regime to determine completely the behavior of the individuals [...] accounts for the constitutive failure of such regimes” (Allen, 2006, p. 203). Butler (1999) does not deny the fear of losing one's identity but following Freud's ideas she claims that the subject adopts new excitements and starts resisting power structures. In the light of Butler’s theories, *Khale Bazi* is a feminist work even though it has not been written to disparage men. Generally speaking, “the term ‘feminism’ itself is used to describe a cultural, political or economic movement aiming for equal rights for both women and men” (Halířová, 2016, p.7). In this comparative study, *Khale Bazi* depicts the complex circumstances of Nahid, an infertile woman born and raised by traditional values in a patriarchal society. Because of her infertility, she is looked at as if she has a serious defect. Moreover, she cannot cope with her condition, mostly because she is expected to become a sacrificial mother and now that she is infertile, she does not know what to do with her life. Regarding the context of the novel, the prevalent opinion about a childless woman is that she must not be treated as a whole entity because she is like a barren land. As her close friend Homeira implies, her strong desire to be a sacrificial mother is manifested in her tendency not to vex her co-wife. However, this role cannot fulfill Nahid’s desire to become a sacred mother. The roots of such a desire can be traced back to the system of a male-dominant country where the girls are brought up to become sacred mothers and nothing else. Nahid does not fit in such a society because she is not recognized as a normal wife and a sacred mother, so she feels depressed. She has had no sovereignty for many

years, but eventually, after her co-wife's death, she abandons her husband and his two children to commence her journey of self-discovery. In the end, Nahid, who was once not more than an object, turns into a subject and resists the dominant power. In parallel with the concept of "the sacred mother" in Iran, the concept of "the angel in the house" has kept women down in the West.

The Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century entailed a new way of life for the traditional family. The home was divided, serving only as a living place and no longer as a workplace, and women were supposed to stay at home tending to the children; the men were absent during the day working (Bassin et al., 1996, p.37).

The division of labor dramatized the role of mothers, and the dominant figures of the time, including Martin Luther King, spread the idea that the woman is to be a wife, a mother, and nothing more. Luther asserted that:

Women should remain at home, sit still, keep house, and bear and bring up children. A woman is, or at least should be, a friendly, courteous, and merry companion in life, the honor, and ornament of the house, and inclined to tenderness, for thereunto are they chiefly created, to bear children, and to be the pleasure, joy, and solace of their husbands. (qtd. in Halirova, 2016, p. 5).

Similarly, the focus of *The Fifth Child* is on a mother who struggles during the 1960s to lead a life that she used to fantasize about, in the past. "The character of Harriet in *The Fifth Child* is arguably an example of the maternal voice and story that Hirsch demanded, in that Harriet's maternity dominates the story, more so than her role as a wife" (Clark, 2013, p.175). Everything is fine until Harriet gives birth to an abnormal, hyperactive, and aggressive child. All people blame her for giving birth to a monstrous child. As Uematsu says: "The responsibility is cast solely on the mother; her body is supposed to be the mediator of society's happiness and, therefore, becomes monstrous if she cannot provide a healthy child for the nation" (1988, p. 6). Harriet experiences contradictory feelings as a mother while trying to maintain her social identity as a social agent. Affected by what other people stimulate her to do, she is even provoked to kill that abnormal child. According to Kallman:

Mother blame and mother-guilt are the results of an ideology of motherhood that has been formed in Western culture since the Victorian era. This ideology romanticizes motherhood and disregards the mother's reality, providing a skewed conception of maternity. This, then, creates unrealistic expectations of mothers, which causes a sense of blame, but also guilt when the expectations are not fulfilled. Due to this conception of motherhood, mothers have been scrutinized progressively for more than one century (2014, p.1).

All things considered, the main female characters of these two novels are supposed to perform their pre-determined roles as mothers to sustain their social identity. The idea of becoming sacred entities by giving birth to healthy children, being only a myth, controls these women and leads them in a certain direction. However, women like Nahid and Harriet can resist the dominant power by knowing themselves better and commencing their journey of self-discovery.

Considering the issues above, this study attempts to compare Belgheis Soleimani's *Khale Bazi* and Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* in the light of Butler's concept of "performativity." According to Butler (1999), gender is a performative act, that is, the performative aspect of gender that implies that gender roles are culturally constituted in time and are imposed upon individuals through the repeated citation of norms. As Salih says:

Butler has collapsed the sex/gender distinction to argue that no sex is not always already gender. All bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence (and no existence is not social), which means that there is no "natural body" that pre-exists its cultural inscription (2006, p.55).

