

**The Interlocking Matrix of Oppression:
A Reading of the Nameless Women in
Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls* and Dina Soliman's *Al-'Arayis***

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Intersectionality, as an approach, fundamentally points to the various overlapping facets of an individual's identity by providing a deeper more inclusive understanding of his/her experiences with different forms of oppression. Originally, intersectionality was associated with describing the experience of women of colour since the concept was first articulated by African American women as a means to correct their omission in Feminist theorisations (Schwartz-DuPre 2012, 178). The term itself emerged from Black Feminist Activism and Scholarship in the 1970s to articulate multiple forms of oppression experienced by African American women in the US. Later, the concept was expanded by African American Feminist and law school professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to include "the intersecting of race and gender with poverty and violence within the American Criminal Justice System" (Mojab and Carpenter 2019, 275-276). In a footnote, Crenshaw wrote about her hopes for suggesting a methodology that can disrupt the tendency to see race and gender as exclusive or separable (1991, 1244); however, according to Aguilar, Crenshaw did not consider the concept she expanded as a totalizing theory or even a methodology that can travel across disciplines (2015, 208).

Over the decades, the concept has undergone several expansions: for example, in the 1990s, Patricia Collins' work about the matrices of domination added to the theorization of the concept (Mojab and Carpenter 2019, 276) and the approach was expanded to include a variety of social aspects including: disability, age, religion and sexual orientation (Pfau, Goksel and Hosemann 2021, 131). The approach has been used for the last thirty years to analyse theories of oppression that are often incorporated in anti-racist, feminist, and cultural studies fusing of "falsely separated or exclusive categories" (Carastathis 2016, 3) that position individuals at different levels of the social hierarchy.

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The Emergence of Intersectionality

In the 1960s and 1970s, women of colour found themselves divided between anti-racist and anti-patriarchal movements (Falcon 2009, 468). They criticized both feminist and civil rights movements for not dealing with race and gender issues, respectively. They were torn between feminist and civil rights struggles “because their experiences were not just based on race or gender, but on race and gender” (Falcon, 468). Schwartz-DuPre describes the experience of women of colour at the time by explaining that “they argued that white, often middle-class, women were not serving the interests of black women and that black men did little to address the issues of black women” (2012, 178). They vocalized their issues by publishing books that appeared in the 1980s and challenged both white feminists and men of colour, one of which is *But Some of Us Are Brave; All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men; Black Women's Studies* (1982). As a consequence, the need for a new critical approach that helps in understanding the overlapping nature of the concerns of women and race has emerged. Intersectionality “claimed to re-envision feminism in a way that critically considered the matrices of oppression with and among both race and gender” (Schwartz-DuPre 2012, 178).

To sum up, ‘intersectionality’ considers how the merging of different forms of discrimination leads society to examine social problems that could be sidestepped. It prevents the community from homogenizing categories because “oppression and privilege by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, nationality [...] do not act independently of each other” but interconnect with each other (Garry 2011, 827). Ultimately, the concept provides society with more effective solutions to problems since it takes into consideration the social factors and accumulations that have led to them. Laws are unable to do so because they leave no middle room in the either/or cases. Intersectionality, however, can thrive in the grey area of social problems (Falcon 2009, 469).

Strands of Criticism

Intersectionality is akin to ‘traveling theories’ as it moves across disciplines and geographies. It faces at least two strands of criticism; “one that pushes for more categorization,” and another that “aims to abolish categorization altogether” (Schwartz-DuPre 2012, 179). Promoters of the first strand argue that without categorization, people are left without allies to support them. They base their argument on humans’ instinctive need to clan. The second group of critics pushes in the other direction calling for a complete rejection of categories altogether. Questions about how to constitute social groups have inevitably

resulted in questions about whether to categorize or separate at all (McCall 2005,1778).

In her article “The Complexity of Intersectionality”, contemporary feminist theorist Leslie McCall offers three categorical approaches that manage the complexity of intersectionality in social life. The three approaches are defined in terms of their stance towards anti-categorical, inter-categorical, and intra-categorical categories (2005, 1773). First, the anti-categorical complexity aims to deconstruct analytical categories and is premised on the belief that social life is too complex to use fixed categories. Fixed categories only simplify identity and produce further inequalities by focusing on difference. Instead, this perspective focuses on a holistic method of studying intersectionality without categories. Second, the inter-categorical approach recognizes inequalities. Its advocates believe in the existence of inequalities and aim at studying how they function and change over time. Finally, the intra-categorical complexity, like the anti-categorical, rejects categories but uses them strategically while always accounting for the fact that categories are changing. This approach recognizes the changing nature of categories and aims to critically consider them at any moment in time (2005, 1773).

