

FIRST YEAR/SOPHOMORE FINALISTS

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My Kurdish Tradition: A Silent War against Women

In each society, tradition plays an important role in determining how society behaves, thinks, and develops. Tradition provides a unique common identity among individuals and guides them to share a set of valued and accepted rules to follow. These rules create a judgment identifying what is correct and what is wrong. Kurdish society like other ethnics has a particular tradition. Most of the Kurdish society thinks that Kurdish tradition gives nice ways of living for both genders. They think it is applied equally for both genders but in different ways. However, Kurdish tradition is full of inequality and injustice against women. Kurdish customs support numerous mechanisms to insult and disvalue women in society. It is true that some of these mechanisms are not originally Kurdish customs, but they came with Islamic culture. However, most of the mechanisms emerged with Kurdish tradition because they are applied by all Kurdish communities such as Muslims, Yazidis, and Zardashties (Saarinen). If you are a Kurdish reader, you might immediately think that this paper insults Kurdish values and history. What you think is not true. From the title, "My" is written, indicating that I also take a part of this tradition. I regret that we have such a tradition, but it is necessary to identify the negatives of this tradition. If we just keep saying that "Kurdish tradition is a pride," then all the society will be lost and destroyed. Women are suffering under traditional rules. They are killed, attacked, and insulted by a set of rules. I also call it a "Silent War" because no one in the society sees this injustice as problems, but they think it is a part of nature and normality. Society should take reaction and say the truth because of the destiny of future mothers, sisters, female friends, wives, and Daughters, and you should also have a voice and change your mind for the same reason. This paper explains seven ways that Kurdish tradition tries to establish a patriarchal society and goes against women.

The most common and widespread way is called Zhin Ba Zhina (bride for bride or exchange of brides). Zhin Ba Zhina is the process whereby a family gives a daughter to another family, and in return, the other family also gives a girl to them. They exchange the brides to create a strong social relationship between the families. Some of the families apply Zhin Ba Zhina because they do not want to pay any value such as money and gold

for the bride they received, but they give one of their daughters instead. Always, the brides and women become victims of this dealing. They do not choose or decide on their marriage, but they are considered as objects to exchange to fulfill men's sexual and social desires. For the Zhin ba Zhina section, no evidence was achieved online, so I decided to have an interview with those who are victims of this process. I found several women in my grandmother's village. First, I was afraid that they might not accept to talk about what happened to them. Then, I concluded that they were much more curious to reveal their horrible lives. For instance, seventy-five-year-old woman, Meriam, says that "she was exchanged for a bride when she was just sixteen"(Appendix 1). She became the wife of Mahmud—a fifty-five-year-old man, and in return, Mahmud's sister became the wife of Meriam's father. She also said after several years, the old Mahmud died. Then, his step-son exchanged her for a bride for himself. She said "I was lucky that time because the new husband, Ahmed, was thirty-eight years old"(Appendix 1). Also, another elder woman, Rahma, always says that "she was lucky because her father had died when she was born, and she had no brothers to exchange her for a bride"(Appendix 2). Hopefully, this ugly process decreases in the urban areas, but it has been still applied widely in rural areas nowadays.

Honor killing and domestic violence are another common way. Honor, reputation, and value of a family are just related to women and daughters of the family. When they do something "bad", all the family must be ashamed. Thus, male family members must be careful to supervise their wives, sisters, and daughters. In other words, they must be "shepherds" of their females. Tradition allows them to kill and use violence against their wives, sisters, and daughters when they bring shame to the family's honor. Some families kill their daughters when they realize that they have boyfriends or intercourse without marriage. However, some other families use domestic violence against them, so they will die as a result. According to an official report by EKurd Daily, there have been thirty-seven women killed due to the name of honor and domestic violence in the first ten months of 2018 (EKurd Daily). However, when a son of the family has a girlfriend, his family proudly says that their "son changes a girlfriend each day and has many girlfriends." when a woman is killed due to honor, everyone including other women, says that she deserves it because she breaks traditional rules. Most of the killers justify their crimes due to tribal tradition and religious rules to affect people's feelings what they have done is not a crime. Most of them have not punished that way. For instance, a 45-year-old husband, Sleman, from Duhok killed her 15 year-old-wife, Dunya. He recorded himself in a video while justifying his crime by tradition and religion. Therefore, some religious

scholars and tribal elders tried to protect him. Also, a Kurdistan MP, Soran Omer, shared Sleman's video on his official account. People criticized him that he supported what Sleman did by spreading the video (EKurd Daily).

Another way is that Kurdish tradition sees menstruation as an illness and a shameful situation. Menstruation is a biological process and a part of female nature (Davis). Society and particularly men should understand what menstruation is to be familiar with the situation when it occurs to women. Husbands, brothers, and fathers should take care of women during menstruation period because women need to be physically, emotionally, and psychologically well treated during that period. Unfortunately, in Kurdish society, women ought to keep it as a secret because it is shameful. Most of society considers it as a sickness. A Kurdish woman, Jian, reveals that her mother always said that "she (her older sister) was sick" when menstruation had occurred to her. Jian also said, for many years, she thought about why her sister always got sick several days a month (Hagberg and Jonegård). Even after she got her first period, she had not known why her sister and herself had become sick every month (Hagberg and Jonegård). This evidence shows that not just men, but women also do not know about menstruation well. It will be a problem and a great one in the future. Most men do not know how to deal properly with their wives and daughters during menstruation, so in most cases, it will lead to domestic problems between them. This problem also affects women themselves not to have sufficient information about the menstrual cycle because they try to hide it instead of sharing it to obtain understandable knowledge about it (Hagberg and Jonegård).

Circumcision or female genital mutilation is another common problem. It is not just occurring in Kurdish society, but it occurs in some other Muslim countries. However, it is considered as a Kurdish custom because it is applied by some Kurdish Yezidis, some Kurdish Christians, and Zardashtis as well (Saarinen). Kurdish tradition demands people to circumcise their young children including both genders. It has biological negatives on both genders, but women are most victims. Five to fifteen-year-old girls should be circumcised, and their genitalia (external sexual organ) or a part of it should be cut and removed (Selim). A Kurdish Activist, Kurdistan Rasul, says "Victims are usually between 4 and 5 years old but are affected for years" (Rasul). Rasul also says that uncircumcised girls are considered dirty and sinful in society (Rasul). In the future, these girls will face health issues because of this traditional process. The immediate harms are a huge pain, bleeding, shocking, injury, fever, and even death (World Health

Organization). There are also long-term negatives. The girls will have much pain during intercourse, and their sexual desire and satisfaction will decrease. It will also create menstrual problems, and it makes childbirth more difficult and complicated (Reisela and Creighton). It also creates psychological issues because victims think that they are sexually weaker than their partners, and they will be afraid of having intercourse due to extreme pain (Reisela and Creighton). This way, women become weaker physically and mentally than men. This process is now reduced massively by government force, but it is still applied in many rural areas.

Widows are also victims of the Kurdish tradition. When a woman becomes a widow, her life will destroy. Society considers her to stay with her children and mourn for her husband forever. If a widow decides to remarry again, she “doesn’t have other possibilities than try to get remarried, perhaps as a second or a third wife of someone” (Saarinen). All society sees her as a bad and dishonest to his first husband because she marries again. However, when they do not remarry, but stay with their children, they cannot have a normal life as well. Society and tradition consider them to become valueless and someone like prostitutes. Everyone gossips about what they do and how they behave. Their lives, behaviors, and thinkings will be affected by people, and they will be limited. There are much traditional Kurdish common sayings and songs that clearly insult a widow who is no remarried. For example, when Kurds want to make a woman angry, they say “Daley bewazhni”(you look like a widow). When a poor man wants to marry, his relatives and friends tell him “ marry a widow she wants nothing and also feeds you.” In addition, one of the songs says that “ she is a widow, and she had two apples on her breast.” In a way, the song sexually insults widows and make fun of them. This way, their lives are controlled by others, so most of the widows try to isolate themselves from society to avoid these gossips.