Accordingly, based on Butler's theory, the current article seeks to explore and examine two female characters from two different cultural contexts in terms of the woman cause as a concept that is never bound to geography, culture, race, or nationality. It is to say wherever patriarchal ideology is dominant, it rules over women regardless of their marital status. The concluding remarks focused on how these two characters are exposed to the hidden undercurrents of the male society although they think that being mothers, in particular, would increase their position within the society, while motherhood in patriarchal societies seems to be another form of subjection to keep women silent and away from their rights, regardless of such issues as geography, culture, religion or race.

2. Authors and their Works

Doris Lessing is a British writer, novelist, and social activist. Born in 1919, Lessing is an outstanding figure in literature. She is a key figure in the social and political upheavals of the 20th century. Her glorious works brought her many national and international awards. Doris Lessing's significant works are *The Grass Is Singing*, *The Golden Notebook*, *Retreat to Innocence*, *Memories of Survivor*, *The Good Terrorist*, *The Fifth Child*, and *Ben in the World* is a sequel to *The Fifth Child*.

Out of her numerous works, *The Fifth Child* is chosen as the basis of this discussion. As a prominent feminist, Doris Lessing used the word motherhood to describe a gender discourse. This concept is the best comprehensible in this novel where a happy life of a married couple-David and Harriet Lovatt- is changed forever. Some turbulences come along their life after the birth of their last child, Ben. The role of the mother and the relationship Harriet shares with her son is so central that can be discussed in this book. What is considerable about this novel is that the society she lives in attempts to blame her for her son's nature and condition.

Belgheis Soleimani was born in April 1963 in a rural area near Kerman, Iran. Following her father's path, she takes an interest in literature and studied Persian literature at high school, and later, philosophy at Tehran University. She has taught literature and acted in two movies. Her first work, which was published in a newspaper, was about children who were killed in the war. She also works as a literary critic for a couple of newspapers. Presently, she is one of the most prolific Iranian writers and has published more than eighty critical articles and thirteen novels. Her four research-based works include *Art and Beauty According to Plato*, *Life and Poetry of Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda*, *The Gun and The Scales: An Analysis and Criticism of War Short Stories*. Several of her novels and short story collections which were published within the first decade of the twenty-first century are *Banu's Last Game*, *Auntie Games*, *Bride and Groom Games*, *Welcome to Hades*, *Rabbit Day*, and *Doggone Year*.

3. Discussion

3.1. The Woman Problem and Motherhood in *The Fifth Child*

The novel begins by introducing two ordinary but ambitious characters named Harriet and David, the main protagonists of Lessing's *The Fifth Child*. When the novel begins in England in the 1960s, Harriet is a young yet traditional housewife: although she has a job, she puts motherhood first. Her husband David is an architect and the two share a sense of being charmingly traditional. "Harriet and David met each other at an office party neither had particularly wanted to go to, and both knew at once that this was what they had been waiting for" (Lessing, 2001, p.7).

Harriet and David meet each other at an office party and both are not willing to socialize with strangers. People describe them as "conservative, old-fashioned, not to say obsolescent; timid, hard to please" (p.7). They attract each other simultaneously and very soon they realize that they share common ideas, feelings, and a similar attitude toward familial life and procreation. Upon their first meeting, the two agree on having at least six children: as if these two chaste loners are destined to be. Immediately, Harriet moves to David's house which is a spacious one similar to Victorian houses. Their marriage also turns out to be remarkably fruitful: Harriet loses her virginity to her husband on the same night they purchase their sprawling estate after two years of hard work and that same night, Harriet gets pregnant.

From the very beginning, they could feel an intense tendency to live the way they desire, to be different, and to be unlike what their parents traditionally used to be. The serious intention of having many kids makes every member of their family and relatives surprised. David's parents disagree totally with all sorts of unconventional and exaggerated matters. "Aiming, like all their kind, at an appearance of unconformity, they were the essence of convention and disliked any manifestation of the spirit of exaggeration, of excess. This house was that" (p.18).

However, David and Harriet, unconcerned with the old generation's advice, reproduce themselves almost every year (four children in six years). Harriet's mother, Dorothy, doesn't confirm their choice either; but she has different reasons in mind. Being conscious of their class and financial status, Dorothy is unable to

confirm her daughter's lifestyle. In her view, middle-class people must have a certain number of children. She points out:

The aristocracy - yes, they can have children like rabbits, and expect to, but they have the money for it. And poor people can have children, and half of them die, and expect to. But people like us, in the middle, we have to be careful about the children we have so we can look after them. It seems to me you haven't thought it out (p.23).

