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**Victims of Gender Based Violence in Selected Novels:
A Comparative Study**

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
Master's Degree in Literature and Civilization**

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Dedication

For the sake of God, whose strength and constant grace sustained us every step of the way. To our mothers and fathers, for their endless love, support and sacrifice. To our sisters and brothers, each by name, to the warmest hearts who walked beside us.

To all the children and students of Gaza, who have been deprived of their right to education by normalization and betrayal.

This is for you

INSAF, CHAIMA

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Abstract

Gender-based violence (GBV) is regarded as a significant issue, deeply embedded in social, political, and cultural structures, and broadly reflected in literary texts. This study presents a comparative analysis of selected novels to investigate the depiction of women as victims of GBV, concentrating on how these works articulate themes of oppression, marginalization, resistance and other related issues surrounding gendered victimhood. This study employs a two-pronged methodological approach, combining feminist theory and psychoanalytic criticism. The feminist perspective tends to explore how narratives condemn the social frameworks that propagate violence against women, while the psychoanalytic approach investigates the psychological dimensions of trauma and victimization. The two approaches, together, afford a thorough insight into the ways gendered violence is represented and internalized in literature, demonstrating on the profound psychological and social dynamics at play. The findings expose that though all the works describe GBV as a means of dominance and subjugation, they diverge dramatically in the portrayal of victims' resilience, intervention, and social reactions. Thus, the study concludes that literature not only reflects the social realities of gendered based violence but also work to challenging and redefining them, offering nuanced views on victimhood and existence. Accordingly, this study underscores the role of literary texts in contributing to broader discourses on gender, violence, and social transformation, and encouraging scholars and specialists for more engagement with literature as a medium of resistance and awareness.

Keywords: Gender, Literature, Victimhood, Violence, Women

Table of Contents

Dedication	I
Acknowledgements.....	II
Abstract	III
Table of Contents	IV

Chapter One: Gender-Based Violence: Social and Literary

Considerations

Introduction.....	08
1.1 Overview of Fundamental Definitions	08
1.1.1 Gender.....	08
1.1.2 Violence	08
1.1.3 What is Gender-Based Violence?	09
1.2 Understanding Gender-Based Violence: A Multidimensional Framework.....	10
1.2.1 Presentation of Historical background on Gender-based Violence.....	10
1.2.2 Emergence of a Patriarchal Paradigm.....	13
1.3 Forms of Gender-Based Violence.....	14
1.3.1 Physical violence.....	14
1.3.2 Sexual violence.....	15
1.3.2.1 Rape Culture.....	16
1.3.3 Psychological and Emotional Violence (Verbal violence and hate speech)	17
1.3.4 Domestic violence	19
1.3.5 Socio-Economic Violence	20

1.4 Factors contributing to gender-based violence	20
1.4.1 Use of Culture as a Tool	22
1.5 Gender-Based Violence's effects on society and victims	23
1.6 Giving voice to the Silenced: Literature as a space for testimony	24
1.7 Gender-based violence: Not Just a Women's Issue	25
Conclusion	27

Chapter Two: Narratives of Suffering: A Thematic and Comparative

Study of Violence in Selected Novels

Introduction	30
2.1. Philosophical Perspectives of Kate Chopin, Alice Walker, and Nawal El Saadawi	30
2.1.1. Kate Chopin	30
2.1.2. Nawal El Saadawi	31
2.1.3. Alice Walker	32
2.2. Social Violence as a phenomenon: Dynamics of Oppression	33
2.2.1. The Social Violence of Gender Roles in <i>The Awakening</i>	33
2.2.2. The Chains of the Norm: Structural oppression and social control in <i>woman at point zero</i>	35
2.2.3. Social violence, Discrimination, and Oppression in <i>The Color Purple</i>	37
2.3 Interiors of Pain: Traumatized Personalities and Emotional Fragmentation	38
2.3.1 Psychological Wounds of Violence in <i>The Color Purple</i>	38
2.3.2 The Psychological Trauma of Repression and Gender Violence in <i>The Awakening</i>	39
2.4 Bodies as Battlegrounds: Literary Representation of Sexual Violence	40

2.4.1 Unveiling sexual and social oppression in <i>Woman at Point Zero</i>	40
2.4.2 The Brutality of Sexual Violence in <i>The Color Purple</i>	42
2.5 Comparative and Intersectional Analysis	43
Conclusion	47
General Conclusion	48
References	50
الملخص	55

General Introduction

1. Background of the study.....	01
2. Statement of the problem.....	01
3. Research Questions.....	02
4. Literature Review.....	02
5. The aim of the study.....	04
6. Research Methodology.....	04
7. Significance of the study.....	05
8. Structure of the dissertation.....	05

General Introduction

1. Background of the study

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a pressing global issue, often reflected and challenged through literature. This research offers a conceptual background on GBV, explores it as portrayed in three novels, each novel in its own, deeply manifests the many forms of violence against women and the struggle for freedom and dignity, offering a comparative study of how different cultural, historical and social contexts shape the representation of violence against women. *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *Women at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi, are novels that powerfully cover themes of gender, power, and resistance. By analyzing the characters, narrative techniques and the thematic concerns, the study highlights how literature not only mirrors real-world injustices but also serves as a powerful tool for resistance and awareness. Through this comparative lens, the research seeks to uncover the varied dimensions of GBV and the broader societal attitudes towards gender, power and victimhood.

2. Statement of the problem

Gender-based violence against women remains to be a prevalent problem across various cultures and societies, taking forms including physical mistreatment, sexual abuse, psychological manipulation, and systemic persecution. Literature has historically functioned as a persuasive instrument for reflecting on and condemning these social issues. Nonetheless, the representation of gender-based violence within specific cultural framework can vary profoundly based on the narrative's cultural origins. Although there is a growing body of feminist literary criticism, there is still a need for comparative analyses that scrutinize how gender-based violence is depicted in literary texts from different cultural and social backgrounds. Thus, this research aims to examine the representation of gender-based violence against women in three novels from different

cultural contexts. By examining these narratives, the research seeks to expose both shared patterns and culturally distinctive interpretations of violence, power, and gender dynamics, thereby enriching the cross-cultural literary understanding of the global challenge of gender-based violence.

3. Research Questions

The current study answers the following questions:

1. What forms of gender-based violence are represented in the selected novels, and how do they mirror the cultural, social, and historical settings of the societies denoted?
2. In what ways do the female characters react to or rebel against gender-based violence? To what extent do the novels challenge or reinforce traditional gender roles and power dynamics?
3. What similarities and differences appear in the representation of gender-based violence across the three cultural backgrounds?

4. Literature Review

Scholarly work has focused more on the experiences and challenges faced by victims of gender-based violence in recent years.

In “*Trauma and The Gradual Triumph of the Black Feminist Voice in Alice Walker The Color Purple*” Zahaf and Ghadbane (2021), examines how Walker goes beyond merely portraying the struggles faced by African-American women; rather she offers a hopeful pathway for all women to free themselves from the constraints of patriarchy and sexism. The research delves into the profound suffering, dehumanization and marginalization experienced by women. It highlights feminist initiatives aimed at addressing and transforming the global issue of female abuse while advocating for equal rights.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's 1984 study entitled *Feminism and Difference: Gender, Race, and Critique* provides a critical framework for understanding how women from the Third World are represented in feminist discussions. Mohanty critiques Western feminist studies for their tendency to generalize and remove context from the experiences of women from diverse cultural backgrounds. According to Mohanty, El Saadawi's works are often co-opted by Western feminist movements that overlook the nuanced, localized realities of Arab women's lives, even though El Saadawi seeks to articulate the issues faced by Arab women.

In *From Submission To Defiance Women's Personal Growth In Kate Chopin's The Awakening And Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Bouanani Fatiha (2015) explores the patriarchal societies' expectations, the conditions of women in marriage, and the different paths towards female gender identity in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The research seeks to illustrate the struggles faced by the protagonists in their marriages and their defiance of societal norms and addressing the personal development of women following an extended period of oppression and both physical and emotional pain.

While various literary researches have explored gender-based violence within specific cultural or national literatures, there is an evident deficiency of comparative studies that investigate how such violence is portrayed across multiple cultural settings. Much of the current studies inclines to focus either on Western feminist interpretations or on minorities' narratives, often abandoning the nuanced ways in which culture forms both the forms and insights of gender-based violence. Moreover, limited studies have placed literary portrayals from varied global frameworks in a debate to highlight both world-wide patterns and culturally unique understanding of violence against women. This gap confines a universal understanding of how literary texts from diverse parts of the world engages with, evaluates, or emphasizes the social realities of gender-based violence. Focusing on this gap, the present study seeks to offer a cross-

cultural literary examination of gender-based violence as depicted in three culturally distinct novels, contributing to larger feminist literary discourse and holistic gender studies.

5. The aim of the study

The primary objective of this study is to conduct comparative analysis of the representation of gender-based violence in *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi. Through an analysis of these novels, the study aims to explore how different cultural, historical and societal contexts contribute to shape GBV. The study tends to examine the protagonists' experiences and responses to different forms of violence. Thus, analyzes how these literary works critique patriarchal structures and advocate for women's empowerment.