In addition, Kurdish tradition considers women to stay at home and be responsible for household duties. In Kurdish traditional societies, women are called “Kabana Mal” (Household salves). Society thinks this phrase has a positive meaning, but there is a negative meaning behind it that is full of injustice and inequality against women. When a woman becomes “Kabana Mal”, she does everything including cooking, babysitting, cleaning, and serving her husband. A woman, who does not commit these domestic duties properly, is considered as a lazy and bad woman. In this way, Kurdish women try to be good “Kabans” to avoid being targeted by society’s gossips. When a woman is a housewife and has no job outside, she is luckier because she just needs to do the domestic

work. Her husband does not do anything at the house, and he expects her wife to serve him as well. For a woman who has a job outside of the house, the situation will be more difficult. She needs to work hard outside, and returning home, she has to do all the household duties herself and serve her husband also. There are few men who help their wives with domestic duties. Those men will face issues in society, and they will be insulted. People call those men “Oumer” or “Aly” meaning that they do the household work because they are afraid of their wives. People also call them “Zhinani”, and it means they behave like women.

Kurdish customs also want women to be speechless and silent. According to Kurdish society, “Good women are speechless and shameful while talking with men.” There are numerous Kurdish traditional sayings that mirrors that point. For example, they say “woman is beautiful with silence” or “ woman’s reputation and beauty is being silent”. This silence reflects all the aspects of women’s lives. They cannot participate in social decisions or share their personal ideas. Also, women should not reveal their domestic problem to other people. Even, when husbands use domestic violence against them, they need to keep it as a private subject. Another consequence of being silent is that women should be punished for men’s sins and problems. For example, in Kurdish society, a man who has a barren wife, tells all the relatives and family that her wife is barren and cannot bore a baby. Society accepts him to take the second wife in order to have children. On the other hand, when the man is barren, the woman should be silent and keep it as secret. The woman should also commit the problem as herself or say that “God does not want them to have a baby”. Society cannot agree when she remarries again to have children, but she needs to stay with her barren husband and be silent with no rejection. When a woman tries to break this silence, she will be insulted by society. They call her “Damaware”, “Zman Drezh”, “Zman Mqas”, “Qahpa” (Bitch), “Ru qaim”, “Be ru”, and “Chaw Qaim”. All these extremely rude phrases are used to insult a woman who is not silent but tries to have a voice in society to get her rights and protect herself.

To sum up, Kurdish tradition applies these mechanisms to weaken women and keep them tamed. Kurdish tradition creates a patriarchal society by insulting women in many different ways. The society is not aware of these injustices and inequalities, but it keeps following traditional rules. Hundreds of women are killed and attacked. These crimes are justified by traditional rules and values. Each individual should say “STOP”. Those traditional roots must be taken out of ruling the Kurdish society and insulting

women. All of us should have a voice to face this problem to have a healthy society that respects both genders equally.

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Shae Kamaran

Race in Let America Be America Again

When people are reading Let America Be America Again by Langston Hughes, some of them could think that it is talking about equality between all people. Even though he speaks about black, white, red, and Indians as if they were all living in misery, and that all of them have a dream about America that has never come true, if we paid attention to the slave-related vocabularies that are used in the poem and the way they are used, we can see that Hughes's main concern is with black people because he thinks that they were the only people who really suffered because of white people. In this paper, I will plot out the slave-related vocabularies and explain how they are related to slavery, and how they are used to show that black people suffered because of white people, and explain how other words could have been used to state the actual idea of equality.

In the seventh stanza, there are a couple of words that suggest the idea of slavery. First, the words farmer and soil in the first line are used, and it says that farmers are bonded to the soil. Farmers are bonded to the soil because they cultivate and plant crops. The first and most common work for black people at the beginning of slavery was an agricultural plantation. Slaves had something in common with farmers, but they were not getting profit from their work. Also, in the second line, he says, "the worker sold to the machine." According to Slavery in America, in the 18th century, a machine was made to remove cotton seeds, but the machine needed a human to manipulate it (Slavery 8). That was one of the reasons that slave labors increased at that time. When a person is sold to something that person will not get any profit, but the one who is responsible for the act of selling will get profit. It will make sense if we see the worker as a

slave who did not get any profit from working with the machine, and the one who benefited were the whites. He mentioned two professions that slaves were known to work in. In the third line, he says, “the Negro, servant to you all.” The object “you all” will directly refer to the white because the Negroes who were the slaves were only working for whites and not for other blacks. It also can be connected to another use of you in the poem which is in the eleventh stanza. He says, “call me any ugly name you choose.” At that time, the slaves were known for being called by offensive names by the whites. Although the whites also were called bad names, it was not as common as the black ones. If the “you” are the whites, and the “I” is working for the “you”, therefore the whites are not included in the group of people who are working and suffering, and if they are not the ones who are suffering, they will be the ones who make the other group, which is the black, suffer. Also, he only uses the subject “you” when he mentioned the Negro. He could have mentioned it also with the machine in the previous line, and it would have made sense, but he actually wanted to separate the Negro from the white. At the beginning of this stanza there is a pattern in the first two lines of showing the relation of a profession to something, but in the third line, he shifts to the relation of black race to “you all.” If the intention was to show how people with different jobs are suffering, then he would not have mentioned one person from a specific race. In the last line, he uses the word bartered and referring it to a person. Normally, the word bartered is used in relation to trading in goods. He is referring it to “the poorest worker,” who is a human. The only American exchange of human beings was the slave trade, so here “the poorest worker” is actually a slave. If we take the definition of worker to be a person who works and gets profit, then the sentence will not make sense because a non-slave worker will be bartered. There is no one who can barter something which is not his, so if the worker is not a

slave then he cannot be bartered. The “poorest worker” is referring to the subject of I that he used at the beginning of the first four lines to represent whole poor people who were suffering. Hughes says, “[I am the farmer...], [I am the worker...], [I am the Negro...].” However, in the last line, the same subject which is the poorest worker is only referring to one race which is black. That means that the subjects I in the first sentences were also representing only one race not all poor people in America.

One of the most repeated words in the poem is “free.” He usually refers it to land or men. The definition of free in this context can be the one who has rights in their land like other citizens because the poem speaks about the people who are suffering in their land because of lack of freedom and inequality. In America, the people who were not “free” were slaves. Some might say that other people apart from blacks were also not free, but the ones who were not treated like the rest of the majority and deprived out of all of their rights as humans were the black. There are two sentences that the word free is used with the homeland. The two sentences are, “There's never been equality for me, Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free, "" and “I came To build a "homeland of the free.”” The tense of the first sentence is present. Free in the first sentence refers to white people because at that time, the present time in the poem, technically the white people were free. However, in the second one, he uses the verb “to build” which means doing the action in the future, so the action was not completed at that time. Free in the second sentence refers to the slaves because they were enslaved at that time, but they will be free in the future. Another sentence, “And yet must be--the land where every man is free,” the use of the word every means that there are already freemen, who are the whites, but he says that *every* man should be, so the currently not-free men should also be free. According to what was mentioned above, the not-free

men are the slaves, so the slaves should also be free like the whites. That means the man who was supposed to represent all poor people is actually a slave.

Now that the relation between the mentioned words and slavery is explained, when Hughes says I or we, he does not mean the American people, instead he is arguing against slavery and he is representing the black race in oppose of the white race. He could have used other words or other ways of using the words to represent every person. For example, in the seventh stanza, when he mentions the professions, he could have mention jobs that represent every group of people on their own and not jobs that are related to slavery. For example, a common job for white people or Indians to represent them. Also, in the third line where he mentions Negro, he could have said a servant because that would have continued the theme of professions that were mentioned before. He also could have said white, Indian, or black more directly instead of just plotting out the Negro race. However, some people might say that he sees slavery as the extreme bad and that the other races are suffering just like the slaves, so he is not taking any sides. But, if we consider the time the poem was written, we can see that at that time, the depression era, most people America were suffering from poverty, and that was worse for the slaves because they were already poor before the depression era. Also, the writer is black who lived at the beginning of the 19th century, so he had seen the time when slavery was still around.

If we accept the idea that was mentioned before, we can apply it to make sense of the small details in the poem. For example, we can make sense of the punctuation and use of adjectives in the fifth stanza. He mentions white and Negro in the same sentence separated by a comma. We can say that he is trying to compare between them because he could have put “red man” or “immigrant” with white so that there would not be much contrast in a single sentence.

Also, he uses an adjective to describe the white whereas he does not use any other adjectives when he mentions immigrant or Negro, so it might be that he only sees himself as the “poor white” not all white.

