

**Betty Shamieh's Play *The Black Eyed* Treating Violence through Four  
Different Ages**

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### **A-Introduction to the Author**

Betty Shamieh, a Palestinian American playwright, declares that she was raised in a "very Arab-American household. Arabic was spoken. My community was integrated, but I felt very much a minority, more so than just an Arab American"(Shamieh4). In June 2002, Shamieh joined several other prominent American playwrights including Tony Kushner (1956- ), Naomi Wallace (1960- ), and Kia Corthron (1961- ) on a visit to the Palestinian Occupied Territories. Shamieh concluded, "The cost of ignoring what is happening there — and ignoring how those happenings affect the stability of the entire world is unbearable"(Najjar 1). Shamieh's Palestinian background affected her writing. She says, "I think that by showing them as human beings, it humanizes people whose stories never are told. I feel my job at first was to show (Arab Americans) as human beings, to show them as people who can lust, who can be ambitious, who can be mean, who can be loving"( Najjar 1). Shamieh was motivated by the aftermath of 9/11, but she has widened her perspective to write not only about the violence of 9/11 but also about various types of violence against Palestinian women through different historical eras.

Shamieh intentionally revives four women to retell their role in shaping history as Postcolonial feminist Spivak Advises the writers in her most popular essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'(1988) to raise the question of the subaltern women. "In it, she explores possibilities to recover the long silenced voices of the subaltern women. It is duty of postcolonial feminists to represent them. When Western women speak for the others, they only displace them, replacing their voices with their own" (Mishra 132). Shamieh recovered the anonymous and silent voices of four Palestinian women from four different ages to speak about themselves. Dina Amin calls Shamieh and other Arab American writers hyphenated or hybrid authors. She states that these writers are often under focus because people around them are always excited to know about their lives and thoughts. She also states that, " Hybrid artist wish to challenge the stereotypes, sometimes even to shock the pigeon-holing reader. In all cases, the works of the hyphenated authors is always a process of negotiating identities-it is almost a diplomatic mission more than a literary artistic. (xi)

## **B-Introduction to the Play**

Delilah, Tamam, Aiesha and The Architect are four Palestinian women from different ages. Delilah was one of the Semitic people of the Ancient Near East, who inhabited part of Canaan during the tribal and monarchic periods (15th to 6th centuries BCE) (Finkelstein 199). Samson and Delilah's story is mentioned in the Old Testament (Book of Judges chapters 13 to 16). The second era, Tamam's story, takes place during the Crusades' Age. 'The Crusades' were military campaigns sanctioned by the Latin Roman Catholic Church during the High Middle Ages and Late Middle Ages. They lasted from 1096 to 1291(Hously190).The third story, Aiesha, takes place during the modern Israeli occupation of Palestine. This period began in 1917 with 'Balfour Declaration' that declared the support of the British Government to the Zionists' plans of establishing a Jewish 'national home' in Palestine. The United Nations on the 29th November 1947 agreed upon a 'Partition Plan of Palestine', which would divide Palestine into two independent States; one for the Jews and another for the Palestinians, while keeping Jerusalem under international administration. On the 14th May 1948, the day before the British withdrawal, the Jewish leaders declared 'The Independent State of Israel'. Soon after the withdrawal took place on the 15th May 1948, war erupted between the newly established Israeli State and the neighboring Arab countries. The war ended with the establishment of the 'Armistice Lines of 1949', also called 'Green Line. Although this period still lasts, Aiesha died at its beginning. Contrary to the preceding three periods, the fourth tale, The Architect, takes place in The United States of America during the 21 century(Morris 65).

Shamieh perfectly expands her perspective to question the price of violence through four different ages. She implies that it is one related history and the past led to the present and will lead to the future. The characters in this play either foreshadow or relive the Palestinian trauma of displacement, occupation, and loss. Postcolonial feminism has never operated as a separate entity from colonialism; rather it has directly inspired the forms and the force of colonial politics supported by its institutional and legal discrimination of violence, sexual abuse, rape, and torture (Mishra 130).

The Palestinian crisis finds repercussion throughout the world. Mishra states that Postcolonial feminists argue that the experience of

women in cultures impacted by colonialism is often vastly different from that of women in Western countries. Postcolonial feminists point out the ways in which women continue to be stereotyped and marginalized. Women around the world have very different histories with respect to their postcolonial inheritance, involving such experiences as imperial conquest, slavery, enforced migration, and even genocide. Thus, postcolonial feminists have argued for the rewriting of history based on the specific experiences of formerly colonized people, and their various strategies for survival (133). Betty Shamieh is one of those few authors who focuses on rewriting the history of Palestinian women to present the various types of violence they faced due to the Israeli occupation. Her plays demonstrate problems of assimilation, stereotyping, independence, and the consequences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on women. Betty Shamieh introduces herself to the world of theatre as the Palestinian American female voice.