6. Research Methodology

This dissertation on gender-based violence employs a combined feminist framework and psychoanalytic research methodology to critically examine the fundamental dynamics of power, oppression, and trauma that form the experiences of victims in three novels namely; *The awakening*, *The Color Purple* and *Women at Point Zero*. The feminist perspective offers a lens to question patriarchal structures, highlighting the socio-political setting of gendered violence and amplifying women's voices. Simultaneously, psychoanalytic approach provides a deeper analysis of the psychological dimensions of violence, including suppression, identity formation, and the internalized shocks. Hence, by engaging in close textual analysis, the study seeks to reveal the psychological, emotional and social layers of gender-based violence in literature. The analysis will be supported by historical and cultural contextualization to better understand how each novel reflects and critiques the social conditions surrounding gender-based violence. Themes, character development, narrative strategies and cultural differences will be discussed to draw meaningful conclusion.

7. Significance of the study

This study tends to hold substantial value in both literary academia and the broader discourse on gender-based violence, as it provides an interdisciplinary methodology to demonstrate how literature epitomizes and shapes gendered disturbance. By investigating narratives that focus on the voices of women and marginalized groups, the study sheds light on the emotional, social, and cultural influence of violence across diverse cultural and geographical settings.

8. Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is divided into two chapters, each emphasizing distinct aspects of gender-based violence. Chapter One, titled *Gender-Based Violence: Social and Literary Considerations*, provides an in-depth theoretical and cultural overview that enriches the understanding of gender-based violence, launching a conceptual background for the study. This chapter examines the definition, different types, and worldwide implications of GBV. In addition, it evaluates important scholarly pieces to place the research within the broader academic discussion.

Chapter Two, *Narratives of Suffering: A Thematic and Comparative Study of Violence in Selected Novels*, offers a comparative literary analysis of *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, and *Women at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi. It investigates how each novel shows the experiences of female characters facing violence, the socio-cultural structures that lead to their victimization, and the narrative techniques used to express their resistance and empowerment. Thus, the research underscores the function of literature in promoting broader discussions on gender issue.

CHAPTER ONE:

Gender-Based Violence:

Social and Literary Considerations

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Introduction.....	08
1.1 Overview of Fundamental Definitions	08
1.1.1 Gender.....	
1.1.2 Violence	08
1.1.3 What is Gender-Based Violence?.....	09
1.2 Understanding Gender-Based Violence: A Multidimensional Framework.....	10
1.2.1 Presentation of Historical background on Gender-based Violence.....	10
1.2.2 Emergence of a Patriarchal Paradigm.....	13
1.3 Forms of Gender-Based Violence.....	14
1.3.1 Physical violence.....	14
1.3.2 Sexual violence.....	15
1.3.2.1 Rape Culture.....	16
1.3.3 Psychological and Emotional Violence (Verbal violence and hate speech)	17
1.3.4 Domestic violence.....	19
1.3.5 Socio-Economic Violence.....	20
1.4 Factors contributing to gender-based violence.....	20
1.4.1 Use of Culture as a Tool.....	22
1.5 Gender-Based Violence’s effects on society and victims.....	23
1.6 Giving voice to the Silenced: Literature as a space for testimony.....	24
1.7 Gender-based violence: Not Just a Women’s Issue.....	25
Conclusion.....	27

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a prevalent and deeply rooted violation of human rights that transcends socioeconomic, cultural, and geographical boundaries. GBV encompasses a range of harmful actions directed at individuals because of their gender or perceived gender identity, stemming from systemic inequalities and power disparities between genders. This chapter aims to present a comprehensive framework for understanding GBV as a global issue and to elucidate its nature, prevalence, manifestations, and effects on individuals and society. Additionally, the chapter examines the historical and cultural contexts that shape societal perceptions and responses to GBV, highlighting the role of literature as a powerful avenue for addressing these issues and amplifying the voices of survivors.

1.1 Overview of Fundamental Definitions

1.1.1 Gender

The term gender signifies "the condition of being male or female, typically referring to social and cultural distinctions rather than biological differences " (Oxford English Dictionary).

It pertains to the socially constructed characteristics and roles of men and women, as well as the conventions and interactions between male and female entities. Gender is subject to change and varies across different societies. Each culture shapes the roles, responsibilities, responses, power dynamics, privileges, and opportunities of its members, leading to the development of socially accepted behaviours. This learned behaviour is referred to as "gender identity" (Desai & Mandal, 2022, p.14).

1.1.2 Violence

In its basic sense, violence refers to "actions that involve physical force intended to inflict harm, destruction, or death on someone or something" (Oxford English Dictionary). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines 'violence' in its World Report on Violence and Health

(2002) as:” the deliberate use of physical force or power, whether threatened or actual, against oneself, another individual, or a group or community, that either results in or has a significant likelihood of causing injury, death, psychological harm, developmental disturbances, or deprivation” (WHO, 2002).

1.1.3 What is Gender-Based Violence?

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) refers to unwanted actions directed at individuals or groups based on their actual or perceived gender. It includes a broad spectrum of actions that can cause harm on physical, mental, or economic levels. Instances of GBV can manifest through rape, sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, human trafficking, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, honour killings, among other forms (Pandey, 2024, p. 2103).

According to The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Gender-based violence pertains to acts of abuse targeted at an individual or community based on their gender. It arises from gender inequalities and reflects harmful norms and behaviours (UNHCR, 2021).

Based on The European institute for gender equality, GBV represents an abuse of power and constitutes one of the gravest violations of human rights in every society (EIGE, 2022). While GBV can impact individuals of any gender, the vast majority of victims are women and girls, with most incidents perpetrated by men who are current or former intimate partners. Additionally, violence against women tends to be repetitive, systematically organized, more severe, and carries a higher likelihood of causing death or serious injury. Consequently, GBV and violence against women (VAW) are often used interchangeably. However, it is important to recognize that GBV transcends cultural boundaries as well as those defined by gender, age, ability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. Therefore, to fully understand GBV in any context, an intersectional perspective should be adopted (Ali & Rogers, 2023, p. 6).

1.2 Understanding Gender-Based Violence: A Multidimensional Framework

1.2.1 Presentation of Historical background on Gender-based Violence

Art, literature, and personal narratives from travellers and others all reflect on violence against women. Unfortunately, this issue is rarely highlighted in historical accounts. As violence against women has become a global concern, there is growing awareness surrounding it. Consequently, one of the significant issues in our time is sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

The earliest indications of 'sexual violence' have been found in the context of armed conflicts. Records from ancient history, notably those of the Greeks, Romans, Persians, and Macedonians, document instances of sexual violence against women during warfare. It was common to observe both physical abuse and sexual assaults on women in times of peace, as well as during conflicts, leading to large-scale rapes and the exploitation of women captured by victorious military forces. Typically, women were regarded as civilians deserving protection, with numerous texts outlining their safeguarding. However, the ancient laws and customs of warfare (reflected in texts like the Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Agni Purana, Manu-Smriti, and the works of Kautilya, among others) notably overlook the occurrence of sexual and gender-based violence against women (Desai & Mandal, 2022, p.33).

Yet, clear examples of non-combat sexual and gender-based violence against women can be seen in the abduction of Princess Sita who later became Queen of Ayodhya by the Lankan King Ravana and the brutal mandate in the Kaurava royal court that led to the humiliation of Princess Draupadi (Desai & Mandal, 2022, p.33).

Both events ultimately sparked extensive warfare against the primary perpetrators and concluded the epic narratives of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, respectively. This suggests that women throughout history have endured bad treatment primarily based on their gender.

The existence of various forms of peaceful sexual and gender-based violence is evident in multiple incidents documented in corresponding literature. Ancient military laws and customs stipulated that civilians and their properties were to be protected from such adverse effects (Desai & Mandal, 2022, p.33).

Therefore, women implicitly fell under this protection. Roman mythology signifies the act of rape against women (such as the case of the Sabine women) as a political maneuver. It was not merely an act between individuals; it evolved into a calculated tactic in warfare employed by the Roman king Romulus (Desai & Mandal, 2022, p.33). Historical records from the ancient Near East indicate that rape in warfare was widespread during that era, as women were regarded as 'spoils of war' (Desai & Mandal, 2022, p.33). Consequently, this granted them a legal status akin to that of property.

The Medieval era (AD 711-1600) demonstrates irrational assaults on non-combatants. Women and children consistently experienced the typical consequences of warfare. In the sixteenth century, as noted in the writings of Hugo Grotius, women were safeguarded as ordinary civilians. In a striking representation of the dominant beliefs regarding women, Francisco de Vitoria, a sixteenth-century commentator on political ethics, argues: "Rape in war is necessary for the conduct of war and acts as a spur to the courage of the troops" (Desai & Mandal, 2022, p.34). During the American Civil War, the sexual assault of enslaved females was widespread. In 1937, under the Japanese occupation of the Chinese city of Nanking, it is estimated that 20,000 women were raped, subjected to sexual torture, and killed. This terrible incident has been referred to as the "Rape of Nanking" (Desai & Mandal, 2022, p.34)

During World War II, the phenomenon known as the 'shock of warfare' emerged prominently with the appearance of 'comfort women' (Desai & Mandal, 2022, p.34). However, following the post-war global criminal trials, particularly Nuremberg and Tokyo, none of the offenders faced punishments for rape and sexual slavery. Nebesar Darren Anne, a historian, has

stated that ‘Rape in war is absent in the study of war because it is too risky, too political and a subject to be dealt with comfortably by the present-day male historian ‘(Nebesar, 1998, p. 116).