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Lilyan Dler Mohammed

Not the religion of peace

Islam is the religion most Muslims around the world claim as the religion of “peace”. In fact, most people blindly claim that the word Islam means the word peace itself. This misconception, promoted by deluded Muslims all around the world, is far from the truth as the direct translation of the word Islam comes from the Arabic root “al-silm” which means “submission” or “surrender”[1]. Islam’s holy political book the Quran has been used to tame people from resisting the rule of one mentally unstable Shepard named Mohammed [2]. Islam is in no way a religion of peace and this paper will argue for that stance. Firstly Islam’s history of how it spread is quite violent and questionable which does not promote the idea that Islam is the religion of peace in the first place [4]. In addition, other Abrahamic religions were oppressed and laws were enforced to keep these religious groups as third degree citizens even lower than Muslim women. Secondly, it dictates hierarchies between men and women, this leads to half of the society being neglected and kept women as “ovens” to bake the goods (children) for more conquests. Finally there is a rule or law of Islam that is still being implemented today especially in the western world, which is the concept of Taqqiya, which is defined as “the principle of practicing the dissimulation of outward conformity permitted Muslims in a hostile or persecuting non-Muslim environment for the sake of their personal safety”[3]. All these areas of Islam that are supposedly god’s words, that have been recorded in his holy book, are the reasons why is Islam is not the religion of peace, despite not being all bad in it's entirety, and in fact it's objective is not for peace to be upon people but enforcing the submission of the people.

First, the history of Islam's spread through conquest across the middle east and Africa was quite violent as it spread through conquest and it also wasn't so kind to other Abrahamic religions like Christianity and Judaism either [4]. Islam started on the basis of conquest and that history definitely resonates today with the rise of terrorists groups like ISIS and AlQaida where Islamic laws are used to further spread Islam and control new territories. For example, there is a verse in the Quran that states, "Those who believe, fight in the cause of Allah, and those who disbelieve, fight in the cause of Satan. So fight you against the friends of Satan. Ever feeble indeed is the plot of Satan"[5], which is directed towards the Muslims in conquest that in order to validate their stance as a good Muslim they have to fight for god against none-believers of Islam that fight for Satan (evil). This verse alone implies the idea that all non-Muslims are enemies as they are worshipping slaves if not God, which is the same tactic used by ISIS when calling the people of the western world infidels. Although some Muslims bring up the verse that "We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you; our God and your God is One, and to Him we have submitted", in order to show that in Islam god saw equally between Islam and other Abrahamic religions [6]. The intolerance towards other Abrahamic religions is also evident from one of the verses in the Quran that states that Christians and Jews should not be seen as friends as they are only friends of each other and whoever befriends one of them is one of them and god doesn't guide such people [7]. From this verse the extent of intolerance towards non-Muslims can be seen and this can be problematic to the modern globalized world, where a system of coexistence is essential to maintain harmony. An example of how this was used in the modern history is Palestinian invasion of Lebanon in 1970 where Christians were dispersed and expelled from their own country [8]. These intolerances can be seen in many Muslim countries

around the world, Saudi Arabia, which is meant to be one of the holiest locations for Islam, according to a research “has rated high on the Social Hostilities Index which measures individual aggression or hostility towards religion-related harassment and terrorism”[9]. This trend in violence and “with us or against us” mentality in Islam’s history and its holy book clearly has non-peaceful implications as can be seen from Islam and Muslims today. However, this is not the only way in which Islam isn't peaceful. Second, the issue of women’s rights is a tricky topic as some claim that women are given “rights” and are seen equal to men according to the Quran by having equal rights with men [10]. However, this argument is to the contrary of what the Quran and “God” supposedly claims as it is written in the Quran: on the matters of inheritance men claim twice as women, men are allowed to have up to four wives, women can be beaten by their husbands and cannot deny sexual activities [12][11]. Some Muslims argue that men acquired more inheritance in the Quran because women back then were taken care of by men and men were allowed four wives just because men were economically in power. This leads to a loop of repeating sequences of men given more power and women being fooled into thinking they are given more rights. The reality is that now a days the world functions on a basis of the involvement of both men and women, in society and the economy, which leads to any wrongful actions against women having a negative domino effect on the society. This can be seen from the case of Syrian migration to European countries that has led to increased crime rates and rape of women and children and a cultural clash with the civilized world[13]. This disruption of peace is caused by the Islamic teachings of male superiority over women.

Finally, the concept of Taqqiya, permissible situations where deception is allowed, is another issue with Islam and its teaching because in some ways it is still being implemented

today in the western world. Taqqiya can be used to say things contrary to your belief in order to avoid being harmed, Muslims can “put on a face of smiles while their hearts curse them” as stated by Abu’ d-Darda’ and Muslims can change their outward behavior using Taqqiya to integrate in societies where they feel in danger from their evil[14]. Despite the possibility of using it for legitimate reasons, like denying faith in order to avoid being killed, this is a technique, or method of deception, in Islam being currently used in various countries in Europe and America. For example, in the UK, Muslims, which account for only 5% of the population, already have functioning sharia courts in the UK and have caused more than 11,000, honor related crimes [15]. Muslims in the UK did not have the power when they were in smaller numbers back in the 1960s hence they made attempts to integrate or infiltrate into the British Society using Taqqiya until they reached the point they are at today. As previously talked about Islam is pre-occupied with conquest and are no friends of Christians or Jews and God even allows them to deceive enemies to further Islam’s agenda and this can be seen as a disruption of peace in the civilized world. To conclude, Islam is a religion fueled by violence and inequality as it can be seen from its violent history and prejudice towards the other Abrahamic religions and the teachings of Islam that portray women as inferior to men. Islamic teaching also informs Muslims of the conditions in which their deceptions and lying will not be punished by God as it would either save Muslim lives or further expand Islam’s authority. For these reasons Islam is in no way a religion of peace as some people claim, by ill-informed westerners and Muslims alike. These teachings disrupt the peace and relative harmony of the world and therefore it should not be encouraged for people to accept Islam in areas where it is not already dominant.

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Yalda Al-Ani

Betwixt and Between

Liminality is a transitional stage in which a person experiences difficulties, nervousness, unpredictability, and intense disorientation as the normal rules of society or reality no longer apply (Abbas). This stage comes between two different stages--a preliminal stage and a postliminal stage--and is a path of transition from the former self to a new identity or personality. Individuals in a liminal stage are referred to as “liminals, that ‘are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial’” (Rumelili).

An example of liminality is the initiation camps in some traditional tribes where “the boys are taken from their villages and families to a comparatively remote 'ritual site' where they are subjected to various ordeals or humiliations and trained by older men” (Trubshaw). The male children are taken between the ages of thirteen and fifteen and kept at the ritual site for weeks or months. The purpose of these camps is to “toughen them up emotionally and physically” (Abbas) and make them ready to take responsibility, to encounter danger, and be independent. “Often the boys are considered to have died and been reborn as men... Only after completion of the initiation ceremony can the neophyte be eligible for adult relationships such as marriage” (Trubshaw).

In *Night* by Elie Wiesel, Elie was a thirteen-year old boy devoting himself to religious study: “I continued to devote myself to my studies, Talmud during the day and Kabbalah at night” (Wiesel). Even though he was serious, his father told him he needed to be at least thirty

“before venturing into the world of mysticism, a world fraught with peril.” Even after the ghetto experience and the torturous train ride, when they arrived at the camp, “Confidence soared..[and they] gave thanks to God” (Wiesel). Arriving at the camp, Elie maintained his faith in God.

Elie entered a liminal stage between naive boyhood and manhood when the selection occurred the first night at Birkenau. First he was separated forever from his mother and sisters. He was terrified when he saw the crematorium chimney. “Over there will be your grave...You sons of bitches!,” Elie was told (Wiesel). Elie, with the other prisoners, was “stunned and petrified”. The panic he felt made him wonder if this was real or if he was dreaming. He saw humans being treated as badly as insects which people would get rid of. He saw people burned! “Yes, I did see this, with my own eyes...children thrown into the flames” (Wiesel). A thirteen year old boy who had believed God was merciful, saw children being thrown into fire! Elie’s father saw that the world was turned upside down. “Today, everything is possible,” he moaned (Wiesel). His terror, losing his mother and sister, the uncertainty, and pretending to be eighteen made of him an older man.