The following section presents, accordingly, an intersectional reading of Ntozake Shange’s masterpiece *For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf* (1975), focusing on the overlapping changing identity of the nameless women in the choreopoem. This work was the first self-proclaimed “choreopoem” that formally incorporated poetry, performative dancing and music. The researcher adopts, in the upcoming analysis, the intra-categorical approach that rejects fixed categories but uses them to trace characters’ changing reaction towards oppression though out the play.

Shange’s Choreopoem *For Colored Girls* (1975)

For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow is Enuf (1975) is Ntozake Shange's first and most acclaimed theatre piece. It consists of a series of poetic monologues that are choreographed to music accompanied by dance movements. It tells the stories of seven women who have suffered oppression in a racist and sexist society. The text discusses topics like violence against women, abortion, emotional hunger, poverty, estrangement, loss of virginity and body shaming. The play “provides hope for women who have known the bitterness of the storm” (Tate 1983, 171). It starts with a poem about the potentials colored women have but are unaware of. The lady in brown explains “sing a black girl's song/ bring her out/ to know herself/ to know you”

([1975] 1994, 4). As a child, the playwright was forced into an integrated school where she suffered from discrimination. Later on, she got married and divorced at an early age and was forced to start her life all over from scratch. She had her fair share of failed suicide attempts. She felt alienated, foreign and unaccepted in society, so she was forced to deal with herself as an independent woman. “Shange used her own life experiences in the work [*For Colored Girls*], along with the experiences of women she has met along the way” (Richard 2001, 1). She studied many art forms, such as African storytelling and dancing, all of which had impact on her writings.

For Colored Girls can be considered a form of poetic drama because of its limited action (Gorečan 2016, 123). It started as a single poem and later a set of poems that were read in women's bars. Soon several poems were developed and placed into a performance piece, “this style of performance was termed choreopoem, denoting a performance where dance is performed to poetry.” (Richard 2001, 2) The stage directions, for instance, read as follows: “All of the ladies start to dance. The lady in green, the lady in blue, and the lady in yellow do the pony, the big boss line, the swim, the nose dive.” ([1975]1994, 6-7) Shange uses dance as a determinant factor that intertwines with words making her text different from those written by traditional authors of poetic drama. Although dancing is not mentioned in any definition of poetic drama, it is vital here to the choreopoem being a non-static type of poetic drama combining verbal and non-verbal communication (Gorečan 2016, 125). Dancing then constitutes an integral part that is used to communicate meaning by using bodies instead of words not just an additional source of entertainment but as integral part of a performance that delights the soul. Appreciating the importance of dance and music in providing sustenance, the lady in yellow admits that “we gotta dance to keep from cryin” and is backed by the lady in brown who adds “we gotta dance to keep from dyin” ([1975]1994, 15).

Nameless Women

Shange’s first choreopoem consists of the confessions of seven ladies who are nameless. Each is wearing a costume that represents a colour of the rainbow. What distinguishes these women is that with the exception of the colour of their costumes, they are ordinary and average. The author does not even give them names but refers to them as colours. They are coloured women in every sense of the word. They are coloured because they are not dressed white and coloured because they are dressed in the colours (yellow, red, green, purple, blue, orange, and brown, the colour of earth. The choreopoem marks the transition of ladies

who have considered suicide or death but found hope at the end of the spectrum. It is about the transition between life and death. The thought of suicide is the thought of death, and the characters are classified according to the experiences that led them to that thought. The lady in brown uses the play's title explaining its significance "this is for colored girls who have considered suicide/ but moved to the ends of their own rainbows" (Shange [1975]1994, 6).

Rainbows stand for fresh starts. They appear after turmoil. Similarly, after being subjugated, the women in the play begin to appreciate their true essence. Shange's symbolic use of the colours of the rainbow was the result of noticing a rainbow on her way back home from work. While observing the variety of its embedded colours, she realized that it provided a justification for the existence of women in all shades. Just as there are no distinct lines separating the rainbow's colours, these are also no distinct separations between the oppressed women (Rao 2009, 40). The performance is a visual proof of the possibility of co-existence despite difference.