Frequently, sexual assault does not receive the recognition it deserves as a fundamental issue of comprehending conflict. Accounts of many historians often neglect the sexual violence perpetrated on women during wartime. Throughout several conflicts, there have been dreadful acts of violence against women, yet these instances are often denoted by a range of terms such as ‘war of gain,’ ‘war of fear,’ and ‘war of doctrine ‘(Desai & Mandal, 2022, p.34). Hence, historically, sexual violence in conflict has been portrayed merely as an unavoidable consequence of war.

It was not until the 1960s that the UN began to address gender-based discrimination against women in both public and private realms. Before the 1970s, discussion about this topic was only related to violence against women within the family or domestic abuse. It gained significant focus following the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985) (Desai & Mandal, 2022, p.35).

Throughout the 1980s, comprehension regarding violence against women expanded and the global community recognized the connection between gender and violence, however, the concept of violence against women shifted from violence within familial settings to violence in community or public settings. It became evident that gender significantly contributes to the oppression of women, thereby fostering violence directed at them. The United Nations and civil society organizations have been pivotal in combating harmful practices such as the trafficking of women, workplace sexual harassment, gender-based exploitation, and prostitution, the demonstration of gender-based violence (GBV) as violence against women (VAW) commenced gaining momentum around this period (Desai & Mandal, 2022, p.35).

This was reflected in the establishment of several international treaties and recommendations from treaty bodies. In 1993, the UN World Conference on Human Rights

(Vienna) proclaimed that infringing on women's rights constitutes a violation of their human rights. Consequently, 'sexual violence,' 'gender-based violence,' and 'violence against women' have started to be used synonymously by international institutional representatives (Desai & Mandal, 2022, p.35).

1.2.2 Emergence of a Patriarchal Paradigm

Men and women differ from one another in a variety of ways, including class, religion, race, and personal experience. Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that each gender shares a fundamental set of cultural experiences that influence their development. In much of Western history, gender hierarchy has functioned as a major reason for shaping society. For example, in the emergence of the archaic state system, Gerda Lerner offers a "working hypothesis" that explains how patriarchy was established alongside the growth of militarism. The winners, who were often a small band of male warriors, established their superiority over the people they had vanquished and strengthened their hold on power by establishing institutions that supported their claims (Fox, 2013, p.16).

Between the third and second millennia BCE, a structure of male authority arose, along with the dogma of "patriarchal privilege," which legitimized the supremacy of successful men over women. The notion that people outside the hegemonic male group, the losers, were lower to and distinct from the successful males and were, as defeated enemies, labeled as deviants was implicit in this patriarchal worldview. Thus, in order to preserve a well-ordered community, violence and the repression of outlaws would be inevitable (Fox, 2013, 16-17).

Additionally, according to common law, patriarchy dominated the couple's economic relationship. A husband might lawfully manage his wife's real estate as well as any personal properties she earned during their marriage, such as clothing, jewelry, or income. The authority of the husband persisted in other important domains, such as choosing a place of residence and having the responsibility to reprimand his wife verbally or physically if he felt it was required. In

contrast, the wife could not verbally fight with her husband without consequence or exercise her right to veto decisions about her property; if she did, she would be considered a scold and subject to punishment. Moreover, the subordination of women through violence has existed since the dawn of society. Focusing mostly on the early modern years when patriarchy flourished in the West, including physical punishment and marital rape (Fox, 2013, p.19).

1.3 Forms of Gender-Based Violence

The term "gender-based violence" (GBV) denotes a variety of self-harming behaviors that target individuals based on their real or assumed gender. Among the types of GBV are:

1.3.1 Physical violence

Employing physical force to manage and impose control over victims is prevalent, this involves the use of force to harm or dominate another person. It can encompass any form of physical attack, including punching, kicking, slapping, hitting, beating, burning, maiming or killing, or the use of objects or weapons (Pandey, 2024, p. 2105).

Many literary works have dealt primarily with the subject of physical violence, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a 2007 novel by Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini, the novel highlights the normalized and legally approved mistreatment of women under tyrannical cultural standards in Afghanistan. An example of physical violence within the novel is the story of the character of Mariam, the protagonists of the novel, and Rasheed's first wife. Mariam endures regular and severe physical assaults from her spouse, Rasheed.

Rasheed went on chewing, and Mariam watched him as he ate with the loudest chewing, the loudest swallowing. Then he passed her a handful of pebbles, and forced them into her mouth [...] Then he was gone, and she was lying on the floor, groaning, trying to spit out pebbles, blood, and the fragments of two broken molars (Hosseini, 2007, p.104).

Accordingly, a common pattern of physical and domestic violence, particularly among intimate partners, is that the abuser shifts between violent, abusive, and remorseful actions. Hence,

Violence and abuse are perceived as manifestations of social dominance and are utilized by men as a means to control and subjugate their female partners. Men may turn to aggressive methods of control over women, especially when they experience powerlessness (Rakovec- Felser, 2014).

Some classifications categorize human trafficking and slavery under physical violence due to the initial coercion frequently faced, and the individuals involved often become victims of additional violence as a consequence of their enslavement.

1.3.2 Sexual violence

Sexual violence refers to any undesired sexual behavior or actions that are imposed upon individuals without their consent. This includes forced prostitution, sexual assault, rape, harassment, and any other types of coercion or exploitation associated with sex. Sexual violence can be perpetrated by acquaintances, unknown individuals, or partners in intimate relationships (Pandey, 2024, p. 2105).

Sexual violence includes attempted rape and marital rape. Sexual harassment, forced unsafe sex, and abuse involving reproduction (e.g., forced pregnancy, forced abortion, forced sterilization) are examples of forced sexual activities.

Furthermore, Sexual violence can take many different forms and occur in both public and private settings. Nonetheless, there are three specific types of public sexual violence that are worth mentioning: sexual harassment in the workplace, sexual violence used as a weapon of war or torture, and sexual violence against individuals as a form of "punishment" for deviating from traditional gender norms (The Council of Europe, 2025).

The main factor in deciding what is considered a crime and an act of sexual violence under the law is consent, the absence of such consent results in rape. Thus, rape is one of the most common manifestations of sexual violence among people, women and girls experience it to a

greater extent, a problem that has an impact on many levels, including social, economic, and political as well.

1.3.2.1 Rape Culture

The term "rape culture" was coined in the 1970s by feminists in an effort to describe how American society normalizes sexual violence while placing the blame on victims (Comer, 2022, p. 4). By examining the statistics and violence frequency across countries, the extensive occurrence of rape and violence brings to light the inquiry: What cultural factors lead to the high rates of sexual violence in societies? Is the victim the only person affected? In fact, Persons who have not directly encountered rape or sexual abuse are also impacted by the social issue of sexual violence. The prevalence of rape culture, the social problem, and the widespread dread of violence and abuse are all influenced by these ways that people are impacted. Both sexual harassment and stalking contribute to the culture of rape in that they make people constantly wary and vigilant, feeling vulnerable to trauma and sexual assault (Comer, 2022, p. 4).

In *Transforming of Rape Culture* 2005, Emilie Buchwald defines rape culture as a complex set of beliefs that encourage male sexual aggression and support violence against women. It epitomizes a society where violence is perceived as appealing and sexuality is connected to violence. In a rape culture, women identify a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself. Buchwald argues:

A rape culture condones physical and emotional terrorism against women as the norm [...] In a rape culture, both men and women assume that sexual violence is a fact of life, inevitable [...] however [...] much of what we accept as inevitable is, in fact, the expression of values and attitudes that can change (p. vii).

FORCE, a group established by survivors in 2010, explains rape culture to include jokes, media, language, music, film, etc. which all normalize violence against women (Upsetting Rape Culture, n.d). According to this group, rape culture does not only pertain to women, but also includes

genders within marginalized communities, including the nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and transgender individuals.

In *What We Talk About When We Talk About Rape*, Sohaila Abdulali examines sexual violence and rape culture while sharing her own experience of rape. Abdulali's book explores a culture that, through victim blaming, systemic failings, and a lack of understanding and discussion about consent, supports, if not actively sexual violence. Abdulali advocates for sex education and cites the lack of education as a factor in the culture of rape and sexual violence, writing that high-quality sex education can and should equip young people with the language and tools to understand and critique the roles of gender and power in their friendships and romantic relationships (Abdulali, 2018).

The overarching message of Abdulali's writing is that we must talk about rape, and we must talk about how we talk about rape (Abdulali, 2018).

1.3.3 Psychological and Emotional Violence (Verbal violence and hate speech)

This category comprises behaviors that jeopardize an individual's emotional well-being and sense of worth. This includes, among other things, verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, manipulation, gaslighting, and dominant behaviors. Emotional violence aims to control and dominate the victim's feelings, ideas, and actions (Pandey, 2024, p. 2105). However, since harming someone else's integrity and dignity is the main aim of violence and abuse, all forms of violence include psychological aspects. Apart from this, some types of violence can be described as achieving psychological violence in a pure form since they employ practices that cannot be classified into other categories.

Psychological violence in the private realm comprises threatening behavior that does not involve physical or verbal violence, such as actions that allude to past violent acts or intentional ignorance and neglect of another individual. while isolation of young women or men who do not

behave in accordance with traditional gender roles is an example of psychological assault in the public domain (The Council of Europe, 2025).

Literature addresses psychological violence in powerful and diverse ways, often delving into the emotional and mental consequences of abuse, control, and trauma. Moreover, psychological violence is a recurring theme in literature. It is often used to explore power dynamics (e.g., in domestic relationships, societal hierarchies), mental manipulation (e.g., gaslighting and coercion), and themes of isolation and control, identity erasure and fragmentation, long-term trauma and PTSD by using different literary techniques such as stream of consciousness and interior monologue to depict internal turmoil, or the use of symbolism to externalize psychological pain. In addition, the application of fragmented narrative structure for mirroring instability and trauma.