### **The Reaction to Violence in the Play**

The feminist movement consists of three waves, first-wave feminism covers the suffragists' generation and groups in favour of women's rights, from 1880 to the beginnings of the 20th century, when most women in industrialized countries gained the right to vote. Second-wave aspired to women's participation in sexual equality and abortion. The Third-wave feminism is the new generation intending to achieve a larger vision regarding women's concerns with the focus on each group's peculiarities and the cultural, social, religious, racial and sexual diversity that is very much a part of the reality women around the world. The third wave of the feminist movement could be considered the continuation of the two previous phases of the movement (Mishra 130). Betty Shamieh is categorized as one of the third wave of postcolonial feminists because she concentrates on presenting the peculiarities of Palestinian women under the Israeli occupation and their struggle against the political violence they face.

Violence against women is present throughout different countries. At least one in five of the world's female population has been physically or sexually abused by a man or men at some time in their life. Kumari defines violence against women as:

The connotation of any act of violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threat of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty in public or private life. Violence against women includes domestic violence in the home, sexual abuse of girls in schools, sexual harassment at work, and rape whether by husbands or strangers, in refugee camps or as a tactic of war. This violence, which is reinforced by discriminatory cultural, social and economic structures, devastates lives, fractures communities, and stalls development. (6)

In the light of this definition, various types of violence that faced Shamieh's character in *The Black Eyed* are going to be discussed thoroughly. Shamieh writes as an Arab American voice who reflects her Palestinian heritage and the traumatic effect of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Her work necessarily employs the feeling of trauma and exile as well as displacement and loss. Her work necessarily employs Edward Said's concept of "Double or Exile Perspective" as a means of understanding the Palestinian situation as it exists today. He states, "Double or exile perspective impels a Western intellectual to see what is usually thought of as a simple issue of judgment against an approved enemy as part of a much wider picture" ("Intellectual Exile" 122). *The Black Eyed* displays various types of violence against the Palestinian women from the colonizer.

The title of the play challenges the stereotypical image of the Arab women who is distinguished by black eyes. *The Black Eyed* as a title also refers to the 'houris' الحور العين in Arabic which means virgin beautiful young girls who are created as rewards for obedient Muslims in Paradise. The first scene begins with the four women wandering around a room where martyrs dwell in the afterlife. The women span the centuries — from ancient times to the present — and so does the violence they inflict and receive. They include Delilah who is searching for Samson, Tamam, who wants to see her brother, and the Architect, an unnamed woman from our own time, wants to see a man who exploded her plane and the fourth woman is the suicide bomber, Aiesha. Each one of these women searches for a man inside that room. They want to join them inside but something stronger than them hinders their entry. Only one of them, Aiesha, managed to enter it before. At

the door of that room, time is meaningless. Centuries gather in one spot. She takes her audiences across ages into an abstract world where the eternal idea of violence and the struggle of women against it are discussed thoroughly. The play presents some sort of a 'time machine'. Chade Jones notes, "There are all kinds of complexities involved in these women's stories that go back for centuries, and in both Shamieh's writing and the performances, those knotted depths are powerfully apparent" (1). She challenges the stereotypical portrayal of the traditional role of women either as wives or as mothers. She depicts dynamically controversial characters whose lives display the political injustice and violence that faced them and their communities as well.

Shamieh begins the play with questions that focus on her main theme, violence. Her questions evoke the readers' mind to begin thinking, "Unanswered questions. Unquestioned answers. I do someone good dead. I do someone dead good"(Shamieh 1). Shamieh questions the result of violence that has faced Palestinian women and its consequences. She provokes the reader's attention from the very beginning to question the price of violence while hearing the females' stories. Chad Jones says about Shamieh's beginning "Shamieh's play grabs you by the brain and won't let go"(1). Shamieh introduces her main theme clearly and early in the play to give her audience the chance to live with the characters and think about the answer. Aiesha says, " Unanswered questions, Unquestioned answers. I do someone good dead. I do someone dead good. What is the point of the revolution that begins with the little hand? Any little hand? This little hand? Unanswered questions, Unquestioned answers (1).

The first one narrating her story is Delilah, a biblical figure who starts confessing that she used her voluptuous wiles on Samson to discover the secret of his power. She was used by the men of her tribe to seduce him. Yet she had her own motives, most specifically to avenge her brother's death. Delilah is a Palestinian girl whose brother was killed by Samson. Samson was the strongest Israeli man who used to kill hundreds from the Palestinians daily. The Palestinians inability to defeat Samson made them rely on one of their girls to do it; namely Delilah. They have tempted her to manipulate Samson to discover the secret of his power. Aiesha says, "So they made you seduce Samson? They forced you into it? (13) She is exploited by Samson as well as by the men of her tribe. They have treated

her as an honorable woman until she uncovered the secret of Samson's power:

DELILAH

They made me think it was my idea.

