



Analyzing the Position of Women in the Novel *Bread on the Table of Al-Khal Milad* by Mohammad Al-Naas Based on the Frankfurt School of Critical Aesthetics

Chiman Mohammadi Bytambar¹ | Mohammad Nabi Ahmadi²

1. PhD Candidate of Arabic Language and Literature, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran. Email: ch.mohammadi@razi.ac.ir

2. Associate Professor, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran. Email: mnabiahmadi@razi.ac.ir

Article Info

Research Type:
Research Article

Received:
05 July 2023

Received in revised form:
17 Sep 2023

Accepted:
02 June 2024

Published online:
10 June 2024

Keywords:

Bread on Uncle Milad's Table,
Critical aesthetics,
Frankfurt school,
Patriarchy,
Position of Women.

Abstract

Introduction

The status of women in contemporary societies is a significant subject that has been extensively discussed, critiqued, and investigated from various perspectives. This issue is pertinent to Arab nations as well. Mohammad Al-Naas, a Libyan novelist born in 1991, addresses this theme in his novel "Bread on the Table of Uncle Milad," which won the 2022 Booker Prize. With this exceptional novel, Mohammad Al-Naas has significantly illuminated the status of women in Libyan society and its entrenched patriarchal culture, despite contemporary social, cultural, and political changes. Through his narrative, Al-Naas adeptly portrays the genuine circumstances of women within both familial and societal contexts, highlighting how they are often subjected to the desires and ambitions of men due to the prevailing patriarchal system.

Al-Naas's critical language reveals societal contradictions while aspiring to construct a society founded on principles of justice, freedom, and intellectual thought. This aligns with the concept of "critical aesthetics," a pivotal topic explored extensively by members of the Frankfurt School, including Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, under the umbrella of critical theory. These theorists argue that the perception of beauty, which integrates feelings and rational understanding, is uniquely articulated through art. They contend that "the purpose of art is to challenge the status quo and express dissatisfaction and aggression."

Assuming that a review and analysis of Mohammad Al-Naas's novel can be beneficial for understanding societal pathology and the role of women in various cultures, the research question for this study is: How has Mohammad Al-Naas, employing a critical perspective and the theoretical framework of the Frankfurt School of Aesthetics, endeavored to enhance the status of women within society?

Regarding the novel "Bread on the Table of Uncle Milad," no reliable published research has been identified. This gap highlights the novelty of the current research on the novel. Additionally, in the realm of Arab literature, there has been no research examining the status of women through the lens of the Frankfurt School's critical aesthetic theory. This further accentuates the originality of the forthcoming research.

Methodology

The mentioned novel is analyzed using a qualitative approach, relying on the content analysis method. Data is gathered through comprehensive library research. The authors aim to analyze the representation of women in the novel by scrutinizing the familial and social statuses of its female characters. This analysis is informed by the theory of critical aesthetics from the Frankfurt School, with the objective of elucidating Mohammad Al-Noas' critical perspective on the status of women and his endeavors to enhance their societal position within the context of Libyan society.

Results

Criticism of women's status in Libyan society is prominently articulated in Mohammad Al-Naas's novel, «Bread on the Table of Uncle Milad». The narrative presents a strong presence of women, exploring their characteristics, concerns, challenges, thoughts, and opinions. The portrayal of women from both traditional and modern backgrounds underscores the significance of their roles

as perceived by the author. This focus reveals the author's concern with the societal status of women and the imperative of ameliorating their conditions.

In the novel, women are categorized into several distinct groups:

- The traditional generation, characterized by adherence to institutionalized societal beliefs, which places significant importance on housekeeping, childbearing, domestic responsibilities, and unconditional obedience to men.

- The other category consists of women who have been deprived of their right to make autonomous life choices, subjected to torture, and exposed to various forms of physical and mental harassment by men. These women lack the right to address or change their existing circumstances.

- The final group consists of women from the new generation who actively pursue their rights to freedom and independence. A segment of this group remains unmarried due to concerns about male dominance in a patriarchal society. For others, despite their intellectual and educational achievements, entrenched patriarchal laws within society inhibit the full expression of their talents.

For this reason, the mentioned novel has been examined and analyzed from the perspective of the Frankfurt School's critical aesthetics, which posits that the function of art and literature is inherently negative and oppositional to the current societal conditions. The research findings indicate that Mohammad Al-Naas's perspective aligns closely with the critical approach of the Frankfurt School. He adopts a critical stance to interrogate societal conditions, with the aim of informing society and enhancing the position of women.

By juxtaposing traditional and modern women, Al-Naas critiques the dominant patriarchal system and the consequent oppression of women. He employs male characters who oppose the patriarchal system as a means to raise awareness among both women and men regarding the status of women, as well as their roles within the family and society.

Conclusion

The research findings indicate that Mohammad Al-Naas critiques the status of women, who have experienced longstanding instability under the patriarchal systems governing Arab societies. By creating various female characters, Al-Naas confronts the women of his society with the rights they could potentially possess. Furthermore, through the dialogue of some male characters, he seeks to advocate for women's rights, thereby providing a critique of their existing societal conditions. From the perspective of the Frankfurt School's critical aesthetics, it can be argued that Mohammad Al-Naas seeks to elevate the status of women through his critical viewpoint in the novel. However, the dominant patriarchal system, the exploitation of power by some men, and the lack of active participation by women in reclaiming their rights hinder the emergence of an ideal society where women can truly thrive and flourish.

How To Cite: Dehghani, S., Seifi, M., & Najafi Ivaki, A. (2024). The Feminist Criticism of the Novel "Allati Taodd al-Salalem" based on Elaine Showalter's Theory. *Women in Culture & Art*, 16(1), 1-21.
DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jwica.2023.361800.1938>



© The Author(s).

Publisher: The University of Tehran Press.

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jwica.2023.361800.1938>