The well-known novel *Beloved* by American author Toni Morrison takes place in the aftermath of the American Civil War. It is an influential and multifaceted literary text that explores the long-term psychological injuries and effects of slavery along with gender-based violence. Through its characters, mainly Sethe, Morrison brightly depicts how the past can constantly haunt and affect the human psyche. The main character in *Beloved*, Sethe, devotes much of her life to “beating back the past” (*Beloved*, 1987) depicting her experiences as a slave at Sweet Home and the community’s reality preceding the tragic demise of her daughter, Beloved. Sethe's former experiences interfere upon her present-day life through hallucinations, the threat of slave catchers chasing her after her escape, the scar on her back resembling a tree, and the apparition and rebirth of her deceased daughter, highlighting Sethe’s struggle to fully escape her trauma (Catherine Buhse, 2024).

1.3.4 Domestic violence

In *Domestic Violence and Abuse in Intimate Relationship from Public Health Perspective* (2014), Rakovec-Felser Z defines domestic violence as a pattern of abusive behaviors, including a variety of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, that one person in an intimate relationship uses against another in order to unfairly obtain power or continue to abuse power, control, and authority. It can cause injury, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or even death (Rakovec-Felser, 2014). Lenore Walker, an American psychologist, argues that once family violence occurs, we can anticipate all other forms of aggression in the community, including those that occur beyond the family (1999).

Psychologists have introduced numerous definitions and concepts of domestic violence. According to Matthew Thomas Huss, domestic violence refers to every act of violence committed within the framework of a meaningful interpersonal connection is considered domestic abuse, violence between a husband and wife or boyfriend and girlfriend are examples of domestic violence (Huss, 2025). Violence may occur between siblings, between parents and children, or between adult children and elderly parents, acts of physical and psychological abuse that proceed from a slap or shove to a punch or kick, and to more severe forms of violence like suffocation, strangulation, attempted murder, and murder, are typical of domestic violence. The entire horror, savagery, and habituation of the violence are neutralized by the term "domestic" (Edwards, 1996).

Since domestic violence covers various forms of violence, we can see its manifestation in most literary works that address themes of violence, slavery, and gender-based violence. Thus, both classic and modern literary fiction, as well as non-fiction, serve as influential and demonstrative means for scrutinizing similar narratives.

1.3.5 Socio-Economic Violence

Economic violence is the term used to describe behaviors that limit or control an individual's capacity to earn a living and preserve their financial freedom. This may entail financial manipulation, denying them access to employment or education, withholding funds, and exploiting their financial reliance. Because they are unable to leave or seek help, victims of economic violence may generally find themselves trapped in abusive relationships (Pandey, 2024, p.2105).

Common cases of socio-economic violence include confining the victim's income, hindering their ability to earn a livelihood (by driving them into traditional roles like housewife or convincing them to work unpaid in a family enterprise), or physically hurting them to the extent that they cannot work. Socio-economic violence in public settings both impacts and rises from predominant gender power dynamics within societies. This can be manifested in different ways; a rejection to allow them have access to necessary facilities, education, or likewise paid employment opportunities (especially for women), as well as bans from enjoying civil, cultural, and entertaining activities, prohibiting from particular types of occupations, and limitations on certain political and social rights (The Council of Europe, 2025).

These types of violence against women are connected and often occur inside the same abusive relationship. The victims may experience significant and long-lasting effects on their general quality of life, as well as on their physical and mental health. Accordingly, it is obvious that in order to address GBV, comprehensive strategies that promote gender equality, address the root causes of violence, and provide survivors with resources and support are required.

1.4 Factors contributing to gender-based violence

Multiple factors contribute to the frequency of gender-based violence, including economic, cultural, and individual influences. A major cause is gender imbalance, which strengthens the power inequality between men and women, which often justifies violence against girls and

women. To defend male supremacy and dominance, patriarchal societies often standardize or authenticate violence against women and girls. Furthermore, GBV can also be reinforced by cultural norms and beliefs that support using violence to establish dominance and authority. moreover, Economic disparities can make GBV worse by reducing people's opportunities for financial mobility and independence, keeping them in abusive relationships, and making it more difficult for them to seek help. Moreover, economic inequalities can exacerbate gender-based violence by limiting individuals' financial mobility and independence, thereby trapping them in abusive relationships and hindering their ability to seek assistance (Pandey, 2024, p. 2103).

Moreover, inadequate access to social services, work opportunities, and education can make people more vulnerable to GBV, likewise, the legal system, law enforcement, and healthcare are examples of social and institutional norms that may support GBV. This can happen through insufficient reactions, victim blaming, or a failure to hold offenders accountable. Conflict and humanitarian crises can also intensify gender-based violence. Sexual violence related to conflict is a prevalent form in these scenarios. War, displacement, and society collapse all provide conditions under which GBV rises because of underfunded legal and protection systems, community structure failure, and offender impunity. Often employed as a weapon of battle to terrorize populations, wreak havoc on society, and exert control is sexual violence. Although men and boys can also be victims, women and girls are especially vulnerable. Often poorly secured and overseen, refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps can further expose people to exploitation, trafficking, and abuse by armed groups, humanitarian workers, or even other displaced people. Furthermore, the damage caused by such violence usually lasts far after the hostilities finish, therefore survivors have permanent bodily, mental, and social effects. In these scenarios, tackling GBV calls for long-term support services, legal accountability, and gender-sensitive peacebuilding techniques in addition to emergency responses. In addition to the abovementioned factors, online platforms and technology can be employed to perpetrate GBV through cyberbullying, online harassment, and the publication of non-consensual personal

photos. Media representations of gender roles and relationships can also reinforce stereotypes and legitimize violence (Pandey, 2024, p. 2103).

Violence is rationalized by patriarchal and sexist ideologies to uphold men's authority and supremacy. Gender biases and prejudice, conventional expectations of femininity and masculinity, gender socialization, the perception of family life as private and male-dominated, and the prevalent recognition of violence as a part of public life (such as street harassment of women) or as an appropriate way for determining conflicts and declaring oneself are additional cultural factors.

1.4.1 Use of Culture as a Tool

In several real-world situations, "culture" has been invoked to justify various types of abuse and crimes against women. Another name for it is "cultural defense" (Desai & Mandal, 2022, p.171). The tendency toward cultural defense is primarily observed in cross-cultural societies, immigrants residing abroad, and deeply ingrained patriarchal cultures. Women in general and immigrants and minorities in particular are primarily impacted. Cultural defense works best when the underlying cultural norms that the culture represents are distinct from those of the originating culture (Desai & Mandal, 2022, p.171).

Furthermore, the idea of women's entitlement and ownership has led to the legalization of the physical punishment of women in both religious and historical contexts. Thus, the idea of ownership legitimizes control over women's sexuality, which is considered necessary to maintain patrilineal succession in many legal laws.

In many traditions, sexuality is closely linked to the idea of family honor, these nations' traditional customs allow killing of women who are deemed to have defiled the honor of the family by engaging in prohibited sexual relations or getting married and divorcing without the family's approval (The Council of Europe, 2025).

In fact, there are several Legal factors that have a strong hand in the subject of gender-based violence, in many countries, being the victim of gender-based violence is seen as shameful and a sign of weakness (The Council of Europe, 2025).

Ultimately, in order to address the underlying causes and factors of GBV, comprehensive approaches are needed, including those that advance gender equality, oppose damaging attitudes and practices, fortify legal protections, offer survivors support services and include communities in preventative measures.

1.5 Gender-Based Violence's effects on society and victims

Gender-based violence has a profound and extensive impact on society in several ways. A prime result is the public health crisis, GBV significantly influences persons' lives, communities, and healthcare organizations. Survivors often experience physical wounds and are at higher risk for substance mistreatment or self-harm, in addition to mental health problems including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. Furthermore, the financial implications of GBV deeply affect social budgets, because it increases healthcare expenses, loss productivity, employee absenteeism, legal expenses, as well as assistance services. These economic disparities impede economic development and continue cycles of poverty.

Additionally, GBV can disturb educational systems, influencing students' academic accomplishment and performance. Children who see or experience GBV may struggle academically, in which they face challenges with concentration and attendance, causing lower educational accomplishments and restricting their chances for social progress. Interpersonal relationships are also undesirably influenced; GBV destabilizes trust within families, communities, and personal relationships. It strains relations with others, potentially causing communication failures, familial discordance, and social alienation, all of which can adversely affect both individual and community well-being.

Moreover, Social structure is definitely to be influenced, as GBV deteriorates social harmony and the basics of societies by fostering a climate of anxiety, mistrust, and social marginalization. The fear of violence can confine individuals' freedom to move and engage publicly, thereby lessening social involvement and solidity. Moreover, Gender inequality is both caused by and sustained by GBV. It perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes and biases, upholding the power imbalance between men and women.

Gender-based violence and discrimination lead women and gender minorities to be marginalized and disempowered. GBV violates fundamental rights to safety, freedom, and life. Moreover, it is regarded as a barrier to justice, as many survivors struggle to pursue legitimate recourse and livelihood facilities. It is essential therefore to reinforce legal contexts and guarantee accountability to protect human rights and struggle gender-based violence. Perceiving or undergoing GBV may lead individuals to repeat abusive comportment in their own relationships as adults. GBV continues a cycle of trauma and violence, producing patterns of mistreatment that affect existing and upcoming generations (Pandey, 2024, p.2106). In general, gender-based violence has a profound and pervasive impact on society and life of survivors, affecting people's physical and emotional well-being as well as their interpersonal relationships, social cohesiveness, and economic status.