They asked me to take my father's place at their meetings,  
even though I was a girl,

because my only brother was dead.

We talked of many things.

They listened as if my opinions mattered,  
as if I mattered.

They were polite.(13)

Delilah has been exposed to trafficking or forced prostitution. Although she has practiced it agreeably, she discovered later that her tribe deceived her and scorned her efforts. Trafficking in persons has been identified by the 2000 UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, Supplemental Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women, as:

The recruitment, transportation, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation" (Trafficking Protocol, Article 3a: 32)

Although the term *exploitation* as used in this definition encompasses sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery, servitude and removal of organs, this paper will focus its attention on the topic of trafficking for sexual purposes only, also referred as sex trafficking. Mishra states that "Colonized countries have been profoundly affected by the exploitative, racist nature of this interrelation which was and remains economic, political and cultural"(131). Delilah was obliged to practice Trafficking by her people in their political war. Shamieh, in spite of being Palestinian, is very objective in portraying her people as abusing Delilah. They forced Delilah to be a prostitute. According to the Trafficking Protocol, trafficking occurs when

persons are recruited, transported, harboured or received in a process leading to exploitation. To amount to trafficking according to the description given by the Protocol, "The victim has to show some kind of coercion, deceit or position of vulnerability to demonstrate that they did not give an informed consent to the operation (5). Shamieh intentionally shows most of the participants as involved in using violence against each other. When Delilah finished her mission, they converted. They treated here as a whore. Delilah says, "My people called me a whore. I overheard a young man from my own clan say. The whore did her job and she did it well. He did not call me the daughter of an honorable man, or a good woman who loved her people. (13)

Delilah agreed to avenge Samson because he killed her brother along with hundreds of men from her people. Delilah says, "Samson snatched up my brother first, but killed him last. He made a game of dangling him, choking him in the crook of his arm, while he with his other iron fist continued to knock the heads off the necks of all my cousins, neighbors, and friends"(15). Samson's violence is the direct reason for Delilah's revenge. The result is the death of everybody. Delilah has played vital role in reshaping the history of her tribe not as a wife or as a mother but as a political weapon to destroy the colonizer. Chandra Mohanty's influential essay 'Under Western Eyes' argues that Third World women tend to be depicted as victims of male control and of traditional cultures. Rather Western feminism comes to function as the norm against which the Third World is judged. If Third World women's issues are analyzed in detail within the precise social relations in which they occur, then more complex pictures emerge (53). The details of Delilah's story presents the complex nature of her struggle against the colonizer and the treachery of her tribe. The price of violence against Delilah is her death along with all her tribe and Samson himself according to the Bible:

Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. 1`AXC Thus, he killed many more when he died than while he lived. (Judges 16)

Shamieh did not write the story of Samson and Delilah as it is in the Bible. She wrote it from the legendary perspective of an artist preserving the same end. Violence led to the death of Samson and all the tribe. Now, Delilah regrets cheating Samson because she discovered that she loved him. She looks for him in the martyr's room. Delilah says, " I don't care. I want to see Samson. I'm sure they'll welcome me in the martyr's room when they know how much I love him"(24).She is searching for him to forgive her.

Tamam speaks second. She is from the Crusades' Age. She is a beautiful girl; she repeats, "I am a pretty woman. It is not a boast (Shamieh 38). She was the seventh sister in her family before the delivery of a boy. Her brother joined resistance groups against the crusaders. They arrested him with "weapon in his hand and curses on his lips"(Shamieh38). They put him in jail. Tamam went to free her brother. The soldiers raped her before her brother's eyes to force him to tell them about something they wanted to know. Tamam says, "And they raped me in front of him, forcing my brother's eyes open so he had to watch. They wanted to know something. They skewered the support for their argument into my flesh. The crusaders believed rape would enrage our men" (39). Krug states that "Rape and sexual torture are systematically used as weapons of war, violence negates women's autonomy and undermines their potential as individuals and members of society"(2). The suppression and violence of the crusaders led to violence from the Palestinians. Tamam describes her feelings along with her brother's during the rape; the crusaders want to destroy the Palestinians but they were used to torture and misery was like anything else:

TAMAM

When the first hand was laid upon me, we both screamed...

My brother tried to look every other way,

but realized I needed him,

to look me in the eyes

*(pause)* and understand.

They thought making us face one another

in our misery would break us.

But we were used to misery.