After the liminal stage of the selection, conflict formed in him about the reality of the merciful God when people were reciting Kaddish. He was wondering why people would thank God. He said, “For the first time, I felt anger rising within me. Why should I sanctify His name? The Almighty, the eternal and terrible Master of the Universe, chose to be silent. What was there to thank Him for?” (Wiesel). The young religious boy whose life was dedicated to religious studies was angry at God. Actually, he knew the change his personality underwent. When they were beaten and demeaned by the *kapos*, he realized how he changed. He thought, “I too had become a different person. The student of Talmud, the child I was, had been consumed by the

flames. All that was left was a shape that resembled me. My soul had been invaded—and devoured—by a black flame” (Wiesel).

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe shows Okonkwo as a strong, successful leader whose courage all people admired. “Okonkwo saw clearly the high esteem in which he would be held, and he saw himself taking the highest title in the land.” He honored his traditions and ancestors and was ready to sacrifice even his children for that. Because the traditions demanded it, he killed his adopted son, Ikemefuna, with his own hands. When his son, Nwoye, converted to Christianity, Okonkwo disowned him and told his other sons “You have all seen the great abomination of your brother. Now he is no longer my son or your brother” (Achebe). Also, as soon as he heard about the white men entering Abame, he said the reason they could not fight them was that Abame’s people were “weak and foolish” and his people would fight and save their land from those men (Achebe).

Okonkwo went through two liminal stages, transitioning from the tough man who was admired and feared to the man who experienced humiliation and finally made himself an abomination to his traditions. The first began when Okonkwo and the leaders with him were imprisoned by the District Commissioner. When they were invited by him, they thought they might be able to solve the problem through an honorable negotiation. However, they were imprisoned, humiliated and demeaned there in a way they would have never expected. What they went through was even worse than Ibo war. They were deceived and tricked by the white man. The men were depressed and did not know what to do and “even when the men were left alone they found no words to speak to one another” (Achebe). They did not eat and they were not given anything to drink. They were disoriented by how badly they were treated.

After Okonkwo was freed, “the bitterness in his heart was now mixed with a kind of childlike excitement” and he promised himself that he would take revenge on the white men. His liminal experience changed him from being willing to work with all the elders to choosing to make his own way if needed. “If Umuofia decided on war, all would be well. But if they chose to be cowards he would go out and avenge himself” (Achebe). In fact, he was afraid that they might not fight with him, and this led directly to the second liminal experience.

Not knowing what would happen next, people were waiting when the Commissioner’s messenger came. Okonkwo was angry, fearful, and the outcome of the encounter was uncertain. When he killed the messenger, even Okonkwo himself did not know what might happen. In confronting the messenger, Okonkwo was suspending the normal rules of Ibo society with peaceful visitors. He created his own liminal phase.

Afterwards, when no one moved and the other messengers were allowed to escape, he had the now knowledge that he was really the only man ready for war. “They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in that tumult” (Achebe). Being disappointed by his people, despair and hopelessness arose in him. The rough man, who achieved many titles and was honored and respected, killed himself. He chose for his body to become “evil” and to be “buried like a dog” (Achebe). What he and his people went through was too hard for him to handle and live with.

In comparing liminality in the two texts, Elie and Okonkwo had had different family lives which then affected them in their liminal experiences. Elie’s relationship with his father was good and his father acted as a guide during the liminal phase. He admired his father and thought about him as a strong person. When they were forced to leave their houses, Elie said, “My father

was crying. It was the first time I saw him cry. I had never thought it possible” (Wiesel). Elie’s life was not based on fear. He trusted his father which made him fear losing him. During his experience, his only thought was “not to lose him. Not to remain alone”(Wiesel). On the other hand, Okonkwo despised his father and always thought about him as a weak person. He was ashamed to have such a father. When his father died, “he had taken no title at all and he was heavily in debt” (Achebe). Okonkwo lived in fear of being like his father, and this made him ready to do anything in order not to be considered weak. Okonkwo had no father as a guide during his liminal stage; he was alone in his difficult experience with the white men.

Another difference between their liminal experiences is the effect it had on their religious views in the postliminal phase. Elie ended up angry at God and questioning his goodness and mercy. “Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever... Never shall I forget those moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to ashes”, Elie said to himself (Wiesel). Before his painful experience, he was willing to devote his life to his God. However, in the end he had no confidence in God and referred to him as “this God in whom I no longer believed” (Wiesel).

In contrast, Okonkwo--a religious man committed to the ancestral and animistic spirits--”kept the wooden symbols of his personal god and of his ancestral spirits. He worshipped them with sacrifices of kola nut, food and palm wine, and offered prayers to them on behalf of himself, his three wives and eight children” (Achebe). He went through this experience only thinking about protecting his religion and traditions against the Christians. His intention was to drive the Christians out of their village, and he was ready to fight in order to save his clan. He

regretted deeply that “he had lost the chance to lead his warlike clan against the new religion” (Wiesel). Even after the liminal experience, Okonkwo decided to retain his traditional religion. A final difference between the liminal experience in the two texts is that Elie was a successful liminal. He succeeded in learning lessons through the liminal experience. Although he was young and physically weak, he survived in the end. He was humiliated and demeaned, he lost his family and his objects, yet he learned how to stay strong and survive. One of the early lessons he learned was from another inmate. “And now, here is a prayer, or rather a piece of advice: let there be camaraderie among you. We are all brothers... Help each other. That is the only way to survive” (Wiesel). And Elie helped others to the end. Conversely, Okonkwo was older and physically stronger. He had a family he was responsible for, but he failed. He could not survive. Okonkwo’s “whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness”, and his father’s advice for him was “Do not despair... It is more difficult and more bitter when a man fails alone” (Achebe). However, Okonkwo’s end was a lonely failure, hanging himself from a tree.

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Mohammed Mustafa Imran Haider

A Son of Earth

As a half Kurdish half Iranian person who was raised in an Iraqi Arabic city (Baghdad) and got a mixed culture of Kurdish and Arabic, Nationality and citizenship were not easy concepts for me to deal with. Actually, it took me years and years to fully understand them or to think as if I did.

It all started with the concepts which they were teaching it to us. The concepts of “loving our homeland”, “loving our country”, and “defending on the land”. These were very regular, normal, and simple for most (if not all) of the students. They may like it and believe in it or they may not like it and simply ignore it because most of them didn’t really think about it seriously. But I was different (or at least I think I was). I simply asked myself, why? Why I should love, defend, and care about a land like any other land? Why would I care about a piece of dirt and sand? People usually answered my questions nearly the same way. They used to say “Because you’ve been born here and this land gave you food protection and life”. Their answer, however, wasn’t satisfying for me. Actually, it was the opposite.

The answers which people gave me made feel as if being born means being cursed by your country to serve it for your whole life. I thought in that way because my country didn’t give me anything worth mentioning except catastrophic wars and distraction, sounds of bombs and guns, pictures of death blood and sadness. Yet, I got used to all of that. I got used to the pictures which they showed on the TVs. Pictures of areas of conflicts and explosions, pictures of injured, and dead bodies. I got used to the sounds of helicopters, to the American soldiers when they come to our small cities, to their vehicles when they accidentally but carelessly cut the electricity wires of our houses. Again and again. When I say I got used to those things I mean they didn’t make me feel nervous anymore, but it was still an annoying life full of mess and chaos. After all that, a teacher comes to our class to tell us about loving our home and serving our country. In the classes of history, they always taught us (and still) about how we “were” a strong nation fearless, and courageous in our battles against the evil, coward enemies of us. How they lost and how we won. I sometimes used to think, did our “enemies” think the same about themselves?

what was their aspect of our history, and what does their history say about us? Of course, when they (the educational system) had to mention the times when we were weak and lost, they made sure to show us as the brave angles who fought until the end and to show the enemy as the giant devil. I didn't attack our history. I was just wondering, what was the point of view of the soldiers of the opposite camp?

These ideas made me realize if I accept these concepts of "you have to love and serve your country where you've been born and raised" I'll just be blinding myself from seeing the reality. If that concept is right, it means there is no bad side and good side in any conflict. It is only a matter of aspect. Everyone will think he is the right side. There will only be our absolutely right ideas and their pathetically blind ideas. People will only see the good in them and the bad in the others Which is clearly a dangerous illusion. Iranians may tell you how strong their civilization was, an Iraqi will tell you that his land is the origin of civilizations, Egyptian people may tell you how their civilization deserved to be called the mother of all nations, a Saudi will talk to you about the greatness of the emergence of Islam from his land. All proud of things they didn't do nor helped in doing them at all. They are each proud of the history of their own home, just because they were born in that specified bordered region. It is clear (from my own point of view) that if any of these people were born on different lands, he/she would have a different thing a different history to be proud of. These ideas made me less and less connected to my country, to my land.