Intersectional Reading of the Characters

The nameless characters share the common experience of a nothingness that is born out of the double burden of being black and woman. They live in a world where being female and black makes them twice-oppressed (Rao 2009, 40). The heart of the experience of nothingness is loss and debasement of self.

LADY IN BROWN: She's been dead so long
Closed in silence so long
She doesn't know the sound
Of her own voice
Her infinite beauty
She's half-notes scattered
Without rhythm / no tune
Sing her sighs
Sing the song of her possibilities
Sing a righteous gospel
Let her be born
Let her be born. ([1975] 1994, 4)

Based on the previous quotation, the women see themselves empty or void from the inside, unaware of their potential or capabilities as seen in the words of the lady in brown. She compares herself to a song without a rhythm. She starts by

singing the sighs of pain and suffering and ends up singing a victorious tune. The poem that accompanied the movement is a microcosm of the whole play. By starting with the word “dead” and ending with the word “born,” it suggests that the transition of the lady in brown is similar to the transitions of all the ladies.

In the choreopoem, the women speak of men who show up as friends and end up being rapists. They meet rapists who smile nicely over dinner in circles for companionship and when women smile back, society assumes that it is an invitation, a sign of the women’s desire to be raped. Women are to blame. The lady in blue asks, “are you sure/you did not suggest” ([1975]1994, 17). In fact, Afro-American history has shown that sexual abuse has been taken for granted as an occupational hazard since the time of slavery. Black women's bodies were within reach at all times to slave masters and their subordinates (Rao 2009, 47). Unlike the rape of a white women, the rape of a black women is not considered cruel; it is considered as the logical solution to the males’ sexual needs (2009, 47).

LADY IN RED: cuz it turns out the nature of rape has changed

LADY IN BLUE: we can now meet them in circles we frequent
for companionship

LADY IN PURPLE: we see them at the coffeehouse

LADY IN BLUE: wit someone else we know

LADY IN RED: we cd even have em over for dinner
and get raped in our own houses

by invitation

a friend. ([1975]1994, 20-21)

Rape can happen “anytime anywhere to female of all ages” (Davis 2011, 42) but Shange’s portrayal of the raping incidents towards coloured women - by familiar attackers who take advantage of them - is asserted by Emeritus Professor of Sociology Robert Staples: “The majority of black rape victims are familiar with their attacker, who was a friend, relative or neighbour. Many of the rapes occur after a date and are what some describe as date rapes [...] Large number of black men believe sexual relations to be their 'right ', after a certain amount of dating” (1996, 34). The play moves from the physical, psychological, and social suffering a woman goes through (due to rape) to another female suffering related to sexuality which is abortion. In 'abortion cycle #I', a detailed account of the procedural invasion of a woman’s body is given:

LADY IN BLUE: tubes tables whitewashed windows
grime from age wiped over once
legs spread
anxious
eyes crawling up on me
eyes rollin in my thighs
metal horses gnawin my womb. ([1975]1994, 22)

Images like "legs spread ", "anxious ", "crawling up on me", "rollin in my thighs" and "gnawin my womb" recapture the action of forced intercourse as if the action takes place twice and the woman relives the horrific experience dealing with its consequences one more time (Rao 2009, 53). Pregnancy, abortion, rape and their consequences are all traumas that affect only females, in spite of the fact that a male has actively participated in their origination. Worst of all, she has to go through all of this by herself. She adds "and nobody came/cuz nobody knew/once I waz pregnant and ashamed of myself" (1975]1994, 23).

In the "no more love poems", the lady in purple who is the embodiment of a loveless love affair, lives with fictitious ideas and has no dancing partners to understand her. Her self- acknowledgement becomes a step towards her independence and self-definition. She says "idont know any more tricks i am really colored & really sad," and adds, "I don't want to dance with ghosts/ snuggle lovers I made up in my drunkenness/lemme love you just like I am/ a colored girl" ([1975]1994, 44). Her emotional hunger is pointed out by the lady in blue who thinks that displaying too much affection is the cause of their loveless lives. Her fellow ladies start listing the excuses a man would typically give to justify his misbehaviour:

LADY IN BROWN: no this one is it, 'o baby, ya know I was high,
I'm sorry

LADY IN PURPLE: I'm only human and inadequacy is what makes
us human, and if we was perfect we wdnt have nothing to strive for,
so you might as well go on and forgive me pretty baby, cause I'm
sorry