It's like anything else.(40)

Dr. Abdullah Mohammad Sindi states, " Of all the religious wars in human history waged by any religion, at any place, and at any time, none have been bloodier, more genocidal, more barbaric, and more protracted than the 200-year "holy wars" by the Western Crusades against the Arabs and Islam"(1). Tamam summarizes the results of oppression through her brothers' words, "Oppression is like a coin maker. You put in human beings, press the right buttons and watch them get squeezed, shrunk, flattened till they take the slim shape of a two-faced coin (41). Kumari concludes that, "Troops also use rape and other forms of violence against women to increase men's subjugation and humiliation"(11). Tamam was raped before her brother's eyes in order to humiliate him, she could not also bury the one part left from her brother, his hand, because the crusaders hang it on the walls with his head and burned their whole village. Maalouf states that in October 1168 the Western crusaders committed a major gory operation against the Arabs in Bilbays, Egypt. The European Christian Crusaders systematically massacred scores of innocent Arabs (both Muslims and Coptic Christians) including men, women and children without the slightest provocation (Johnson246). Tamam recalls the massacre the crusaders did in her village, "The Crusader mourners pulled the one hand... out of mine. They smeared it and his head with pig fat, as they did to desecrate the bodies of our soldiers. They hung my brother's head and hand with them on pikes above the city walls"(41). Tamam is searching for her brother to make sure that he has made his way to the martyr's room. Tamam has the chance to revenge from her rapists but she refuses because she wants them to live in pain forever:

TAMAM

I've been in heaven for over hundreds of years.

I have seen every person, even the guards who raped me,  
who apologized profusely.

And, what they believed,

what they feared even as they raped me,...

and I was allowed to cut off their genitals.

But I chose not to and said I'll be back to do it later,

because I didn't want to hurt them once and be done with it.

I wanted them to fear me forever. (48)

Shamieh hints for another type of violence against women called 'Son Preference'. Tamam speaks about her family's favor of the boy saying, "I am the last of seven sisters, good luck for the family. Because, after me, a brother was born. The only one"(37). Then the Chorus comments saying, "Why do our people rejoice when a boy child is born"(37). Krug states, "Son preference may manifest in other practices which are discriminatory against girls. These practices include: neglect of girls; different feeding of girls and boys; a disproportionate burden of housework for girls; less access to education for girls than their brothers"(7). Shamieh genuinely refuses all forms of violence against women and gives quick hints to these problems through her dialogue.

Aiesha is the third to speak. She belongs to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She was the first woman to explode herself in the Israeli Palestinian conflict. Muslims call this state martyrdom while non-Muslims call it suicide bombing. Martine Luther King declared his famous statement, "Hate begets hate; violence begets violence; toughness begets a greater toughness"(455). Aiesha was the victim of the violence of the Israeli occupation to Palestine. Violence led her to use violent acts to revenge her people. She admitted that millions of women all over history suffered as Tamam. Aiesha says, "You could start by acknowledging your story is not unique. You were raped and lost a brother to war. That happened to millions of women throughout history. In fact, the Crusades were nothing compared to the Palestinian and Israeli wars I lived through"(45). It is obvious that the Israeli occupation increases the level of violence in the Palestinian society in general. For women, the oppressive policies of the occupation present a double source of violence, reinforcing the violence they experience. Palestinian women also have faced psychological harm and suffering, including threats of coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty. Ministry of Women's Affairs in Palestine asserts these violations against women in its report about violence against the Palestinian women because of the Israeli occupation and concluded the following results:

The Israeli occupation contributes to increasing the marginalization of Palestinian women both directly and indirectly. The direct effect is manifested through women's exposure to all types of violence perpetrated by the occupation, such as beating, cursing, forcing women to deliver babies at checkpoints, etc. Women are also

subjected to violence as females, not just Palestinians, via sexual or verbal assault at checkpoints, among others. Indirect effects of the occupation that contribute to VAW include, for example, the obstruction of the Palestinian legal system, which in turn hinders the provision of legal protection for Palestinian women, or the disabling of the Palestinian Legislative Council, hence hindering the ability and work of institutions to amend laws and legislation related to women's rights.(9)

Mishra declares that Postcolonial feminism can provide an outlet for such women to discuss various experiences from the colonial period. These can include "migration, slavery, oppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential discourses of imperialism (131). Aiesha is an example to this; she presents the oppression of the Israeli occupation. Although she confesses that under the Israeli occupation, their suffering was incomparable; her words imply facing various types of violence against women stated by Kumari in page 4. Many reports have documented the tragedy and suffering of women giving birth at checkpoints, house demolitions, inspections at checkpoints, and the difficulty of accessing health centers, workplaces, schools and universities. All of these measures increase the burden of the occupation on Palestinian women and often deny them their basic rights, an outcome that institutions largely fail to reflect in their reports and documentation of VAW. In a press release issued by Maan News Agency in 2007, reference was made to psychological and sexual violence at Israeli military checkpoint in Beit Safafa. Cases were documented of a number of Palestinian women who reported being forced to strip naked at checkpoints under the pretext of security checks. In another press report about this degrading policy, an article in Al-Hayat Al-Jadida newspaper confirmed the occurrence of forced strip searches under the pretext of security checks. With regard to Israeli occupation soldiers' practice of VAW, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights has documented a testimony of a woman who talked about her experience when visiting her husband in Ashqelon Prison:

We reached the Jalmeh checkpoint. There we went through 16 doors or so before reaching the Israeli buses that transported us to the prisons. .... The soldiers called the sister of one of the prisoners and made her go into one of the rooms and then asked her to take off all her clothes.