When I entered middle school, God willed to be a school full of different students from different cultures and backgrounds. The first person I met in that school was Christian. His name was Mutaz. And he was the first christen I meet. Actually, he was the first non-Muslim person in my life. There was something very strange about him. He looked exactly like a normal human. Meeting a lot of different students of from different cultural and religious backgrounds (Sunnis, Shiites, Christians, non-religious, Arabs, Kurdish, a Canadian, and even a British) made me understand more and more about how we (humans) are all similar in nature and close to each other. And how ignorance can make us look different and put us far from understanding the others. Then, I realized the truth about the Arabs, the Kurdish, the Iraqis, the Iranians, the American, the Egyptians, the Saudi and all of the other people from different nationalities and

backgrounds. The truth was we are all the same, just with different environments. We are all brothers and sisters, and that made sense to me. After all, we are (all of us) from Adam and Eve. This idea, or this realization, made it clear to me how fake and unnatural the borders of the countries were. It became clear to me then that before any nationality, citizenship, or any of these “belongings”, I belonged to the whole world. I was belonging to earth. I was a son of earth.

Then I loved my country. I knew then how blessed I was. Then I knew how my country made a big piece of me, of my soul. How I wouldn't have this journey of beliefs in another place, and even if I would have, it probably wouldn't feel the same way. Even if it (my country) doesn't look good, even if it doesn't give me all that I wanted, even if it is not the best place to live in, I choose it, and I'm pleased to have it. I'm proud to say that I will spend the rest of my life trying to make it better. After all, isn't that our job in this life, to make our world better?

JUNIOR/SENIOR FINALISTS

Aya Adnan

Do “Islamic Countries” need to be abolished? What sort of Societies will we be after that? To what extent the abused Islam of today will last?

Political Islam is a widely discussed term that mainly refers to the intervention of Islam as religion into the political stability of a country. While many countries in the Middle East, such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt have separated, to some extent, the religious interference into politics, other countries in the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran have inclined religion within the political life of both of the countries for a very long time. Consequently, ‘religious’ figures were able to have strong opinions on the political, social, and economic aspects of their subject areas which, in return, made the Middle East an area of war. Therefore, in order for the Middle East to witness a brighter future, the existence of “Islamic Countries” must be questioned, evaluated, and changed in response to the contemporary events of today.

Having used Islam as a pretext to achieve political aims, Islamic countries should be abolished. Islamic countries in many occasions used “religious figures” to achieve certain political ambitions in the Middle East. Upon the many countries who declare themselves as “Islamic countries” are Saudi Arabia and The Islamic Republic of Iran. Both countries have a great influence in the Middle East as a result of the role they assigned to some “religious” figures which led to civil wars in places, such as Iraq, Kuwait, Yemen, and very recently in Syria. In addition, having incentives in interpretations and translations of the Quran made both countries representatives of two different Islamic sects. Consequently, both countries invested in a substantial

number of books “explaining” the religion with incentives of having political ambitions. They went even further by having different historical perspectives on Islam. (Armanios, 2004) In other words, each country has its own version of the history of Islam, making tensions among Muslims sects which eventually resulted in civil wars. Hence, Islamic countries are, in reality, totalitarian governments that created a religion of hatred, violence, and oppression and called it Islam. Having political aims, they addressed different narration of Hadith and interpretations of the Quran, and they invested heavily on teaching them to youngsters. (Armanios, 2004) Both countries have religious school systems imposing their own Islamic views. (Burton, 2010) Therefore, creating totalitarian school systems, which block the way of critical comprehension of Islamic books, texts, or even Islamic ideologies, made Islam another means of serving the political motives of Saudi Arabia and Iran in the Middle East. “It took many years to cleanse Arabia of its “false idols.” It will take many more to cleanse Islam of its new false idols—bigotry and fanaticism—worshipped by those who have replaced Muhammad’s original vision of tolerance and unity with their own ideas of hatred and discord. But the cleansing is inevitable, and the tide of reform cannot be stopped. The Islamic Reformation is already here. We are all living in it.” (Aslan, 2005)

Abolishing Islamic countries will pave the way to the rise of secular politics. Having events associated with the abused Islam of today seem to be very similar to the civil wars that happened in Europe which later on in history, gave rise to democracy. “In

Europe, the modern struggle for democracy began with the French Revolution in 1789. Just as the twentieth century's third wave of democratization was greeted with jubilation by observers around the world, so too was the collapse of the hereditary authoritarian regime in France seen by many contemporaries as signaling the dawn of a new era." (Berman, 2006) Some might argue that the adaption of western ideologies might lead to westernizing and entirely neglecting the country's own religion and traditions. However, abolishing Islamic countries does not mean abolishing Islam as a religion and investing heavily in westernization. It simply means that Islam will not be followed through the state, but rather individuals themselves will have the opportunity to read the Quran and decide for themselves without the intervention of politics. One example is Christianity "After 1945, Christian Democracy sought to change Catholic attitudes toward democracy in order to channel religious values into mass politics.⁷ Christian Democracy drew on Catholic identity but also related it to social programs and welfare concerns. Christian Democrats provided the means for conservative religious values to find expression in secular politics. The rise of Christian Democracy reflected the desire of Church leaders to provide a voice for Catholic views in democracies, but it was also the result of strategic choices by political actors who saw opportunity in mobilizing religious values to further their political interests." (Nasr, 2001) Therefore, Islam will still have a social and political role in the society, but it would not be in the sense of utilitarian governments as it is in the case of Saudi Arabia and The Islamic Republic of Iran. According to Reza Aslan, a contemporary Islamic philosopher, "Islamic enlightened politics will arrive in Iraq - another hopeless hope, I fear. Iraq's

secularism has been destroyed and its Islamicisation brings foreboding for secular Muslims, women, Christians, and Jews. ” (Alibhai-Brown, 2005)

In conclusion, Islam was abused mainly by Muslims themselves. The economic, political, and social ambitions of “religious” figures have used Islam as a pretext to reach their own personal goals. This acknowledgment will allow for a critical understanding of contemporary events and eventually end the brainwashing ideas imposed on Muslims in these societies. Moreover, the importance of knowing the reality of such governments is essential in the sense that individuals in the Middle East are the main target of these “Islamic countries.”

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Tara Burhan

Nawal El Saadawi's "In Camera"

Nawal El Saadawi was born in, 1931 in Kafr Tahla, Egypt. She's a feminist writer, activist, and psychiatric. She's an advocate of women's rights, often described as "the Simone de Beauvoir of the Arab world" (Nawal El Saadawi). She was educated in many universities including Cairo University 1955, Columbia University in New York 1966, and Ayn Shams University 1972-74. In 1966 she became the director of the Health Education Department in the Egyptian Ministry. Later in 1972 she was expelled from the position because she wrote a book called "Women and Sex". Saadawi was condemned by the political and religious forces, and she was jailed in 1981. She wrote in her book *A Daughter of Isis* "I had been born a female in a world that wanted only males"[i]. Saadawi dedicated her writings to challenge the stereotypes of the patriarchal society. She challenged the notion of the roles and nature of women in the culture. In her short story "In Camera" Saadawi focuses on viewing the institutions of patriarchy and how they oppress women in Egypt particular and in the Middle East in general, she gives voice to the voiceless women, and portrays the limitation of women's role in the society.

In her short story "In Camera" Saadawi depicts the story of a female protagonist called Leila Al-Fargani. Who is on a trial for expressing her beliefs on the corruption of the patriarchal government. She was arrested for calling the president who is remained unnamed "stupid". Leila faces gang rape from the police while she is in prison "ten men raped her, one after the other" (Saadawi 3006). Leila's thoughts while sitting in the court room is being described throughout the story. Also, her Mother's thoughts and her Father's thoughts take a part of the story during the trial. At the end of the story the judge and his aides have a conversation and decide to put Leila back in prison.