1.6 Giving voice to the Silenced: Literature as a space for testimony

Literature serves a vital role in allowing victims to express themselves concerning the gender-based violence by creating a platform for chronicles that might otherwise be ignored in broader society. Bridging a range of genres including fiction, memoir, poetry, and drama, many significant writings challenge the emotional, psychological, and social complexities related to gender-based violence, moving beyond mere statistics to humanize the stories of victims. Early works such as Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sing* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* layer tales of survival, providing readers with an insight into the inner worlds of

survivors, demonstrating the depth of their trauma while also stressing their trips toward healing and empowerment. In this way, literature raises compassion and sympathy while also rejecting the very social and cultural structures, like patriarchy or systemic discrimination that led to violence. Additionally, this procedure of revelation safeguards that literature is considered as a space for testimony, resistance, and cohesion; a solid network linked to larger encouragement and social change instrument.

1.7 “Gender-based violence: Not Just a Women’s Issue”

Although violence against women and girls is commonly linked to gender-based violence (GBV), men and boys can also experience different types of GBV, especially in certain situations where dominance, power, social standards, or masculinity is heavily emphasized. Literature depicts male victimhood through a number of works, among the novels, Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*. Hosseini’s book highlights the rape of Hassan as a significant act of violence that haunts both the victim and the witness, thereby showing how male bodies become sites of political and personal trauma. However, this fact is sometimes neglected because of disgrace and strict norms regarding masculinity, men, and boys can become victims of gender-based violence in several different situations. They can be sexually assaulted as a way of degradation, torture, or control in conflict areas and war zones. Moreover, male prisoners in jails and detention facilities often have few options for reporting sexual violence and physical abuse from guards and other inmates due to fear of retaliation and social stigma.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Men might also suffer emotional, physical, and sexual abuse from female partners in family and close environments, but societal ideas of male hardness and the worry of not being believed keep such instances unreported. Often silenced by shame and fear, boys in settings like houses, schools, religious organizations, and sports groups are also at risk of being sexually harassed by adults in authority. Through damaging initiation rites or coercive techniques meant to enforce standards of masculinity,

cultural customs can also prolong violence. Furthermore, men who go against conventional gender norms might be victims of hate crimes, corrective rape, abuse, and family violence. Though sometimes obscured, among underrepresented populations like migrants or runaway children, males and boys are also trafficked for forced labor and sexual exploitation (Kolbe, 2020).

The widespread taboos on male victimization help to underreport it, restrict studies, and deny sufferers the acknowledgment and attention they require by way of underreporting, limited research, and lack of customized support services; they therefore underpin damaging gender norms.

Recognizing that while gender-based violence affects many persons, it is women and girls who excessively endure the burden of such violence; this study mainly explores GBV as it affects females. It focuses on the analysis of female victims aims to examine the unique social, cultural, and structural factors that contribute to the prevalence and normalization of violence against women. This emphasis permits a deeper knowledge of the gendered dynamics of power, control, and vulnerability that support various kinds of GBV including domestic violence, psychological damage, and sexual violence. Consequently, even though male experiences of GBV are significant, they are outside the scope of this research in order to maintain a coherent analytical framework aligned with the realities faced by women.

Conclusion

By defining GBV and discussing its theoretical framework, historical context, and its various personal and social effects, this chapter has established a fundamental foundation for understanding the complexities of gender-based violence. Interconnecting concepts such as gender, race, class, and sexuality shape how GBV is perceived inversely and preserve systems of power and discrimination, in which it has been analyzed through an interdisciplinary perspective. Furthermore, the study has considered the ethical dimensions of studying and representing GBV victims, emphasizing the need for sympathy, intervention, and responsibility in all forms of commitment.

Transitioning from theoretical analysis to narrative exploration, the following chapter further builds on this conceptual foundation. Examining specific novels will illustrate how literature reflects the realities of GBV while also serving as a platform for resistance, documentation, and healing. The lived experiences of victims and the transformative power of narrative in the context of trauma and inequality will be further investigated in this literary analysis.

CHAPTER TWO:

Narratives of Suffering:

A Thematic and Comparative Study of Violence in

Selected Novels

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Introduction 30

2.1 Philosophical Perspectives of Kate Chopin, Alice Walker, and Nawal El Saadawi 30

2.1.1 Kate Chopin 30

2.1.2 Nawal El Saadawi 31

2.1.3 Alice Walker 32

2.2. Social Violence as a phenomenon: Dynamics of Oppression 33

2.2.1. The Social Violence of Gender Roles in *The Awakening* 33

2.2.2. The Chains of the Norm: Structural oppression and social control in *woman at point zero* 35

2.2.3 Social violence, Discrimination, and Oppression in *The Color Purple* 37

2.3 Interiors of Pain: Traumatized Personalities and Emotional Fragmentation 38

2.3.1 Psychological Wounds of Violence in *The Color Purple* 38

2.3.2 The Psychological Trauma of Repression and Gender Violence in *The Awakening* 39

2.4 Bodies as Battlegrounds: Literary Representation of Sexual Violence 40

2.4.1 Unveiling sexual and social oppression in *Woman at Point Zero* 40

2.4.2 The Brutality of Sexual Violence in *The Color Purple*..... 42

2.5 Comparative and Intersectional Analysis 43

Conclusion 47

Introduction

Literature has historically acted as both a mirror and a magnifying lens, allowing us to reflect on and examine the complexities of human experiences, particularly those of marginalized individuals. One of the most widespread and enduring issues faced by women globally is various forms of violence, including social, psychological, and sexual. This chapter presents a comparative and analytical exploration of three impactful novels: *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, and *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi. Each of these works presents a distinct yet interconnected narrative that highlights female suffering, resistance, and transformation within patriarchal cultures.

Although they originate from different cultural, historical, and geographical backgrounds, specifically, the segregated South of the United States, late 19th-century Louisiana, and post-colonial Egypt, the novels reveal systemic forms of gender-based violence that cross cultural boundaries. The main characters, Celie, Edna, and Firdaus, embody female voices that are frequently muted by various institutions such as family, marriage, religion, and the government. Thus, this chapter examines how women's bodies and minds serve as battlegrounds for dominance, oppression, and ultimately, liberation.

2.1. Philosophical Perspectives of Kate Chopin, Alice Walker, and Nawal El Saadawi

2.1.1. Kate Chopin

Kate Chopin's beliefs, as shown in her works, particularly in *The Awakening*, focus on personal freedom, women's independence, and defiance against social conventions, especially those that impact women within patriarchal and conservative societies. Influenced by early feminist ideas alongside realism and naturalism, Chopin questioned the conventional roles designated for women as spouses and mothers, confronting the notion that a woman's satisfaction is found exclusively in domestic life. Chopin argues that marriage, even when not marked by overt abuse, can still be a framework that restricts a woman's sense of self.

In *The Story of an Hour*, when Mrs. Mallard learns about her husband's passing, she initially responds with sorrow but soon experiences a profound sense of liberation. Chopin writes: "She said it over and over under her breath: 'free, free, free!'" (1894, p.51). The repetition of "free" highlights the strength and surprise of her emotional response. It transcends mere relief; it is a moment of enlightenment. Louise is awakening to the realization that, for the first time, she has the opportunity to live for herself. No longer constrained by the duties of a devoted wife, she imagines a future where she can make independent decisions, fully experience her emotions, and exist as an individual instead of being defined by her connection to a man. The phrase uttered "under her breath" indicates that this sense of freedom still feels somewhat taboo, perhaps even shameful in the view of society. Louise is undergoing a private victory that contradicts societal expectations, where a widow is anticipated to grieve instead of rejoicing in her newfound autonomy.

Chopin claims that genuine freedom for women can only be achieved through self-awareness and the bravery to reject socially imposed roles, even if such decisions involve significant personal sacrifice.

2.1.2. Nawal El Saadawi

My greatest crime is that I am a free woman in a time when they only want maidservants and slaves. I was born with a mind that thinks in a time when they are trying to abolish reason.

El-Saadawi

El-Saadawi, in her works, tends to reaffirm Virginia Woolf's conventional idea of historical marginalization. Woolf states: "For most of history, anonymous was a woman." She is rendered anonymous because she lacks a voice, is marginalized and silenced, and that "History is too much about wars; biography too much about great men" (Woolf, 1929). However, it focuses on men because women are inherently vulnerable, a vulnerability stemming from their lack of financial power and education, which renders them voiceless and unheard. Consequently, women remain 'outsider[s]' with 'no right to speak' (Woolf, 1938, p.116).

In her main argument, El-Saadawi asserts that Arab women have experienced intentional marginalization throughout history. She contends that the systems of patriarchy, politics, religion, and economy are responsible for this marginalization, and she emphasizes that for a woman to escape this degradation and patriarchal control, she must attain financial independence.

2.1.3. Alice Walker

Walker's philosophy in her works is grounded in womanism, a variant of feminism that focuses on the experiences of Black women and acknowledges the intersection of race, gender, class, and cultural heritage. She champions the empowerment of marginalized women through self-acceptance, spiritual healing, a connection to one's roots, and creative expression. Her writings highlight the idea that personal experiences are deeply political underscoring how systemic issues like racism, sexism, and poverty impact the emotional lives and relationships of Black women.