Nevertheless, ignorant of what Dorothy tells them, they continue to have more children. During all these years, James, David's father helps them financially, although he has never agreed on the couple's plan for having many kids. On the fifth pregnancy, Harriet feels some sort of sickness different from the previous pregnancies and accordingly, she behaves strangely. Her husband, David says: "I don't think Harriet is anywhere near herself" (p.43). She cannot sleep or do her daily routines because the infant kicks a lot. She considers the infant a vicious enemy and goes further to dehumanize her infant (she calls him a creature) and identify herself with animals:

She would think, When the scientists do experiments, welding two kinds of animal together, of different sizes, then I suppose this is what the poor mother feels. She imagined pathetic botched creatures, horribly real to her, the products of a Great Dane or a borzoi with a little spaniel; a lion and a dog; a great cart horse and a little donkey; a tiger and a goat. Sometimes she believed hooves were cutting her tender inside flesh, sometimes claws. (p.52).

Harriet has terrible feelings toward her youngest son. To her, Ben's movements in the womb seem to be signs of aggression than life. As a newborn, he is muscular, yellowish, long, and [he has] green-yellow eyes and a tilted forehead. Although he rarely cries, he grunts and snuffles. The new baby had of course been offered to everyone to hold when they asked, but it was painful to see how their faces changed confronting this phenomenon. Ben was always quickly handed back. Harriet came into the kitchen one day and heard her sister Sarah say to a cousin: "That Ben gives me the creeps. He's like a goblin or a dwarf or something. I'd rather have poor Amy any day" (p. 68) This afflicted Harriet with remorse: poor Ben, whom no one could love. She certainly could not! And David, the good father, hardly touched him. She lifted Ben from his cot, so much like a cage, and put him on the big bed, and sat with him" (p.69). "He was like an angry, hostile little troll" (ibid.).

Harriet feels pity for Ben and as a result of the blame she receives from others for giving birth to such an abnormal child, she frequently says "Alright, I am a criminal" (p.105). A crime is committed inside this house by Harriet which is so heinous that is comparable to the crimes that have been committed in the town they live in. When society is so corrupt that the medium of television has always news or movies on the criminal acts that are committed in the outside world, their inability to maintain order inside the house is not something weird.

This very progression is a kind of regression in itself. The last scene when Harriet sits alone at the huge table in the kitchen tells of the fact that the whole story has a cyclical pattern. In the beginning, David and Harriet are alone at a party and in the end, again, they are alone and feel shallow. They move forward to make a full circle, to be together, to have many children, and to have a fun time with their relatives, but when the circle becomes full, they are alone again.

Most people cannot even tolerate Ben, perhaps because he reminds them of the primitive man. Violence, which is a primitive desire, makes him strange in a century when people are seemingly civilized. The most severe reaction is seen from David's parents who belong either to the aristocratic or highly educated class. They do everything to ignore the reality of the outside world which is corruption and lack of cosmic order. Ben's relatives consider themselves cultivated; that is why they detach themselves from Ben who is uncivilized and uncultivated.

Upon pressure from relatives, Harriet institutionalizes Ben. "Ben had been taken to a place in the North of England" (p.95). On a devastating visit to the asylum, she experiences rows of freaks which turn her into a fragile little girl: "She was at the end of a long ward, which had any number of cots and beds along the walls. In the cots were – monsters" (p.98).

Surprisingly, the institute does not do anything to rehabilitate Ben or children like him: "He had unlearned all the basic social skills that it had been so hard to teach him" (p.108). Besides, they make him feel more excluded. Despite others' wishes and demands to keep Ben away, Harriet goes and brings him back home. There, in the institute, he is found in the most wretched living condition; unconscious in pale green skin and lying among his excrement and urine:

This was a room that had sinks all along one wall, an immense bath, and a sloping cement shelf with plugs all along it. They put Ben on this shelf, unwound the straitjacket, and, having adjusted the temperature of the water, began washing him down with a hose that was attached to one of the taps. Harriet leaned against the wall, watching. She was shocked to the point where she felt nothing at all. Ben did not move. He lay like a drowned fish on the slab (p.100).