LADY IN GREEN: Shut up bitch, I told you waz sorry

LADY IN RED: now I know that ya know I love ya, but I
ain'tevrgonna love ya like ya want me to love ya, I'm sorry.
([1975]1994, 52)

It has been noted that throughout the play, when a woman speaks, others listen or mime the story, creating a sense of sisterhood and sharing. Telling related stories is in a sense an invitation to the women audience to tell their own stories, creating a sense of plurality and commonality. In every poem, universal problems that women all over the world suffer from are seen from a different perspective by adding the colour factor. As the lady in yellow clearly explains, coloured women carry a double burden which they have not reached an understanding of. She explains “bein alive and bein a woman and being colored is a metaphysical dilemma/I haven’t conquered yet/do you see the point my spirit is too ancient to understand the separation of soul and gender” ([1975]1994, 45).

The play ends with women unable to find love but at least defying oppression and celebrating self-acceptance which they lacked at the beginning of the play. Feminist historian Carol P. Christ explains, “Though colored girls have considered suicide because they have been abused by white society and black men, this need no longer be the case. The rainbow (in the title) is now understood as an image of their own beauty, and it "is enuf” (1980, 99). Their sisterhood and support reflect female empowerment. The play has proved to be a success. It was the second play by a black woman to ever reach Broadway, only preceded by Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* in 1959.

In the next section, an Arabic play written by the young Egyptian playwright Dina Soliman is closely examined. *Al-’Arayis* (2017) introduces a similar cycle of oppression experienced by women in the Arab world, in which their origins and cultural background play an instrumental role. An intersectional reading of the nameless women of the play is attempted, shedding light on the suffering of women in this part of the world. The play was originally written in Arabic and translated into German. This paper offers an English translation of the quotes used.

Soliman’s play *Al-’Arayis* [The Dolls] (2017)

Young Egyptian writer Dina Soliman’s play *Al-’Arayis* (2017) is arguably an example of post-modern drama. It consists of ten portraits that present ten different dolls who disclose several ways in which women are objectified and displayed in the Arab community. The dolls are not given names. They are referred to by their role in society. They include the manikin, the marionette, *Al-Mawlid* doll (that commemorates the observance of the birth of Prophet Muhammed in the lunar month of *Rabi’ Al -Awwal*), the envy paper doll, the shadow puppet, the mermaid, *Arous el- Nil* or the Nile Bride and others (Moustafa 2019). The dolls are meant to inanimate solid toys made of paper,

wood, plastic or cloth but somehow come to life on stage and start revealing their struggles using simple colloquial language. The play incorporates dancing and handholding between the female characters. They start by placing their chairs in a circle. They often act in each others' stories and mimic action. Each woman stands behind a transparent glass window for display after finishing her monologue she becomes a static doll in an attempt to express the injustice girls in the Arab world suffer from due to considering women commodities as Adawy claims.

Soliman uses the fragmentation technique since no sequence is adopted. In fact, stage directions at the beginning of the play read as follows: "This play is fit for any time or place" (2017, 11). It lacks a progressive plot. There is no chronological structure in which the action rises, reaches a climax or a conflict, and ends with a resolution or denouement. The play offers a familiar theme with an agonizing twist: the patriarchal oppression of women in Arab and/or Middle Eastern communities never ends.

More Nameless Women

The women characters have no names because they do not exemplify any specific type of Arab Middle Eastern woman. They come from various social and intellectual levels and are portrayed as toys on a toy store shelf that wait for men to choose them. In a dialogue that is layered with insinuated meaning, the dolls say:

DOLL 3: We are dolls just like you but we are not for sale; we are for exhibiting

DOLL 4: What do you mean?

DOLL 3: We are placed behind glass windows for the customer to stare at us; he is allowed to hold or even touch us if he wants to

DOLL 1: He chooses one of us after sorting out all those on the shelf

DOLL 2: Then the customer says he wants a doll that looks just like us but intact and brand new. (2017, 19)

For many Arab men, women who give too much of themselves end up unworthy of proper marriage, despite the fact that these men have given themselves the liberty to women. When it comes to marriage, men look for virgins who have not been touched. Egyptian Feminist Nawal El Saadawi writes that an Arab woman "possesses more value when she is new [...] a virgin who has not been made use of before. Her value drops with previous use [...] a woman who has

experience with life and men [...] is met with refusal as though experience were a stigma” ([1977] 2007, 114). The quotation reveals the double moral standards some Arab men hold on to by believing that previous relationships ruin females’ chances for proper marriage. At the heart of the standards that govern Arab societies lies the assertion that whereas men view their sexual experience as a source of pride and virility, women must be made to view their sexual experience as a source of shame and degradation ([1977] 2007, 48).