The same happened with the wife of a prisoner called Youssef. When it was my turn ...they asked me to take off my jilbab (gown) and I said no. They made me go out, and later they made all three of us go back into the same room and locked us in for about 45 minutes... (Ministry of Women's Affairs)

Aiesha was very precise in relation to her exposure to violence. She does not recite any situation to let the American audience follow the news about the Israeli violence against the Palestinians. Shamieh may evoke the readers' attention to imagine Aiesha's suffering and to think about the Palestinian -Israeli conflict. Postcolonial feminism can be seen as having a similar goal in giving a voice to those that were voiceless in the traditional dominant social order as Aiesha. It is also clear that Shamieh is unwilling to declare allegiance to one side or the other in the Palestinian Israeli crisis because she wants to reach to everybody with or against Israel. She wants to make an inquiry about the real price of violence from all sides. She concludes in her play that the Israeli Palestinian struggle is useless. Shamieh concludes that killing each other is worthless and in vain, it is the dark past of the two nations, "You go to remember that all the killing and struggling on both sides was in vain" (46). Shamieh remarks in the introduction to *The Black Eyed*: "I wanted to be smart about my career choices. . . . until I felt safe, which is hard to feel when you're in your early twenties anyway, particularly if you are a minority trying to break into a field where few or no members of your race are working" (7).

The Architect narrates the fourth tale dealing with violence. She interrupts Aiesha and begins her story. She is nameless, modern woman, who belongs to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She is identified only as The Architect. She introduces herself "I'm an architect of unseen structures and buildings that will never be built. I am the mother of children who will never be born (49). She is the play's most fully formed character: a jittery, neurotic woman who had fantasies about having sex with her boss and who then died in a plane hijacking. She was a Palestinian American woman who lived in America with her heritage of the Arabic customs and traditions that is why she felt alienated. According to Kumari's definition of violence against women, The Architect has encountered psychological violence occurring within the general community, including intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere. She has resorted to escape from a

world she could not live in into a world of her imagination. She lost her living soul into a world of fantasy and daydreams:

ARCHITECT

Why must I speak in words when I think in images?

Hands! Movement! Change!

I'm an architect of unseen structures  
and buildings that will never be built.

I am the mother of children who will never be born,

CHORUS (DELILAH, TAMAM)

the lover of men who will remain unloved. (49)

The Architect begins her story repeating that she is not an articulate person. She is only articulate when she speaks about architecture. She tells her story with the half-bread employer in a job interview who had an Arabic heritage by coincidence. She felt in love with him the moment she saw him. He interviewed her about architecture while she was imagining a whole life with him, "I would marry you in a heartbeat. Our children will have an Arab last name and I will raise them in the culture you do not know and you will not understand why I'm still a virgin at thirty. (53) She imagined engagement, marriage, having children, fight, treachery and death while sitting in her seat before him. The Architect says, "Soon enough, I'll be staring at you in your coffin. Our three-quarter breed children will be crying(62). She says, "I realize that I've done it again. In my mind, I planned a whole life"(61). She worked with him for one summer but they did not renew her contract because she was introverted and daydreamer. It is clear that The Architect suffered lack of assimilation inside the American society. She could not balance between her Arabic customs and traditions and the freedom of the American society. Ruth Ravve states in his study about Arab women in America, "Despite the fact that Islamic groups are growing in major cities in the U.S., many Muslim women living here say assimilating into Western culture is still very difficult"(1).

Five years passed, she remained a virgin steeped in her life of fantasy. She decided to get rid of her Arabic customs to be able to live in America. The Architect says, "If I'm not married by thirty-five, I would stop being precious and just have sex (64). She realized that in order to assimilate in the American society, she had to get rid of her Arabic and Islamic traditions. She phoned the half bread telling him that she wants to meet him urgently.

He asked her to take the first flight and she did. She had more daydreams while sitting at the airport waiting for her flight. She imagined that Arabs hijack the plane. They wanted to kill all the passengers. The Architect realized that they are Arabs; they spoke her mother tongue language. She discussed them and became so articulate in her mother language; she could not speak it in reality. She convinced them to leave the plane land safely. They explained to the passengers that they only want to be heard, to be understood and to be treated as human beings, "All the Americans in the plane would listen to the grievances of the men who were willing to kill and die to be heard"(68). The architect's dialogue with the hijackers is a mirror of Betty's thoughts. She lets her Arabic heritage speak declaring the reasons for 9/11 attacks. The Architect addresses the American society saying:

So what if terror helped bring down apartheid in South Africa?

CHORUS (TAMAM)

So what if the Black Panther Movement got civil rights workers moving

just a little bit quicker?