As a result, she decides to bring him home. The apocalyptic landscape of the little town in which Harriet and David inhabit is significant regarding the corruption of the whole system and every kind of institution that is illustrated in the novel. The more the story closes to its end, the more it gets chaotic, and vicious events are seen more and more. After five years of living together in this town: "Brutal incidents and crimes, once shocking everyone, were now commonplace. Gangs of youths hung around certain cafes and street-ends and owed respect to no one. The house next door had been burgled three times" (p.29).

The institution of family was supposed to be the most important institution for Harriet and David. David wants "a life that was going to annul, absolve, cancel out all the deficiencies of their life, Molly's and Frederick's; and of James's and Jessica's

life, too” (p.18). The patterns and features of a dysfunctional family are significantly traceable in this novel. Almost all of the couples in this novel are unable to establish a strong familial relationship. James and Molly got divorced when David was seven. Harriet’s mother is “a widow, and this life of hers was mostly visiting her daughters” (p.20). Harriet’s sister, Sarah “and her husband, William, were unhappily married, quarreled, and made up, but she was pregnant with her fourth, and a divorce was not possible (p.28). Anyway, they resume their marital life because of their little child Amy who has Down’s Syndrome. Deborah, David’s sister is always either marrying or divorcing. Even, David and Harriet fail to create a life different from others, a life that is based on deep familial ties.

The whole system endeavors to scapegoat Harriet to mask its faults. As it is obvious, all institutions conspire against her. She cannot recognize the roots of her confusion. The institutes’ supportive reaction and their protective gesture toward Ben are in sharp contrast to their relatives’ reactions. At least the relatives accept the fact that Ben behaves oddly. However, in both cases, Harriet is the target of the attacks. She is even confronted and dismissed by her husband when she is pregnant with Ben: “Harriet was weeping again, and he felt, knowing, of course, this was unfair, that she was breaking the rules of some contract between them: tears and misery had not ever been on their agenda! She felt rejected by him.” (p.45).

There is a discrepancy between what society, during the late twentieth century, expected mothers to do and what Harriet did in practice in the period when various kinds of violence against women existed in society. In such a context, Harriet subverts common expectations and keeps her child at home. Nevertheless, as the system brings about Lovat’s downfall, Harriet feels the absurdity of caring about her abnormal child. She says to herself: “Around and around and around: if I had let him die, then all of us, so many people, would have been happy, but I could not do it” (p.157). Like Ben, Harriet is unwanted and a margin figure in her own life.

Butler (1999) does not consider gender as a biological criterion. Therefore, she claims gender is not something fixed and unchangeable. Gender has fluidity which means that a man might identify himself as a woman or a woman might identify herself as a man. Gender performativity simply implies that people are playing their gender in a way to affirm social norms, but there is a space for violating the demarcations between sexual binaries and also a space for revolting against the social expectations of gender norms.

Harriet always performs her gender role above or below the social expectations line. She transgresses social expectations of her gender when she exaggerates her gender by showing a great appetite for giving birth to many children. Thus, she goes beyond the gender norm. Besides, when she gives birth to the abnormal child, she degrades herself and moves below the normal line. Again, when she saves Ben, she transgresses the typical role of a woman and a mother which, in this society, means working in a way to protect the fittest children as they live in the aftermath of Darwin’s theory of evolution. Although women are expected to be obedient, Harriet is not submissive. That is why she is rejected by her family and relatives.

Harriet appears in others' view as an abnormal woman and a monster because she has given birth to an abnormal child. Consequently, she does not perform her gender role completely well. Whether the existing abnormality in the birth of the child is considered as voluntary or involuntary work, people criticize her severely. The reason is that when she creates a freak, she becomes something less than a woman, something equal to animals. She identifies herself several times with marginalized creatures such as animals in the novel.

Society gives her such an awkward idea by degrading her in different scenarios. Although, David tells her "It was chance. Anyone could have got Ben. It was a chance gene, that's all", he treats Harriet as if she's committed an unforgivable deed" (Lessing, 2001. p.141). She recurrently feels alienated and guilty, and once she thinks that David treats her in a way an uncivilized primitive man used to treat a woman who gives birth to a creepy child; "I suppose in the old times, in primitive societies, this was how they treated a woman who'd given birth to a freak. As if it was her fault. But we are supposed to be civilized" (p.74). Nobody attacks David, though he shares his genes in creating Ben. Even he denies his fatherly relationship with Ben. Accordingly, patriarchy spreads and reinforces the idea of fitting within the boundaries of gender norms and normal women and mothers.