In another portrait, the manikin doll discusses the prevailing right pedestrians give themselves in the Arab world to check, judge and comment on women’s choice of clothing, blaming victims for rape and sexual harassment; believing that there is a casual relationship between outfits and consent (O’Keefe 2014, 2). The manikin doll screams “I am what I wear. My clothes are part of my personality and who I am. I am not wearing anything to impress anyone. Can’t you get it?” (2017, 22) The way Soliman describes the suffering of the Manikin doll mimics what many Arab women have to go through on a daily basis. They are exposed to physical and verbal abuse in the streets based on arbitrary judgement (El Saadawi [1977] 2007, 220).

An equally significant portrait shows the marionette doll that has strings holding onto her to guide her movement. She represents the average girl who lives in a patriarchal community that decides for her the next step. She loses the ability to act or stand up for herself. Ilkkaracan explains that in the Arab region, “mechanisms aimed at controlling women’s bodies and sexuality continue to be one of the most powerful tools of the patriarchal management of women’s sexuality and a root cause of gender inequality” (2002, 760). The famous *Al-Mawlid* sugar doll - known for its vibrant colours, fan, and decorative style, is the subject of another controlling mechanism. She is kept out of sight; concealed in the stock house lest she attracts the pedestrians/shoppers’ attention (Moustafa 2019). Girls of the Arab World are asked to narrow their outings, remain indoors (sometimes by force) as much as possible. It is believed to be the mannerly attitude sought after by a respectable woman and is often promoted by religious ideas. However, in *Dawa'ir al-khawf: Qira'a fi khitab al-mar'a* (Circles of Fear: A Reading of Women's Discourses), Abu Zayd makes it clear that: “men's violence against women rises, with negative ideas and attitudes being promoted, even though they have nothing to do with religion or Islam as a religion” (2000, 39). Hiding women and ordering them to stay at home is just a backward misogynistic controlling mechanism (Abou-Bakr 2019, 171).

Another prominent portrait is that of the envy paper doll. In old wives’ tales, a doll shape is cut out of paper and pinned with a needle to help protect from the

evil eye or the green-eyed monster. Usually, women curse those whom they suspect are being envious and call them by the name. They pin the paper doll as they call names to destroy the envious person's evil eye that causes trouble. In this portrait, the doll stands for the prevailing superstitions in the Arab world specially those possibly involved in the rising age of marriage (Dialmy 2005, 22). Doll 2 states the following: "Cursed be those who see you and do not pray upon the prophet. Cursed are books, pens, papers and words. Cursed are love, passions and movie lines. Cursed is joy and laughter. Cursed is tomorrow, the future and its dreams. Cursed is anyone who tells you learn and excel" (2017, 32). The word "learn" can be a reference to education which is one of the major reasons causing the deferment of the age of getting married in some Arab communities: "evidence suggests a consistent relationship between more educational attainment and older ages at first marriage among women" (Salem 2016, 288). Many Arab men shy away from marrying an intelligent woman; believing their masculinity is diminished by a wife who can stand up for herself and weigh the consequences of a decision before submitting to its repercussions (El Saadawi [1977] 2007, 114).

The playwright moves to another doll that is, "the shadow puppet." As the name itself suggests, she is the girl who lives in the shadow of a controlling family (2017, 26). She lives to impress others and search out their approval. She is a naive girl who often gets manipulated by men who take advantage of her emotional hunger and deprivation. In Soliman's characterization of "the shadow puppet," she writes the following: "He used to look me in the eyes. I had mixed feelings going on inside of me; those of happiness and anxiety. I was embarrassed yet over the moon. I never thought I was able to look someone in the eye the way I did to him. I thought of leaving but I eventually surrendered to him" (2017, 38). El Saadawi explains that almost any Arab man prefers "when he decides to marry, a young virgin girl with no experience, imbued with a childish simplicity, naive, ignorant, blind 'pussy cat' who does not have inkling of her rights" ([1977] 2007, 114-115). For him, such a woman is a safe choice because she shows constant vulnerability and passivity. Emotional hunger is a universal problem; nonetheless, for Arab women, the problem is intensified by social conventions. Arab women are not expected to reveal any feelings in fear of being misunderstood or accused of being playful. While men are expected to be active and show initiative, women are expected to remain passive: "The passivity observed in Arab women is not an inherent or inborn characteristic but has been imposed upon them by society" ([1977] 2007, 110). They are not allowed to engage in premarital affairs of any kind because of customs and

traditions. With the rising age of marriage, they are, however, expected to frustrate any emotional needs.