CHORUS (DELILAH)

So what if the American government supports corrupt leaders in our countries and then kills hundreds of thousands of Arabs when those leaders don't do. (66)

During the real flight, fantasies became true. Arabs hijacked the plane. The Architect could recognize their language as her mother language but what she did in her daydream did not occur in reality. She wanted to talk to them and one of the hijackers recognized that she was an Arab and stopped to hear anything from her but she kept silent. She could not be articulate. They exploded the plane and she died with other Arabs and Americans. Now The Architect declares the reasons for being waiting before that room," I'm here to find that man who passed me and knew I was an Arab. I know that I could have stopped him before he did what he did if I had the right words. The man who killed me is the only one who can tell me, I'm here to ask him. (73) She is searching for justification. The Architect declares the reasons behind the outrage of the hijackers in some of the play's overtly tendentious passages, unfortunately, as she imagines a day when:

In fact, they'll refuse to get off of the plane,  
until Palestinians are allowed the right to self-determination,

Iraqis are not killed so their oil can be stolen,  
The people on the plane don't buy the crap the American government  
tries to sell us about trying to secure human rights...

CHORUS (DELILAH, TAMAM)

having the gall to use human rights

ARCHITECT

as an excuse to bomb those human beings  
while being allies. (68)

Shamieh declares her opinion through The Architect. She refuses the policy of the United States of America towards the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular. The reason for creating Islamic terrorism is the long history of Western colonialism to the Middle East; the Storm of Desert against Iraq ; the Crusade against Terrorism in Afghanistan; the false principles of human rights that the United States of America apply on non-Muslims only; and the interference of America in the Middle East's affairs to control oil wells. This history of prejudice and unfair towards Islamic countries is the fertile soil to terrorism to grow and destroy, the past leads to the present. Shamieh and other Arabs and Muslims do not agree on replying with violent accidents. Exploding innocent people will not solve problems, on the contrary, it doubly complexes them. She rejects both sides.

ARCHITECT

All that still doesn't make it right to kill.

I would say to them-You're hijacking this plane full of people who are ignorant, who are looking at you and saying What kind of people could do such violent, cruel things?

ARCHITECT

They don't know that it's the kind of people

The American government has been doing

just as violent, cruel things to

in its people's name for generations.

Maybe they don't care.

But they're not worth killing yourself over.

They call us terrorists.(65)

The Architect is the author's voice who addresses the Americans after 9/11. Olimovnastates, "Social sources of violence are well-known for a long time. First of all, it is unequal position of groups and individuals in the stratification system of a society, connected with the distribution of social benefits. It is known that social inequality generates extremist forms of behavior, including violence and terror." (79). The Architect in spite of being skillful, could hardly find a job in America due to her conservative customs and traditions. She could not assimilate inside the American society and the society did not accept her. Her culture's rules prevented her from making a relationship with any man before marriage. She says, "I live with my parents, always have, till a man takes me from my father's house"(54). In spite of being 30 years old, this bright, skilled woman still lives with her family and is a virgin, for she believes in adhering to her culture's tenets about the proper conduct for unmarried daughters. The postcolonial feminists' goal of giving a voice to those that were voiceless in the traditional dominant social order appears in The Architect's dialogue (Mishra 131). She provides an insight for the Americans into the mind of Palestinian Arab women living among them; a Palestinian American woman suffers inside the American society from her Arabic heritage and finally dies by Arabs.

Postcolonial feminism encompasses women in both the developing and developed world. Much of the feminist theory and scholarship produced by Third World women remains invisible in the West, though some feminists from the Third World who live in the West are increasingly making their voices heard. In addition to analyzing their own situations, Third World women are articulating powerful critiques of the Eurocentrism of much Western feminism, its amnesia about colonial history and its tendency to reproduce colonial modes of representation (Mishra 132). The Architect plays this role in *The Black Eyed*. Her voice pays attention to Third World women who live in the West and their suffering due to the gap between the Arabic and Western customs and traditions. Linda Winer says about the Architect, " This birdlike modern woman becomes so layered and unusual that we begin to suspect that Shamieh wrote this first as a solo for her, and grafted on the others to broaden the lens...The Architect's words pose a human problem as well as an intellectual one"(1). At 35, she decided that at least she would lose her virginity, but found herself, awfully and ironically, on a weapon headed for the twin towers. She suffered from an

identity crisis due to her inability to assimilate inside her supposed country. She was an American citizen; however, she could not live fully either as an American or an Arab. In her world of fantasy, she loved, married, had children, felt jealous and suffered from her husband's death. She lived a whole life in her imagination because she was unable to live it in reality. Basiouny demonstrates:

The Architect's narrative touches upon themes that concern second-generation Arab Americans, namely: living between two cultures, holding to tradition, representing one's people, explaining the home culture to the host culture, and the responsibility of and need for marrying people from the same cultural background to keep the lineage alive. Her fantasies reveal the importance of knowing the mother tongue that she herself did not learn. (140)