3.2. The Female Portrait in Belgheis Soleimani's *Khale Bazi*

The representation of women's bodies and souls has a prominent role in describing the atmosphere of society in which Nahid, the main character in Soleimani's *Khale Bazi*, lives and also in illustrating the kind of ideology that rules over it. Masoud, the other character in *Khale Bazi*, puts the idea this way "Nahid believes that a masculine soul is commanding different cultural and economic levels and that spirit determines what women do" (Soleimani, 2014, p.80). This idea vividly represents the domination of patriarchy and its direct influence on society throughout the whole novel, especially in the periphery areas. The undignified and humiliating position of women is manifested in the men's belief in the equal value of women and animals. The main female character, Nahid, although female, reinforces such dehumanization because, in this stifling atmosphere, she's never been treated like a human being. By having a defective reproductive organ, she is continuously forced to encounter harsh experiences and consequently becomes generally alienated from her female body. Among all others, a key character in Nahid's past is Kheiol Nesa who helps Nahid's aunt, Senobar, with her menstruation and then tries to treat Nahid's illness similarly. Here, again, the portrait of a woman is negative. Kheiol Nesa is described by people as a devilish woman, an elf. She falls in love with a puck and he makes her a widow on the wedding night by abandoning her forever.

Consulting with Kheiol Nesa, Nahid begins the unreasonable treatment and she goes through too much suffering. In the fear of not being able to become a mother in the future, she once says: "I didn't like myself, my body. I wished Kheiol Nesa, this witch do me whatever she can. I hated myself" (p.29). This is how a woman feels in a patriarchal society in which women are considered only for recreational purposes. Nahid jumps from the roof of the barn, lifts a fifty-kilogram potato in a gunnysack,

and sits on a hot brick to become period, but she always fails because the problem is more severe than the harsh physical actions she undergoes.

Nahid's traumatic experiences conspire against her and bring her mental breakdown in the future. She accepts the presence of a rival wife, Sima in her life and treats her like a sister. Immediately, after Sima's suicide, she feels like a criminal; "I realized that all accusing fingers were at me. I was the first defendant. It was me who killed Sima" (p.104). She seeks shelter to hide herself and be away from people. The first scene that comes to her mind after Sima's suicide is a memory about the day Sima gives birth to Mah Banoo. When Sima becomes a mother, Masoud's discriminating reaction between his two wives commences as he says: "I hope you understand that moments after childbearing a woman needs the companionship of her husband more than anything else" (p.105).

By recalling a scene about the way she was excluded by her beloved for something that she has no interference in the happening of (her imperfect reproductive organ), she desires loneliness even more. Nahid doesn't want to punish Masoud by avoiding him or stopping taking care of his children. She has only accumulated such negative feelings about her marital life and is frustrated by the memories of her past. She remembers the agonizing treatments that were prescribed by Kheiol Nesa and other horrible events from the past while she was on a mountain. She yells and calls God for help. Homeira accuses her of being selfish and a murderer, but she is not guilty at all. She is just a helpless woman who although educated and financially independent, is wretched now because of the context that she is raised in is ill.

3.2.1. The Woman Problem and Motherhood in Soleimani's *Khale Bazi*

If gender is not something fixed and enacted, according to Butler, individuals can change their performance. This means that they can violate heterosexist norms that rule their gender performance. A woman can transform herself by switching her gender role by being fearful, shy, humiliating, nurturing, and humble instead of extrapolating an aggressive, proud, and commanding enterprise in her relations with others. By performing gender parodically, an individual can transgress the heterosexist norms, instead of supporting it. Therefore, Butler intends to encourage people to enlarge their knowledge of gender, to know more that gender is changeable to realize the fact that there's the possibility of subverting the dominant ideology of a society that attempts to subjugate its objects, but the objects that are shaped by such systems can turn themselves to subjects who resist the ideology (Allen, 2006, p.460).

Similarly, Nahid, who is the byproduct of the heterosexist cultural norms, demolishes the very ideologies that formed her throughout her life and more precisely in her relationships with the opposite sex. To be more specific, the social milieu in which Nahid grows up leads her to have a feeling of disgust toward her biological orientation. This feeling would further lead her to censure herself for loving men, accept the presence of another woman in her marital life wholeheartedly, and go through much suffering since she does not have a perfect reproductive organ. Nevertheless, after Sima's suicide, she rebels against the very foundations of

patriarchy by leaving her husband's home forever. She becomes conscious of what is going on, aware of the way men suppress women; so, she would not stay submissive and consequently, makes a quick subversive action towards them. This is how she becomes an emblem of all those women who have had the same harsh experiences of infertility but were hoping to change their gender performativity and become new women in such societies.