Throughout the story Leila is resembled to animals. "remained like a small animal incapable of uttering the simple words" (Saadawi 3000) "No animal could sit like the way she could, if it did, what would it do with its four legs?" (Saadawi 3001). Through the previous quotes Saadawi views women's degradation in the society by resembling Leila to animals. According to Ortner women are being identified with something all cultures devalue which is "nature" (Ortner 72). Animals are considered as a part of nature, and by that they are viewed as

inferior. In the same sense women are considered a part of nature. Women are identified as inferior due to their biological sex which makes them closer to nature. Saadawi highlights one of the issues women face which is degradation. By showing how Leila thinks of herself as an animal Saadawi displays that Leila has unconsciously obliged to the culture's view of her. All her life she has been given the sense that she is inferior and she has been related to nature many times.

Saadawi uses beauty imagery to show the value of women within the society at that time. She does so by showing a conversation between Leila's Mother and Grandmother. The first thing Leila's grandmother said when she was born "A girl and ugly too! A double catastrophe!" (Saadawi 3004). As if to say the only good thing about a girl is her physical beauty. As if a girl's beauty is the only valuable thing she can possess. Viewing women as images of physical beauty was the case in 1950's American women and it is still going on till this day. According to Betty Friedan the suburban beautiful housewife was the dreamy image of the young American women. Large sized pictures of beautiful women were shown in magazines and advertisements. Women dyed their hair blonde, and ate chalk instead of food to get thinner. All of that was done to fulfil the expectation of the society that the true "feminine" value of women is her "beauty" (Friedan 17-18). Furthermore, this statement made by Leila's grandmother shows women as agents of patriarchy. Also, women, in this society, were viewed as the weaker sex, or the "Other", who gave power to men which were considered as the "One".

Moreover, Saadawi represents the voiceless women in the society through Leila and her Mother. Leila's mother remains unnamed through the story. She describes her sadness for her daughter's suffering, thinking to herself, "How, my daughter, did you stand so much pain?" (Saadawi 3004). Then she reflects how Leila was capable of doing anything, and how strong she was inside of her making movements inside of her womb "shook me from inside, like a volcano shakes the earth" (Saadawi 3004). All the previous statements we hear from Leila's mother are represented in her own thoughts. Her voice is never heard. In addition, Leila's thought about the corruption of the government are shown when she thinks "And what inner corruption! She wished at that moment they would give her pen and paper so that she could draw that corruption," (Saadawi 3001). Both Leila and her mother are a representation of the women in the

society who have no voice. Saadawi portrays their emotions and expressions within the privacy of their thoughts. Their voices are not heard like many other women in the society.

Correspondingly, Leila is told many times by her parents not to get involved in politics. Her mother told her “What’s politics got to do with you? You are not a man” then she continues to say girls in her age should only think about marriage (Saadawi 3002). This quote confirms that Leila’s mother believes in the limitations society set for women. Instead of encouraging her, she is following the system’s beliefs that the only occupation for a woman is as a “Wife”. In one of her books Saadawi mentions the limitations the society set for women in playing a role outside of their domestic environment. She states “a woman’s life is very narrow it doesn’t step out of the family and the children’s issues, it does not live up to the bigger public political and humanistic issues” (Saadawi 148). Also, Leila remembers her father telling her “Politics, my girl, is not for women and girls” (Saadawi 3006). Both her mother and father have become a part of the institutions of patriarchy. An institution that limits and devalues women starting from the family unit to the government and powerful institutions. In the same sense, Leila remembers when she first heard the word court when she was a child from a conversation between her mother and her aunt. Her aunt said “The judge didn’t believe me and told me to strip so he could see where I’d been beaten” (Saadawi 3000), and when she refused to strip for a strange man the judge refused her claims and told her to go back to her husband. This shows another patriarchal institution not in support of women which is the “Court and Law”. Due to the existence of these hidden mechanisms there is no space for women’s resistance. They make it very difficult for women to succeed in their revolutions, unless they get help from the outside it’s not possible for them to go against the patriarchal society. This was the case for Leila it was not possible for her to resist with all these institutions the court, law, police, and family holding her back.

Saadawi focuses on how the society views women as sexual objects. One of Leila’s rapists told her “This is the way we torture you women—by depriving you of the most valuable thing you possess”, and this was followed by Leila’s angry response “You fool! The most valuable thing I possess is not between my legs, you’re all stupid. And the most stupid among you is the one who leads you” (Saadawi 3007). This conversation shows that the women in the culture were reduced to bodies. Men only looked at them as sex objects, in order to violate their

honor. According to Simon de Beauvoir a women's body is her enslavement to the species (Ortner 74). Women's body seems to doom her due to the possibility of violating her honor through it. What Leila did by stating her opinion was bringing shame to her family. According to the culture she did not only lose her honor, but in fact, she lost the family's honor.

In light of the men through "In Camera", we notice that they are the only characters who can speak loudly, and exercise their power freely. In the courtroom, the judge often showed his power with his large hammer, and by reading the charges of Leila out loud. Leila's father has two stands and perspectives in the story. At first, when the judge announces loudly that Leila called their leader "Stupid", everyone in the court starts clapping. His heart started to beat quicker when the crowd clapped for what his daughter said. He thought to stand up and say "I'm her father", then he continues to say "Men like us live and die for one moment such as this" (Saadawi 3006). What he means is for others to recognize him and applaud for him. As if for him to be proud of his daughter he needs the people to confirm it, by clapping and congratulating him. He goes on to say that he has suffered pain with her and what happened "Now I have the right to enjoy some of the reward and share in her heroism" (Saadawi 3006). He wants to share that moment of pride, and to enjoy how others praise his daughter once. Soon after this, gossip starts to go around in the court. Things like "They trampled on her honor and on her father's honor" "her poor father" "maybe he can't face people after his honor was violated" (Saadawi 3006). Her father here shows his quick reaction and how he changed from a proud father to one who is ashamed. His thoughts sum up the patriarchal society, instead of sympathizing with his daughter he is ashamed of her. He thinks if she had been a man, he would not be suffering now the way he was. The attitudes the men in the story have towards women is that of their own culture. Women are not honored, they are devalued. They view women as the carrier of the family honor, and by losing it she loses all her value. She is no longer a full human being, not even a victim, only someone who has brought shame to the family.

Towards the end, the judge and his aides went into the conference chamber. The accusation shifts ironically on the judge because he repeated what Leila said about the leader in the court. He is told that the people applauded because he said in public what is said in private and it was "confirming a fact rather than an accusation" (Saadawi 3007). Moreover, they tell him

that the worst label to stick on a man is “stupid” because it means he’s mindless “That he’s an animal” (Saadawi 3008). Here Saadawi shows that the biggest fear of men is to be called stupid, because it would relate them to animals. As it was mentioned before animals are closer to nature, and men are afraid they will be degraded to it. Because men consider themselves as “Culture” they always need “Nature” to give them a sense of superiority. In the end, Leila is brought back to the place she was before. That’s how the institution of law “the men” exercised their power over Leila to show her inferiority and confirm their superiority.

In conclusion, Saadawi depicts the patriarchal institutions in the society. She repeats strong implications of criticism through the story towards the government, law, police, and family. Saadawi views women’s devaluation to physical beauty, sex objects, and animals close to nature. She gives voice to the unheard women in the culture by viewing the thoughts of Leila and her mother. Moreover, Leila’s attempts to get into a field she’s excluded from gets her into trouble. In the eye of the public Leila has brought shame to her family, but in the eyes of the narrator she is a victim of patriarchy. Saadawi makes it clear that it is difficult to triumph through patriarchy with all these obstacles in the way. Leila resisted the system and expressed her thoughts about the corruption, but ended up being raped and sent to prison. For a woman to resist patriarchy is difficult, she needs the help from other institutions to overcome the patriarchal ones.

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[i] A quote by El Saadawi from her book *The Daughter of Isis*

Is Enlightenment Enlightened?

A cultural blossoming during the historical period of the 14th century, which is known as the Renaissance in Europe (Strayer P.561), subsequently gave birth to a more profound evolution and progression in the history of Western thought, and that is known as the Enlightenment. Before the Enlightenment period, most states had oppressed their people's will both in the sense of religious oppression and people's lack of rationality. People then found themselves in a harsh denial of the authority of the Catholic church and attempted at emancipation from feudalism. This essay examines whether Enlightenment and the Renaissance were insulated from irrational thinking and whether they were devoid of religious tendencies; in other words, this essay scrutinizes whether history repeated itself within the frame of the Enlightenment, whether any forms of irrationality sneaked in the framework and the aims of Enlightenment.