Before finishing her story, the Architect recognizes Aiesha. She declares her absolute refusal to violence. Shamieh asserts her opinion that practicing violence is worthless and destroys everything including the victims. The Architect searched the web the night before her death and saw Aiesha's photo. Aiesha exploded herself and the victims were not Israeli, it was a young Palestinian girl. The girl's name was Amal that means, "Hope". Her mother was from the richest family in Ras Abu Ammar, the village that no longer exists. Her mother's family fled to Gaza but she had a deep sense of belonging to her village. She welcomed working as a maid to remain. The young girl used to hang the key to their house in Ras Abu Ammar around her neck. That is a Palestinian ritual that anyone who has a destroyed house by Israeli should hang its key around his neck in order to return to it after liberation.

Aiesha remembers that day when she exploded herself and killed the young Palestinian girl. The girl's mother left her away because the girl offered to clean with her. Israeli teenagers took her with them, bought her a sandwich and ice cream. When Aiesha was close to them, they recognized her as an Arab, so they went away except the young Palestinian girl who smiled at her. She exploded herself and killed only that young girl with her.

ARCHITECT

The teenagers bought her an ice cream cone.

AIESHA

And they ran and left her for dead when they saw me coming.

It was too late to stop everything,

the one step I took back was my last.  
The little girl didn't understand she was going to die.  
She smiled at me. (80)

The Architect remembers reading the phrase written under Aiesha's photo, "They are killing one another"(80). The women now understand why Aiesha got out of the room, Tamam says, "So, the reason the martyrs don't want you in there, is because you're no good at being no good (80). Shamieh asserts her opinion; the Israeli Palestinian struggle is in vain. Thousands of innocents lose their souls in a useless conflict. It is time to announce the aim of the play. Shamieh skillfully declares her aim through clarifying what she stated earlier obscurely. The women begin to ask the ongoing questions again. The following are the unanswered questions and unquestioned answers that Shamieh began her play with:

DELILAH

Isn't the only way we can assure we're never oppressed is to oppress other people?

ARCHITECT

Wouldn't they do the same to us the minute they had the chance?

CHORUS (DELILAH, TAMAM, ARCHITECT)

Why is violence only wrong when we use it?

CHORUS (ALL FOUR WOMEN)

Isn't violence the only thing these people understand?(82)

Violence against the Palestinian women is the main theme of this play. Shamieh discusses how violence interferes in the human life. Kuchwara confirms this saying, "Shamieh's writing is powerful! Violence haunts the four Palestinian women occupying an anteroom of the afterlife"(1). These questions are the messages that Shamieh wants to deliver to the American and Arab nations. Oppression and violence are destructive to the victim and the victimizer. Aiesha summarizes the Arab world's question "How do you survive in a violent world and not be violent (82). The Architect declares the hijackers motives "Wouldn't they do the same to us the minute they had the chance? Shamieh declares repeatedly that she refuses the violence from both sides. The Architect says, "When we kill ourselves in the hope of hurting them, we show that we agree that we feel our lives are dispensable (83). Chad Jones notes "Themes of violence run through all the women's

stories, and much of Shamieh's drama concentrates on conflicting views of violence. Is a suicide bombing cowardice or courage? (1)

### ***Conclusion***

The struggle of Third World women representatives who live in the West and in the developing world-for recognition lasted for a long period. Postcolonial feminists are still in the process of contesting the Eurocentric gaze that portrays Third World women primarily as victims of ignorance and restrictive cultures and religions. Third World women are making their voices heard and are beginning to change the picture of Arab females in the West. Postcolonial feminists have argued for the rewriting of history based on the specific experiences of formerly colonized people, and their various strategies for survival. The females' stories in *The Black Eyed* address the hardship and oppression that faced Palestinian women through four different ages due to colonization. Shamieh intentionally awakened her female voices from death to tell the Western society that Third World women fought and still fight against colonialism, racism, sexism, and economic forces. Third World women are not subservient to male domination; on the contrary, they played and still play vital roles in shaping history.

Violence due to colonization was the common factor among the four women that Shamieh used to reflect their role in history. The four women have arrived at this place in the afterlife due to violence. Two of them, Delilah and Aiesha, were parts of this violence. They lost some of their family members, so they determined revenge. While Tamam and the Architect were victims of violence without having vital roles in directing it. The Architect as well as Tamam did not react to violence with more violence. Shamieh depicts the Architect's death by Arabs to show that reacting with violence is devastative and destructive. Tamam also faced severe violence; however, she refused to revenge when she got the opportunity to cut the gentiles of her rapists. The Architect relates the past to the present. Current violence is the result of hundreds and thousands of years of violence directed against the Middle East in general and the Palestinians in particular. The four women have been exposed to various types of violence. Delilah encountered trafficking and forced prostitution while Tamam was raped in a political conflict. Aiesha faced all types of oppression and persecution under the Israeli occupation, while The

Architect's human rights were neglected and harassed inside her supposed country. Shamieh's writing is powerful in its description of violence that faced the four women. She rejects violence from both sides because the methods of violence may change down through the centuries, but the horrifying pain they inflict remains the same. Kumari's definition of violence against women has deeply reflected the violence that the four females faced. Betty Shamieh has also applied Mishra's theory in relation to postcolonial feminism successfully in *The Black Eyed*.