Furthermore, Walker adopts a thoughtful spiritual and biological consciousness, concerning love, nature, and artistic manifestation as dynamic foundations of freedom. Her writing often blurs the boundaries between the concrete and the spiritual, suggesting that real autonomy is realized when individuals line up their inner realities with their external lives, even in the face of tyrannical systems.

In *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*", Walker scrutinizes the repressed creativeness of Black women throughout history, individuals who were deprived of schooling, creative expression, and liberation. However, she proclaims that these women still found ways to express themselves through unconventional ways, including quilting, nursery, storytelling, and spirituality.

These were the artists whose lives, despite ongoing oppression, were a form of artistry. Their capacity to endure, to persist, and to cultivate beauty amidst destruction was in itself a creative endeavor (1983).

Herein, Walker argues that art and creativity as not simply professional or academic quests, rather as deeds of confrontation, endurance, and identity creation for Black women. Her viewpoint pays tribute to the ordinary experiences and contributions of women who, in the face of systemic disregard, conveyed strength and splendor through generations. In fact, Walker sees the recuperation of this heritage as dynamic for both individual healing and ethnic justice.

Walker's awareness is part of her wider womanist standpoint, which highlights the significance of ethnicity, intergenerational understanding, and the spiritual aspect of feminist emancipation, particularly for women of color.

2.2. Social Violence as a phenomenon: Dynamics of Oppression

2.2.1. The Social Violence of Gender Roles in *The Awakening*

In Chopin's *The Awakening*, societal violence is transmitted strongly through the cruel standards and expectations placed upon womenfolk in late 19th-century American culture. This type of violence is both psychological and structural, influencing the identity and decisions of the protagonist, Edna Pontellier.

Edna grapples with considerable pressure to adhere to the role of the "mother-woman," a self-sacrificing, nurturing figure whose existence is primarily for her husband and children. This expectation strips her of her individuality and represents a form of social coercion that hinders her autonomy. Edna's marriage to Léonce Pontellier illustrates how societal norms impose emotional dependency and subservience. Her role is strictly confined to the domestic sphere, and any acts of defiance are met with condemnation and rejection, reflecting a socially sanctioned method of control.

Mrs Pontellier was not a woman given to confidences, a characteristic hitherto contrary to her nature, even as a child, she had lived her own small life all within herself, at a very early

period, she had apprehended instinctively the dual life that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions. (Chopin, p.35)

The social structures limit Edna's chances for independence, especially as a woman of her social class. When she begins to explore painting and chooses to live independently, society retaliates against her with isolation and scandal, emphasizing how any deviation from norms is socially corrected. Edna's emotional and sexual awakening is denounced by the social order. Her aspirations for love, fulfilment, and personal freedom are deemed immoral, and the criticism she encounters represents symbolic violence aimed at shaming and silencing those women who do not conform.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf posits that financial independence is crucial for women to attain intellectual freedom. Woolf asserts:

The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself. If women are to write, or to be artists, or to be intellectuals, it is necessary that they should be free, free from the burden of economic dependence, free from the weight of social expectations. (1929)

Women in Edna's society possessed limited legal rights, and their reliance on male relatives for financial stability underscores a form of institutional violence. Edna's attempts to achieve financial independence highlight the systemic obstacles faced by women.

These various forms of social violence ultimately led to Edna's tragic conclusion, making *The Awakening* a profound critique of the silent yet harmful effects of societal oppression on women's mental health and freedom.

2.2.2. The Chains of the Norm: Structural oppression and Social control in *Woman at Point Zero*

In *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi, social violence emerges as a significant and recurring theme that reveals the deep-seated systemic oppression that women endure within a patriarchal, classist, and authoritarian society. The novel utilizes the life of Firdaus to illustrate how societal structures inflict violence not only through direct abuse but also via institutionalized marginalization and social control.

In fact, in her works, El Saadawi generally portrays a grim social reality for women in the Arab world. It would not be an exaggeration to say that she often distorts the truth by adopting an extreme stance rooted in her animosity and confrontational approach towards men and society. She emphasizes the social inequality between males and females from their early years.

In *Woman at Point Zero*, El Saadawi notes:

When one of his female children died, my father would eat his supper, my mother washes his legs, and then he would go to sleep, just as he did every night. When the child that died was a boy, he would beat my mother, then have his supper and lie down to sleep. (1983, p.17)

In "*Exile and Resistance*," El Saadawi further recounts that Om Mahmoud, the midwife who assisted in her birth, attempted to kill her upon realizing that she was a girl, as she states: "when she did not see the sacred male organ between my thighs, she dropped me into a basin of water and left me to drown." (2002). This, according to El Saadawi, illustrates the longstanding darkness within Arab society, where numerous female infants were buried alive by their fathers who preferred to eliminate their daughters rather than confront potential shame in the future.

In the novel, Firdaus is deprived of equal opportunities solely because she is a woman. From education to employment, her potential is systematically constrained by a society that regards women as inferior and secondary. In *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir contends that women are not born as such but become women, a concept reflected in Egyptian

society's perception of Firdaus. Her intelligence goes unnoticed or is undervalued, reinforcing gender-based social hierarchies.

As a woman from a disadvantaged background, Firdaus faces double marginalization. The social system strips her of the right to determine her own path, leaving her vulnerable to exploitation by wealthier, more powerful individuals. Her turn to prostitution stems from a lack of economic and social alternatives. Firdaus is also forcefully married off to an abusive older man without her consent. El Saadawi writes:

On one occasion he hit me all over with his shoe. My face and body became swollen and bruised. So I left the house and went to my uncle. But my uncle told me that all husbands beat their wives, and my uncle's wife added that her husband often beat her [...] She replied that it was precisely men well versed in their religion who beat their wives. The precepts of religion permitted such punishment. A virtuous woman was not supposed to complain about her husband. Her duty was perfect obedience. (Saadawi, 1983, p. 42)

In this context, the institution of marriage serves as a mechanism of social control and submission rather than as a partnership, subjecting her to both physical and psychological abuse. The legal and social systems that are meant to safeguard Firdaus instead continue to inflict pain upon her. The authorities, including the police and the correctional system, only take action when she resorts to violence. This highlights a broader societal failure to recognize or pre-empt violence against women, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds. Societal condemnation falls on Firdaus for her choice to engage in prostitution, while the men who take advantage of her are overlooked.

This double standard exemplifies the moral hypocrisy of a system that penalizes female independence while upholding male dominance. Firdaus's narrative is shared only after her imprisonment, and even then, it is conveyed through another character, El Saadawi. This narrative technique symbolizes how society silences women's stories and only acknowledges

them when it is too late, frequently after their death or when they are no longer perceived as a threat.

2.2.3. Social Violence, Discrimination, and Oppression in *The Color Purple*

In *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker examines various facets of social violence, demonstrating how systemic oppression impacts Black women in early 20th-century America. The novel addresses multiple dimensions of social violence. In the novel, Walker illustrates the patriarchal systems that sustain gender-based violence. Celie suffers physical and emotional abuse from male figures such as her stepfather and husband, mirroring societal norms that devalue and silence women. The expectation for women to be submissive and the normalization of domestic violence are key themes as Walker states: "A woman needs to be at home." (Walker, p.82).

In her influential essay, "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak investigates the obstacles faced by subaltern groups—those outside the dominant power structures—in articulating their experiences within mainstream discourses. She suggests that the very systems of power and knowledge often make these voices inaudible, not just by silencing them but by arranging their expressions in a way that renders them unrecognizable or misinterpreted by the dominant culture. Spivak's concept is vividly portrayed in *The Color Purple*, where the suppression of female voices is a recurring theme. Walker writes:

Sofia, as the black woman, also clearly shows the condition of blacks at that time through her family, as she shared: "All my life, I had to fight. I had to fight my dad. I had to fight my brother. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men, she says. To tell the truth, you remind me of my mama. She is under my daddy's thumb. Now, she is under my dad's foot. Anything he says goes. She never said anything back. She never stands up for herself. (Walker, p.46)

Celie's correspondence with God represents her only means of expression in a reality that denies her agency. The enforced silence, illustrated when her stepfather cautions her against speaking up, symbolizes the wider societal tendency to marginalize and dismiss women's experiences.

The narrative underscores the widespread racial discrimination faced by African Americans. Sofia's harsh beating and subsequent imprisonment after defying a white mayor illustrate the violent reinforcement of racial hierarchies. Moreover, the lynching of Celie's biological father highlights the deadly repercussions of Black achievement in a racially oppressive society.

Celie's existence is meticulously controlled, from her attire to her behavior. Mr. _____ exercises psychological domination by isolating her, restricting her social interactions, and treating her more like property than a partner, which contributes to her emotional numbness and depression.