One of the best definitions for Enlightenment in history was made by the German philosopher, Emanuel Kant, who is considered to be the central figure of modern philosophy. Kant argues that Enlightenment does not necessarily have to be connected with some sort of time period and it is not related to a specific philosophy school. It is actually an ideological perfection that makes human beings have their own sense of criticism for themselves and the world they live in. Kant believes that humans should use their own brains independently without some sort of guideline from a superior power. "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another" (Kant 1784). Kant claims that humans tend to be dependent because of the fear and lack of courage that they have and this makes him say that the motto for Enlightenment is "Be courageous and use your brain independently" (Qani P.325). What Kant was trying to do was putting emphasis on cognitive reality of human perception and not the objective reality. The enlightening point here is that it seems to be that there is not reality outside of human brain or at least reality is always a subject to perceptual interpretation. So, Enlightenment for Kant seems to be used as a kind of device that is always able to remind us about this priority of human mind over the pure objective reality. Moreover, I believe that this can also be utilized as a counter Enlightenment as it always has a potential of changing to some ideology that believes in pure scientific objective reality irrelevant of human perception.

If there is one thinker one would expect more than any other to have criticized Enlightenment, it is Friedrich Nietzsche, who is the symbol of extremity and radicalism, he has given inspiration to generations of critiques of the Enlightenment and says in his great book named, *Beyond Good and Evil* "Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And if you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you" (Nietzsche P.101). It seems as though Nietzsche is trying to say that we have fought against religion and all superstitious forms of thinking, but along this process we have fallen into the same or similar outlook towards the world in different forms. This might have been one of the outcomes of how scholars, artists, and writers saw or perceived a world in an entirely

different way. It first happened when the philosophers such as Spinoza and Rene Descartes started criticizing the existing and the typical theology of the time. Descartes was proposing a new way of living together through forming a new social structure, a kind of perception that is human centered. Prior to these changes, groups from religious and cultural authority were exploiting mostly poor people so they can stay wealthier and wealthier (Dark P.7).

If history shows that religious authorities used violence to dominate people's awareness, and if we accept the fact that the Renaissance caused a cultural revolution in which rationality helped sciences improve, and consequently, if we also accept the fact that the Enlightenment has considerably changed the history of the entire world in terms of the new ways of thinking differently from the pre-Enlightenment, then has it really successfully gone through and is protected from the inevitably valid questions and criticism posed by thinkers and critics?

Therefore, every single advantage of Enlightenment can be put under a critical scrutiny; if these advantages are actually and realistically practical, then we have to question if we have seen the reality of promises and ideals of the Enlightenment and its objectives fulfilled. For example, when we say Enlightenment implies rationality, the question is whether history managed to be totally free from all forms of irrationality. As Nietzsche points out, one can very much become the monster he has been fighting. Religious wars were only transformed into other types of wars.

Baruch Spinoza, a Dutch philosopher and a critique of religion, wanted to limit the harm done by religion. Spinoza's arguments were really prominent, he wanted to make distinctions between the genuine religious ideology and the superstitious irrational thinking. Despite the fact that Spinoza identified God with nature, he radically argued that "universal natural reason was the rule by which the scriptures should be interpreted; that miracles which implied that God could break the laws of nature should be rejected, and that passages which were illogical or confused should be downgraded" (Hudson P.2). What Spinoza did not account for was the happiness that religion brings to people, the regulations that religion offers making society better, more loving and helps sustain peace. In a civilized modern developed country like Sweden, who focuses more on rationality than religion, it is shocking that it is in the top 3 countries that suicide rates are the highest (June, 2016).

If Enlightenment is a great method of thinking, then why are all these people not happy? Having an enlightened society without a moral compass or a set of common cultural values and traditions that bind individuals to each other could really be good for us humans. It seems that reason for this phenomenon is that Enlightenment helps societies to exhaust the possible life experiences from a rational point of view only (ignoring the irrational side of human existence such as the poetic and spiritual aspects) to the extent where no other options are left to be tried and they probably think that they have arrived to the end of history.

In medieval times, scientists were using cultural traditions and religious texts in support of what they believed in. Enlightenment was a process that took time but it made the classical

thought and ideologies vanish, building a modern society upon these. Enlightenment in the sense of escaping the dogmatic beliefs of the past and defining the universe with a religious background and overthrowing it with a scientific and logical interpretation. In the beginning, Enlightenment fought the religious elite men and criticized all the religious ideologies and took their secrecy off them and unleashed the real truth behind them. The question is if Enlightenment is claiming rationality, then why are they destroying the planet earth by their chemical, nuclear weapons and driving countless animal's species into extinction, killing millions of innocent civilians including women and children in their wars over power and wealth (it should be borne in mind that this destructive aspect of Enlightenment is only one outcome of it).

Enlightenment, however, is always a necessity, and an ongoing process. We may still need some sort of belief system. Enlightenment has not started yet, or it has actually failed in the middle east, despite the fact that there are attempts by the Islamic scholars to extract the interpretations from their religion that go with western Enlightenment. Even though most scholars consider Enlightenment a fresh start in the human history, I would argue that it is not a necessarily as good as claimed for and has a wide range of flaws that we humans might one day synergize on a solution that gives us a better system.

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Karbin Darwesh Ahmed

A Letter Burned on the Way Before Juliet Receives it

We were settled between the steep mountains of Sargalw. Spring was around the corner, and the air felt so fresh. We had scattered all the printed pages of the latest newspaper under one of the tents. Some of us are busy organizing them, and some others fold-and-rolling them. “We get so tired working on all of these newspapers, and the government may not even know, about its existence!” a friend said. Just before we could respond to his comment, we saw the aircrafts showing in the sky. We all ran toward the hole in the ground that we had dug to secure ourselves during aircraft strikes. The hole was about five to six meters away, while it felt like as if it was five to six kilometers, just with the appearance of the aircrafts! I had jumped into the hole, and to save my ears from the BOOOOM sound and the high pressure of the explosive rockets, I opened my mouth wide and pushed my hands hard against my ears.

The rockets had not hit yet, and I observed that Farhad was running to jump in... With the blast of the rocket on the ground, all I saw, was hundreds of small shattered rocks and stones going over my covered ears. All I felt was the dryness of my wide-open mouth because of the dust, not only filling my mouth but the entire hole! We were covered up dust and smoke, my knees are shaking, and one said, “For God’s sake, who said that the government doesn’t know about our existence.” Nobody replied. Based on the sound of the aircrafts getting lower and lower, it was reasonable to leave the hole, and wishing them not to come back again. I did not know how much time it took, but time was like a rusted watch, with no moves. I get my head out of the hole; all I

see is fire and smoke, and no Farhad. All I hear is the sound of the crackling woods burning around, and no deep voice of Farhad reading me poems.

Farhad Burhan Mustafa Marouf, I knew him, since his first day leaving the city and becoming a Peshmarga. He had so many nice, calming and heart-warming characteristics that you could not resist liking him from the first time you meet him. He was one of the most hard-working guys cooperating with us in the publishing agency serving for the Kurdish Revolutions back in the 1980s. He was a typist that you could almost never find a mistake within his works, and most of his writings did not require editing and adding to at all. All of the articles were typed with his dancing fingers, and all of the words were put together by his thoughts. It had already been a week since he had written a letter to his love, and yet he was waiting for someone to go back to the city and be the postman of a letter that says a lot about how beautifully and romantically he loved and felt! When nobody was around, he would come to me and read me the letter with his deep soft masculine voice. Just because I was a poet, he was trying to make sure that there was not even a single mistake within the letter, and he could send a fully beautifully written letter filled with cute and heart tickling words, to a lover, that he could barely meet-with, just because he was a Peshmarga. He had read me the letter several times, and the time I crawled out of the hole, I wanted the letter to be read for me, at least for one more time, but it was apparent that the letter was burnt in his pocket during the strikes. I could comprehend that, because there was a new hole with the diameter of a meter and it was deep about another two meters. The new hole was in the place that I glanced at him for the last moment we had eye contact after I had jumped in, our own

created hole. As it was a fire lighting inside of me, I felt the tension and ache in my entire bones. Now, not only my knees, but my entire body shakes. I felt tired, as I was holding the grief of everyone, who once lost a loved one. For several moments, everything stopped moving, smelled death, appeared black and white... and even the spring going by our tent sounded like the lullaby sung for a rebellious dead brave fighter, whose eyes were filled with the sparkles of hope. I remember the poem by Latif Halmat that he had included in his letter, and it says,

**Even if I die,
I don't care,
neither I have a mom
to cry for me,
nor I have a picture
in the bag of a beautiful girl**

"Halmat declares that, and it is his right to feel like that, but for a man like me, it is fair enough to care about life so much, because I have a mom that would cry me a river, and I have a picture to be saved in the honey jar of your heart" these are the last sentences written at the very end of Farhad's letter, which has never been received by his love!