**Betty Shamieh's Play *The Black Eyed Treating Violence through Four Different Ages***

**Key words:** violence against women, Palestinian American, *The Black Eyed*, The Palestinian Crisis, postcolonial feminism

**Abstract**

This paper treats the concept of violence against women in general and the Palestinian women in particular. Betty Shamieh (1979-) concentrates on Palestinian women's crises as a result of the Israeli occupation. In her play *The Black Eyed* (2005), she shows the influence of violence against Palestinian women through four different ages represented by four women. She is also very objective in her portrayal to the extent of blaming her ancestors for practicing abuse against one of the females in the story, namely, Delilah. These female voices in *The Black Eyed* refuse to be subservient. They introduce a postcolonial feminist perspective through their stories. Rather than identifying themselves with traditional roles such as wives or mothers, they actively debate the social injustices within their community. Western feminism has never been heedful to the differences pertaining to class, race, feelings, and settings of women of once colonized territories. Postcolonial feminism rejects Western feminism on the ground of its utter 'eurocentrism'. Of course, the long Western tendency to homogenize and universalize women and their experiences led to the emergence of 'postcolonial feminism'. The postcolonial feminist theory is a suitable frame of reference to Betty Shamieh female characters in *The Black Eyed*. The four women fight the stereotypical image of Western views towards the Eastern women. Western literature used to depict Eastern women as victims of female genital Mutilation; patriarchal hegemony; Arab familial system; or victims of the Islamic code. Shamieh fights this universality genuinely. Four females died due to their active participation in political struggle against the colonizer. The objective of this paper is to show how Shamieh challenges the Western views of Eastern women

directed by Raj Kumar Mishra in relation to postcolonial feminism. Violence against Palestinian women is also discussed framed by Kumari's definition of violence against women.

### العيون السوداء لبيتي شامية ومعالجة العنف عبر اربعة عصور مختلفة

هذا البحث يعالج مصطلح العنف ضد المرأة بشكل عام والمرأة الفلسطينية بشكل خاص. الكاتبة الامريكية فلسطينية الأصل بيتي شامية تعطي اهتماما كبيرا الى ازمان العنف ضد المرأة الفلسطينية نتيجة للاحتلال الاسرائيلي. في مسرحيتها العيون السوداء توضح بيتي تأثير العنف ضد المرأة الفلسطينية على مر اربعة عصور مختلفة. والاصوات النسائية في هذا العمل لديها أصوات جريئة ومرنة ويرفضن التبعية الى الذكور. إن شخصيات العيون السوداء ترفض القيام بالدور التقليدي للمرأة كزوجة وام ولكنهن افراض مشاركات في النزاع السياسي والظلم الاجتماعي السائد في مجتمعهن. إن هدف هذه الورقة البحثية هو عرض ثمن العنف ضد المرأة الفلسطينية من خلال عرض قصص النساء الأربع اللاتي تروى في حياة ما بعد الموت. الحركة النسوية الغربية لم تراعى بعض الفروق المرتبطة بالطبقة والجنس ومشاعر النساء الاتي عانين تحت وطأة الاستعمار. الحركة النسوية لما بعد الكولونيالية رفضت النسوية الغربية بسبب تعصبها الأوروبي. وقد قاد اتجاه الغرب الى الشمولية والتعميم ضد المرأة في الشرق الأوسط الى ظهور الحركة النسوية لما بعد الكولونيالية. وتعتبر هذه الحركة إطارا نظريا مناسباً لتحليل الشخصيات النسوية في مسرحية العيون السوداء لبيتي شامية. حيث ان النساء الأربع يحاربن النظرة النمطية الغربية للمرأة في البلاد التي كانت مستعمرة والتي كانت تركز على ابراز المرأة الشرقية ضحية الى ختان الاناث، السيطرة الابوية او سيطرة الأنظمة العائلية او لسوء فهم التعاليم الإسلامية. الكاتبة الامريكية الفلسطينية الأصل بيتي شامية حاربت هذه النمطية ببراعة فأظهرت النساء الأربع يتعرض للعنف ثم الموت نتيجة الى مشاركتهن الفعالة في الصراع السياسي ضد الاستعمار. هذه الورقة البحثية توضح ان بيتي شامية تتحدى النظرة النمطية الغربية الى النساء في الشرق موجه بنظرية ميشرا وتعالج العنف التي تعرضن له هؤلاء النساء من خلال تعريف كومارا للعنف ضد المرأة.