2.3 Interiors of Pain: Traumatized Personalities and Emotional Fragmentation

2.3.1 Psychological Wounds of Violence in *The Color Purple*

The Color Purple explores the effects of emotional and psychological abuse. Celie's absorption of disparaging labels and her feelings of worthlessness reveal the profound psychological scars inflicted by ongoing belittlement and control. Her path to self-discovery and empowerment showcases the resilience necessary to rise above such abuse. Celie is consistently demeaned, insulted, and told she holds no value by the men in her life, first her stepfather and later her husband, Mr. _____. Repeated phrases like "Mr. ___'s point of view, as he says to Celie: "Look at you. You are black, you pore, you ugly, you are a woman. Goddam, he says, you nothing at all." (Walker, p.187)

In *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (2015), bell hooks explores the intricate issue of marginalized voices, particularly those belonging to Black women. She challenges the idea that women's silence is naturally virtuous, instead framing it as a way of submitting to patriarchal control. hooks argues that for Black women, the fight is not just about breaking free from silence but about shifting the content and direction of their speech to ensure it is acknowledged and respected. In *The Color Purple*, psychological violence is illustrated

through Celie's lack of voice. She faces restrictions that prevent her from voicing her thoughts, questioning those in power, or sharing her emotions. Her interior life becomes solely related to the letters she directs to God, showcasing both her loneliness and her intense longing to be heard.

Moreover, the novel depicts the idea of internalized cruelty where Celie begins to admit the negative views enforced upon her, showing the emotional harm resulting from persistent abuse. This interior acceptance leads her to see suffering as her destiny, a typical consequence of lasting emotional manipulation. Psychological violence in the novel also demonstrates through a persistent fear of physical harm, the act of speaking out, and the threat of abandonment. Celie's trauma is not merely personal but generational, passed down through stories, silence, and endurance strategies.

2.3.2 The Psychological Trauma of Repression and Gender Violence in *The Awakening*

In *The Awakening*, psychological violence is viewed as a crucial theme, articulating itself not through physical abuse but rather through emotional manipulation, social conditioning, and inner struggle. Edna suffers substantial internal conflict as she reconciles the expectations of her roles as a wife and mother. The struggle between her personal desires and social norms generates psychological dilemma, guilt, and doubt, leading her to feel scarce and estranged. The constant request for conformism and the dread of societal ostracism weigh heavily on Edna. The repressive nature of social judgment operates as a psychological confinement, making her eventual retreat from society both a disobedient attitude and a plea for help. Edna wrestles with the challenge of defining her identity beyond the societal roles imposed on her. Her psychological anguish deepens as she comes to the realization that achieving complete autonomy might be impossible within her circumstances, concluding in a sense of despair and desperateness that leads to her awful suicide.

Léonce Pontellier, Edna's husband, may not explicitly mistreat her, yet his emotional detachment and preoccupation with social appearances leave Edna feeling invisible and

misunderstood. His inability to empathize and his view of Edna as more of an object than a person takes a toll on her psychologically. As bell hooks articulates in *Feminism is for Everybody*

Women have been taught to see the world through the eyes of others, and the result is that many of us see ourselves through their eyes, feeling incomplete and inadequate. But when we begin to reclaim our power, to see ourselves as we are and not as others want us to be, we can move beyond the internalized self-hatred and start to love ourselves fully (2000).

As a result, Léonce and others in Edna's social circle often dismiss her emotions and decisions as irrational or unsuitable. This subtle form of invalidation acts like a form of gaslighting, eroding Edna's confidence in her own judgment and negatively impacting her mental health.

2.4 Bodies as Battlegrounds: Literary Representation of Sexual Violence

2.4.1 Unveiling sexual and social oppression in *Woman at Point Zero*

In *Woman at Point Zero*, sexual violence emerges as a dominant theme that underscores the oppressive patriarchal structures entrenched in Egyptian society. The protagonist, Firdaus, faces numerous instances of sexual violence throughout her life, experiences that profoundly shape her identity, perspective, and ultimately determine her fate. Men persistently perceive Firdaus as an object of pleasure or possession. Throughout her experiences in educational settings, within the institution of marriage, and during her tenure as a sex worker, her worth is inextricably tied to her physical form. This objectification represents a continuous manifestation of sexual violence, effectively depriving her of her humanity.

Firdaus was sexually abused by her own uncle during her childhood. This traumatic experience marked her initial confrontation with male dominance and exploitation, resulting in profound feelings of confusion and shame. It also demonstrates the alarming truth that sexual violence is often caused by close confidants or trusted advisors.

The act of forcing Firdaus to marry an older man results in both sexual and physical abuse. The severity of her husband's actions during sexual intercourse highlights the pervasive reality of marital rape and the absence of autonomy over her own body.

Subsequently, Firdaus enters into prostitution, not by choice, but as a consequence of her constrained life options. Although she appears to exercise some degree of control through prostitution, the transactional nature of sex within a patriarchal society reveals how profoundly rooted sexual exploitation is, even when masquerading as empowerment:

I was seized with wonder and asked her, 'And am I really of any value, Sharifa?'

'You are beautiful and have culture.'

'Culture?' I said. 'All I have is a secondary school certificate.'

You belittle yourself, Firdaus. I never go further than a primary school certificate.'

'And do you have a price?' I asked cautiously.

'Of Course. Nobody can touch me without paying a very high price. You are younger than I am and more cultured, and nobody should be able to come near you without paying twice as much as what is paid to me.'

'But I cannot ask for anything from a man.'

'Don't ask for anything. That's not your affair. Its mine.' (Saadawi, 1983, p.51)

Herein, it is evident that sex work is viewed as commonplace, despite Egypt's overall strong opposition to prostitution. However, due to poverty and a lack of employment options, some people feel they have no alternative. Firdaus, having experienced frequent abuse and lacking a family, job, or stable housing, saw following Sharifa's guidance as a means of survival.

Ultimately, Firdaus kills a pimp who attempts to take advantage of her, an action that symbolizes her reclaiming of power in a world where her body has been subjected to ongoing violations. Her violent response can be viewed as both a consequence of and a reaction to the sexual violence she experiences. Therefore, the novel illustrates sexual violence not merely as

isolated incidents but as a systemic and institutionalized phenomenon embedded in the social, legal, and economic fabric of life.

2.4.2 The Brutality of Sexual Violence in *The Color Purple*

The narrative addresses the brutal truths of sexual violence. Celie's ongoing sexual exploitation by her stepfather and subsequently by her husband showcases the mistreatment of Black women both within their families and in society at large. Her trauma begins with the continual sexual assaults by the man she thinks is her father.

You're going to do what your mama wouldn't." [...] And then he proceeds to rape her. When she cries, he chokes her and threatens, "You better shut up and get used to it." (Walker, p. 11) [...] I'm fourteen years old. I have always been a good girl. Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me." (Walker, p. 11)

This incestuous violation robs her of her bodily autonomy and voice from a very early age. It also highlights the silencing and disempowerment experienced by girls in abusive familial situations. Celie is subsequently given to Albert (Mr. __) through a marriage that prioritizes ownership over affection. She becomes relegated to the roles of servant and sexual object. Celie states: " He beat me today because he said I winked at a boy in church [...] He beat me for dressing trampy, but he did it to me anyway" (Walker, pp. 15,17).

The lack of consent in her sexual interactions with him exemplifies marital rape, a concept that was historically overlooked or disregarded both legally and socially. In a similar vein, squeak (Mary Agnes) experiences rape by a white prison guard when she attempts to fight for Sofia's release. This event demonstrates how Black women's bodies were frequently

2.5 Comparative and Intersectional Analysis

A comparative examination of *The Color Purple*, *The Awakening*, and *Woman at Point Zero* demonstrates that violence inflicted on women crosses cultural lines, yet its expressions and rationalizations are influenced by the specific sociocultural environments present in each story.

In *The Color Purple*, Walker delves into the confluence of racism and patriarchy within early 20th-century African American communities. It illustrates how Celie suffers from sexual abuse, physical harm, and emotional humiliation imposed by male figures, including her stepfather and husband. Gradually, her journey towards empowerment is based on the values of female solidarity and the practice of self-expression, which are best demonstrated in her letters and through the support of influential women like Shug Avery.

In contrast, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, situated within the confines of the conservative Creole society of 19th-century Louisiana, presents a more intricate yet equally oppressive manifestation of violence, characterized by psychological and social domination. Although Edna is not subjected to physical abuse, she has limitations imposed by strict gender norms, marital obligations, and limited personal autonomy. All of these elements ultimately lead to her tragic suicide claim of freedom.

Conversely, *Woman at Point Zero* presents a poignant narrative centered on Firdaus, a woman living in mid-20th-century Egypt who endures various severe manifestations of gender-based violence. These include female genital mutilation, child marriage, exploitation, and sexual assault. Firdaus's story is marked by a stark awakening to the ways in which male-dominated systems leverage religion, economic structures, and legal frameworks to maintain dominion over women. In contrast to characters such as Celie or Edna, Firdaus's act of rebellion culminates in a violent assertion of autonomy, as she takes the life of her abuser, ultimately embracing death as the most profound expression of her agency. Collectively, these novels illuminate the varying forms of violence against women, which range from overt physical assault to internalized

psychological control, and underscore the overarching systems of patriarchy that. Each protagonist's journey reflects a unique form of resistance shaped by her cultural and historical backdrop, illuminating the complex interplay between gender, power, and societal norms.

- **Sexual coercion**

Sexual violence against women remains a persistent and deeply entrenched atrocity that has affected generations and continues to be alarmingly prevalent today. It not only violates the integrity of the body but also undermines the foundations of social justice and human dignity." Pain and suffering are always inevitable for a large intelligence and a deep heart" (Fyodor Dostoevsky, 1866, p.296). In the novels, women endure both physical and sexual violence at the hands of men who exploit religion as a cover for their brutality. Walker Started by Celie's mother husband, whom she viewed as a father figure, subjected her to a horrific act of rape. And the man that he forced into marriage with her, treated her in a manner reminiscent of the abuse she had suffered in her mother's home. Similarly, Firdous's uncle, whom El Saadawi used to show that men cover their reality by religion and kindness, her uncle, who had once played with her in her childhood and whom she regarded as a familiar presence, claimed her body for himself in Cairo. He treated her as his property. engaging in a relationship that blurred the lines of marriage while exploiting her for his gain.