Chiavan Mohammad

How Oil Became a Curse for the Kurdistan Region

“Erbil is on its way to becoming the second Dubai of the region.” This was a common narrative in Kurdistan Region, Iraq, and the wider region, which only lasted until 2013. It immediately disappeared after oil prices hit the floor (and after Daesh came). The change brought to the surface the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)’s inefficient management of its economy; namely, its mismanaged reliance on oil. Kurdistanis often say that oil has become a source of trouble for them rather than a valuable resource to enjoy. The KRG’s oil policy that lacked transparency, political unity, and proper security led to the region’s mal-development.

One of the underlying causes of this ill development was corruption. The history of corruption in the Kurdistan region can be traced back to 1990s, the period in which the Kurdish leadership established the KRG and took over several oil fields in areas under its control. Up until 2005, not many people were aware of what was going on, in terms of corruption, since the region was in a chaotic situation and there was no sufficient media coverage of the events. In such conditions, corruption found its way to spread easily all over the country--but still as something one would rarely know about.

However, it was after 2005 that corruption in the oil sector became even more popular in the Kurdistan region. The KRG became an official government, recognized by the new Iraqi constitution. As a government, it had to act responsibly and publicize its economic and financial actions. Media became more prominent as the number of media stations increased and their quality improved. Thus corruption became a topic that Kurds talked about in their daily life. They used the Kurdish word for corruption, “gendeli,” more often than ever before. At a time in which Kurds were recovering from their unfortunate past under Saddam’s regime, corruption represented another threat, this time internal, to a bright future for their fragile region. The next years would prove the effectiveness of that threat.

Later years showed a rapid development in the Kurdish region. Main roads became numerous and more polished, new residential units were being constructed everywhere, business towers began to stand in the capital, and modern shopping malls opened their doors to Kurdish customers. Everyone was impressed by such transformations. The region became one of the main targets for foreign investors. Even the Kurdish community itself was surprised and became relatively confident of its infant government.

Despite this positive, promising development, there were some voices, both from inside and outside, that warned about the huge amount of corruption happening inside the KRG, which would harm the region eventually.

Although corruption has lodged into different sectors of the KRG, its favorite sector in the Kurdish region is oil. "Corruption in the KRG has come in all forms and most recently in the form of attempting to sell off oil fields illegally, along with the recent scandalous actions of KRG officials in not allowing foreign audit firms to see certain financial agreements."¹ Corruption in oil management has proven to be the factor that brings the worst repercussions.

Also, the KRG's weak institutions paved the way for corruption. The operating oil companies are owned either by the ruling families or the ruling parties. Thus, they have replaced the government institutions.

The outcomes were terrible. Kemal Chomani, a famous Kurdish journalist, said "The KRG has been undergoing severe financial crises for a year. Qubad [Talabani, son of the former president] forgot that KRG debts have reached 17 billion dollars."²

Thus corruption harmed the KRG and froze its fragile development. The region is currently undergoing a severe recession.

Another factor that makes oil a headache for the Kurdish region is its deep political divisions. Even though there is officially one government, the KRG, that rules the Kurdish region, it is not the case on ground. The KDP and PUK, the two largest Kurdish parties have divided the region between themselves, each having a relatively high power over the areas they control. The KDP controls Erbil and Duhok whereas PUK is in charge of Sulaimani and Halabja. This division has a historical dimension--no need to talk about it here. Not until 2006 did the Kurdish leadership officially unified their governments, which was previously composed of the yellow (KDP) zone and the green (PUK) zone.

Despite the KRG's success in appearing as a unified government, the reality does not say that. After 2006 up until the emergence of Daesh in Iraq in 2014, the KRG sustained a relatively stable and unified version of governance. In the first part of the period, from 2006 to 2008, the KDP and PUK dominated the political realm of Kurdistan. They divided the state positions evenly between each other. Simultaneously, there were attempts by the two parties to unify the KRG "on ground", but they failed. In general, the Kurdistanis were, to some extent, satisfied with the situation as they looked south and saw the chaotic situation that the other parts of Iraq were experiencing. The second part of the period, beginning in 2009, was shaped by the emergence of a strong opposition party—Gorran. This movement put an end to the long-lasting dominance of the two main parties in the region. It began as an opposition party that monitored the performance of the KRG. Later it took part in the government and held some ministerial positions. The highest point it reached was holding the presidency of the Kurdish parliament. Although it was Gorran that was leading this transformation, the two main Kurdish-Islamist parties, the Kurdistan Islamic Union and the Kurdistan Islamic Group were involved, too.

This period brought some hope to the Iraqi Kurds as they witnessed, for the first time, a more inclusive political process in their country. This was despite the fact that the quality of services that the KRG was providing during this period went down as a result of having more conflicts inside the five-party cabinet. Some ordinary Kurdish citizens often showed their opposition to

the new government. However, the Kurdish academics and intellectuals in general saw this as an opportunity for the Kurdish region to move towards more democratization and inclusiveness. The scene was interrupted by the emergence of Daesh, especially when the extremist organization reached the KRG borders.

It would be irrelevant to go into the details of the three-years-long war against Daesh. But the important aspect of this period and its aftermath was that it revealed the true picture of the Kurdish politics—the sharp division between the KDP and the PUK. It is true that the two factions set aside their disputes during the war. However, the results of the war brought them back...quickly! By the end of the war, each of the two was controlling a number of important oil fields around the city of Kirkuk from which the Iraqi army retreated without fighting in 2014. Holding larger ones, the KDP was selling the oil from these fields (through Turkey) and was receiving huge revenues. The PUK was irritated by this. It ended up with the famous Oct. 16th's handover of Kirkuk to the Iraqi Army and Hashd-al Shaabi by some angry PUK leaders. Ala Talabani, a Kurdish/PUK MP in the Iraqi parliament, said on the day of the event that they were not ready to protect "KDP's oil fields."

After this major swerve, it became clear that any policy that the KRG had for its policy was far weaker than the conflict between the two parties. Not only this, but it also revealed that the two parties controlled all the power in the region despite the pluralistic picture that started to appear in the previous years.

Moreover, military divisions in the KRG further intensified the pain caused by the political headache. The Kurds are historically known for their military force, the Peshmerga. The Peshmergas have fought for Kurdish rights since 1946. However, with the political split in the second half of the 20th century, the military force was divided too. The KDP and PUK have their Peshmerga troops separately. On many occasions, the troops have shown their loyalty to their political parties rather than the state.

Various internal (sometimes external) attempts to unify the two factions have been there for the last two decades. "After waging separate guerrilla wars against the Iraqi army in the 1970s and 1980s, the two main Kurdish political parties—the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)—formally agreed in 1992 to unify their peshmerga units and integrate them under the authority of a dedicated Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs."³ However, they still remain separate forces to this day, 25 years after the first attempt. "The Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs was reconstituted as a joint body in 2010, but although it presents a veneer of unity, the KDP and the PUK still maintain their separate peshmerga forces."⁴

The Oct. 16 Kirkuk event just revealed the truth about the Kurdish internal rivalry. It was mainly over oil. The Kurds lost Kirkuk oil fields in one day, proving that they were unable to protect their invaluable natural treasury and instead turning it into a curse.

Hence, oil became a specter that harmed the Kurds, and more unfortunately, it undermined their dream of independence at least for few decades.

¹ Hussein Fayli Muneer. "A Patriotic Socialist Solution to the Problems of Kurdistan." Ekurd.net. 2017.

² Michael Rubin, "Beyond Islamic State, Kurdistan Faces Internal Crisis." Ekurd.net. 2015.

³ Mario Fumerton, Wladimir Van Wilgenburg. "Kurdistan's Political Armies: The Challenge of Unifying the Peshemrga Forces. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 2015.

⁴ Ibid.