3.2.2. On the Similarities and Differences between Lessing's and Soleimani's Portraits of Women

By comparing the two women protagonists of the novels under discussion, we understand that both Harriet and Nahid feel guilty because of living in an unjust society as if they were criminals. Instead of blaming the patriarchal society, Nahid's friends and acquaintances accuse her of murdering Sima and oppressing her husband. In several emails to Nahid, Homeira condemns her for being the quintessence of bad manners:

Who are you? A mean and jealous infertile, an unemotional intellectual, a witch, a killer? Without a doubt, accept it was your behavior that sent the unlucky Sima to the grave. She was your rival wife and she expects you, jackass to treat her like a rival wife, and what have you done? You confused her [...] You played not only with her but also with your husband. You impelled him to remarry to splurge your grandeur, patience, and liberalism on him and the populace (Soleimani, 2014, p.122).

Like Nahid and in the same notion, Harriet is not even understood by women. Her mother and her female colleagues mock her for being out of fashion. Nobody respects her decision to give birth to many children either, or later, and nobody understands why she brings Ben back home. Like Nahid, she constantly feels as if she committed a crime against the norms of her society. Harriet knows that people sympathize with David and attribute negative features to her: "Poor David . . . always that, Harriet knew. Sometimes, rarely, poor Harriet [...]. More often, irresponsible Harriet, selfish Harriet, crazy Harriet" (Lessing, 2001, p.140).

Violating the dominant ideology by both women is witnessed in both novels. However, the way this notion is represented might be somehow different. Harriet rebels against norms that she has been shaped by protecting her alienated child and Nahid by abandoning her husband forever. Everything is at peace unless they violate social norms either voluntarily or involuntarily. Consequently, the more the story closes to its end, the more the main female characters become lonely. It is obvious because nobody can understand the reason for their acts which are in line with turning themselves into subjects and not remaining an object forever. Nahid cries out in agony all alone while she is standing toward the mountains and remembering her sufferings in the past. Harriet also remembers different events attributed to the past; her relatives, her children, and her friends; she remembers them all as she is now an old woman sitting at the long table in the same kitchen which was once crowded.

Conclusion

For two centuries, female writers and their writings have undergone significant changes. Gradually, women gained more rights and greater freedom of choice. During the first and second waves of feminism, women fought to be treated equally with the privileges granted to men. Leaning toward Butler's theory of performativity, this study has shown that the main female characters in both novels, under scrutiny, imitate the dominant ideology of their time up to a certain point, and then, from that point on the shift to experience a new realm and demolish what they once were shaped by. Harriet lives within the framework of heteronormative gender roles as long as she is the mother of four normal healthy children and obeys her husband. From the moment she gets pregnant with Ben, her last child who lacks the health of the former ones, she begins the process of subverting the norms and is consequently portrayed as a stranger and a monster. In line with Ben, who is seen as a monster, Harriet feels guilty since others treat her in a way as if she has committed a crime by giving birth to him. She also parodies patriarchy when she makes her decision to keep Ben at home and ignores her husband's opinions. In the same way, Nahid surrenders herself to patriarchy by performing her role as expected by society for many years. Then, after feeling suffocated by the norms that expect women to necessarily become mothers, she cried out for being alone. When she expands her limited viewpoint, she leaves her husband's house to go on self-discovery journeys. By abandoning her husband's house, she mocks the very idea that patriarchy, at its foundation, is worshiping motherhood.

Both main female characters of these two novels are revolting against the foundations of the dominant ideology of the time. They change their perspectives from romanticizing motherhood in the beginning to de-romanticizing it in the end. Harriet has a great desire to give birth to lots of children in the beginning, but in the end, her dreams are shattered and her great ambitions about motherhood are punctured. She is all alone in a kitchen living with memories of the past. Nahid blames herself for not getting pregnant in two-thirds of the story, but in the end, without caring about motherhood, she refuses to take care of Sima's children.

Another important fact about them is the way they represent themselves. They feel alienated from their bodies, they identify themselves with animals, and they consider themselves imperfect. People make judgments about them because they do not fit within what their society considers normal. They are grotesque in the view of the majority and as the story progresses, they become more marginalized. However, such exclusion is fruitful, because now they have a broader outlook toward their sex, gender, and motherhood.

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