The pattern highlighted by Walker was that when a Black woman is subjected to racism from her partner, she often finds herself without receptive to it. This is reflected in Celie's mistreatment by her husband, and also in the violence and racism that Sophia experiences at the hands of white people. "All women are prostitutes of one kind or another"(El Saadawi, p.99) El Saadawi takes the reader into a world where women endure the weight of physical and mental violence, illustrating how societal notions become a tool for everyday oppression. Moreover, Nawal El Saadawi deliberately crafts her narrative voice and structure to reveal and challenge the male-dominated society. Rather than simply depicting the violence and injustices that women

endure, she shapes her writing style as a condemnation of any society that permits such treatment.

- **Death as the threshold of freedom**

Kate Chopin and Nawal El Saadawi, both notable feminists, crafted their narratives in such a way that their characters' liberation from violence was not reliant on seeking help or escaping to external authorities. Instead, their focus was on preserving the woman's identity and restoring her sense of personhood and dignity.

In particular, Chopin provided a poignant conclusion for Edna, symbolized by her connection to the sea, representing the solitude she sought from a society she felt was misunderstood. In his book, *Suicide*, Émile Durkheim viewed suicide as a curious social phenomenon. Egoistic Suicide: Occurs when an individual feels isolated and not integrated enough into his group or family (Durkheim, 1951, p.150). Chopin challenged the typical narrative surrounding a mother's sacrifice and unwavering patience to remain with her children. The author aimed to highlight this choice, as for Edna, death represents a starting point that exists solely in her mind. Edna experiences emotional isolation, existential despair, and the struggle to balance her passions with societal expectations.

For Firdaus, death is a more desirable fate than enduring further subjugation; “I prefer to die for a crime I have committed than to live crushed by a crime that was committed against me.” (El Saadawi, p.111), this is not just defeat that brings Firdaus to death; it is the pinnacle of her revolution. Her death serves as a stirring protest against a society that consistently silences, exploits, and erases women, and by choosing to embrace death on her terms, she affirms her humanity in its purest form. This is her final transformation. Gone is the fear that once dictated her life; as she approaches death, Firdaus stands empowered. She is no longer restrained by men, oppressive systems, or the weight of consequences; her defiance has become the cut oneself loose.

It is undeniable that the writers' choice in this matter was effective. A woman cannot easily forget her experiences, nor can she continue to endure an environment that has brought her nothing but suffering, particularly within the family, the very foundation of love and security. When that foundational support is absent, there is little reason for her to endure further pain. A woman is not meant to be oppressed, and when faced with such adversity, sometimes the only escape that feels justifiable is death.

- **God, the Harbinger of Freedom**

The Color Purple is dedicated to the rights of Black women, drawing heavily from Alice Walker's personal experiences. Growing up in a rural environment has inspired her to empower Black women to advocate for their rights and resist violence. Walker employs an objective and mimetic approach to delve into this literary work, reflecting the complexities of human life. The protagonist, Celie, exists in a state of isolation from the racially charged world around her, encompassing both white and black individuals.

Through Celie's character, the author highlights that black women possess the same capacity for education as any other segment of society. In her letters to God, Celie employs simple, colloquial language that reflects her limited understanding, yet she articulates her inner turmoil with remarkable clarity. In one poignant moment, she writes, "Dear God", This also has a religious dimension, illustrating her hope that faith will provide a pathway to relief from her suffering. God seems to be her only confidant, as she has no one else to turn to. Celie realizes the magnitude of her situation; her stepfather, Alphonso, has warned her: "You'd better never say anything to anyone but God. It will kill your mother" (Walker, p.8). In addition, Walker's choice to craft a powerful ending for Celie reflects her belief that Black women are capable of enduring and overcoming even the most profound oppression and subjugation.

This perspective stands in stark contrast to the conclusions presented by Chopin and El Saadawi in their novels, which explore the ultimate fates of women in more somber

terms. Additionally, by deliberately omitting Celie's husband's name and refraining from referring to her as Mrs. ----, Walker makes a bold statement against patriarchy, asserting that women are not defined by their relationship to men, nor are they possessions to be named after them.

Despite the diverse cultures, histories, and religions of Chopin, Walker, and El Saadawi, their writings share notable similarities. The narratives illustrate the violence perpetrated against women as a perplexing and multifaceted means by which men seek to assert control. Through the application of physical and psychological coercion, along with inequitable legislation, the bodies and minds of women transform into battlegrounds. These accounts not only illuminate and interrogate existing power dynamics but also affirm the capacity for resistance, even when such efforts are arduous or predominantly symbolic. Furthermore, they offer a comprehensive critique of the institutions that endeavor to silence and oppress women.

Conclusion

This chapter shows an analysis of *The Color Purple*, *The Awakening*, and *Woman at Point Zero*, how literature serves as a powerful vehicle for expressing the pain, opposition, and empowerment of women who face societal limits; yet each sets out a different path towards self-discovery and revolt. Though their stories differ in time and location, the books together reveal the worldwide mechanisms by which gender-based injustice is challenged and sustained; these narratives not just record pain but also encourage great reflection and societal awareness. This comparative study emphasizes the essential part of fiction in highlighting injustice and promoting the dignity and freedom of women over different periods and civilizations.

General Conclusion

This dissertation dealt with a descriptive and analytical investigation of gender-based violence as depicted in literature, concentrating on its historical origins and ongoing manifestation, mainly among marginalized communities. By examining the lived experiences of women exposed to systemic subjugation and social struggle to change, the research intended to reveal the fundamental mechanisms of violence and the main battles women undergo. Essential to this analysis are three novels; Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, each of which offers a rich portrayal of the multidimensional prejudices imposed on women. In fact, these acts of violence, often starting in early life and unexpectedly happening, are outlined as results of extremely rooted patriarchal dynamics that marginalize women within both familial and social contexts. Such depictions mirror broader cultural structures that tend to diminish women's uniqueness and personal achievements.

The first chapter offered a broad cultural and literary overview of gendered violence, examining its causes and the social circumstances that preserve it. The second chapter focused on feminist traditions in Egyptian-American and African-American contexts, investigating sexual and psychological violence, social inequality, and the socio-political conditions that shaped these stories.

Special attention is given to women's roles, systemic oppression gender, and the mechanisms of empowerment implemented by female characters in reaction to the social inequality and unfairness. Thus, the works of El Saadawi, Walker, and Chopin are examined through a feminist lens to emphasize the interplay between gender, power, and resistance. Through this interdisciplinary approach, combining feminist criticism, historical and cultural context, and psychological analysis, this dissertation explored how the authors' representations

of violence reflect authentic experiences of women in Egypt, the United States, and African American communities. By analysing the similarities and differences in these portrayals, the study contributed to an offer an explanation to female complex realities across diverse temporal, cultural, and geographical settings. Eventually, this research underlined the intersection of literature, feminism, and cultural studies and religious dynamics in determining the discourse on gender-based violence.

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الملخص

يُعتبر العنف القائم على النوع الاجتماعي قضيةً بالغة الأهمية، متأصلةً في البنى الاجتماعية والسياسية والثقافية، وتنعكس بشكلٍ واسعٍ في النصوص الأدبية. تُجري هذه الدراسة تحليلاً مقارناً لروايات مختارة لدراسة تصوير النساء كضحايا للعنف القائم على النوع الاجتماعي، مُركزةً على كيفية تعبير هذه الأعمال عن مواضيع القمع والتهميش والمقاومة وغيرها من القضايا ذات الصلة المحيطة بالضحية القائمة على النوع الاجتماعي. تعتمد هذه الدراسة على نهج منهجي ثنائي الاتجاه، يجمع بين النظرية النسوية والنقد التحليلي النفسي. يميل المنظور النسوي إلى استكشاف كيفية إدانة السرديات للأطر الاجتماعية التي تُروج للعنف ضد المرأة، بينما يبحث النهج التحليلي النفسي في الأبعاد النفسية للصدمة والوقوع ضحية. يُتيح النهجان، معاً، نظرةً شاملةً على طرق تمثيل العنف القائم على النوع الاجتماعي واستيعابه في الأدب، مُظهرين الديناميكيات النفسية والاجتماعية العميقة المؤثرة. تكشف النتائج أنه على الرغم من أن جميع الأعمال تصف العنف القائم على النوع الاجتماعي كوسيلة للهيمنة والإخضاع، إلا أنها تختلف اختلافاً جذرياً في تصوير قدرة الضحايا على الصمود والتدخل وردود الفعل الاجتماعية. وهكذا، تخلص الدراسة إلى أن الأدب لا يعكس الواقع الاجتماعي للعنف القائم على النوع الاجتماعي فحسب، بل يعمل أيضاً على تحديه وإعادة تعريفه، مقدماً رؤىً أكثر شمولية حول الضحية والوجود. وبناءً على ذلك، تُبرز هذه الدراسة دور النصوص الأدبية في الإسهام في توسيع نطاق الخطابات حول النوع الاجتماعي والعنف والتحول الاجتماعي، وتشجيع الباحثين والمتخصصين على زيادة التفاعل مع الأدب كوسيلة للمقاومة والتوعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النوع الاجتماعي، الأدب، الضحية، العنف، المرأة