In the subsequent portrait, the author surprisingly presents three unusual mermaids. One who wears a medical pair of eyeglasses, another who is overweight and a third who is described as a less pleasant looking girl. They shed the light on the idea of stereotyping women since mermaids are originally thought to have perfect slim bodies, long hair, and pleasant voices (Moustafa 2019). Stereotyping women can lead them in many cases to risk their lives going under the knife to achieve the tough standards set by European and American trend setters and fashion houses bloggers. Angel M. Foster, for example, discusses the evolving body image of Tunisians who have exchanged their traditional standards of beauty with Western ideals: “many young women report a desire for lighter hair, fairer skin and the svelte bodies of European models” (2006, 164). These extreme beauty measures, displayed by models and actresses on magazine covers, attract the attention of both men and women to the extent that they have almost become the norm. Body shaming is a universal problem that women all over the world suffer from. As the slim bodies grow in popularity, Middle Eastern women find it more difficult to abide by such standards since their bodies tend to be genetically plump. Being Arab, Middle Eastern, and a woman interlock creating a different cycle of oppression. Such a woman finds the need to abide by the universal standards of beauty which are very high in nature, yet her body is not even close to them. When she achieves her version of beauty, she is not free to show it because she is not supposed to attract attention. The unusual mermaids in the text assert that physical appearance remains the most crucial aspect in judging a woman whether in the dating or the professional field. Mermaid 3 says “No matter how smart, clever or special a girl is, beauty remains the key factor in the impression people form of her” (2017, 46).

Despite the emancipation of women and them gaining many of their rights, external physical appearance remains an important factor in achieving success that sometimes outweigh talent, hard work and excellence. Another mermaid says, “You need to get to know us first before you judge us” (2017, 46). In the Arab world, it is twice as crucial as it plays a huge role in finding a suitor. For Muslims who constitute most of the Arab world, beauty is one of the reasons they may receive offers of marriage, along with wealth, lineage, and religious commitment. The mermaid portrait ends with the dolls screaming, “Here comes the most beautiful woman on Earth,” pointing to an approaching doll (2017, 47). This takes the audience to the following portrait that introduces them to *Arous*

el-Nil or the Nile Bride who happens to “meet all social and cultural beauty standards” (Moustafa 2019).

The Nile Bride is an ancient Egyptian myth that Westerners find fascinating, exotic, and sometimes barbaric. It “refers to the practice of casting into the Nile/Hapy a beautiful young virgin as a sacrifice” (Budge [1912] 1970, 197) for “a plentiful inundation, a bounteous yearly coming, and an avoidance of the god Hapy’s wrath” (Abdel Hafeez 2018, 168). Hapy’s powers are associated with creation, renewal, and fertility, which explains why the human offering goes by the title of “a bride” instead of human sacrifice. She is chosen based on her distinguished beauty and guaranteed chastity as a gift to the Father of the gods. Her wedding ceremony is concluded with her drowning. The myth justifies “men’s privileges and authorizes their abuse” (De Beauvoir 1971, 255). Yet many have rejected this myth, especially with lack of evidence to support it in Ancient Egyptian history. Whether the story is accurate or not, it certainly has inspired writers like Soliman and others to revisit it in the modern era.

The Nile Bride or the most beautiful maiden in the country proves to be far from being more fortunate than the less pleasant mermaids in the play. Her exceptional beauty leads to her destruction and loss of dreams. Soliman shows that even a beautiful woman by Arab world standards is a normal oppressed woman whose beauty leads to her confinement and hiding. This portrait may also be a reference to the widely spread obnoxious phenomenon in the Arab world of female genital mutilation. The practice attempts to control women's sexuality and their ideas about purity and modesty by deliberately removing the sensing area of the genitals. “FGM affects over 200 million girls and women globally [...] but is highly concentrated in thirty countries in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia” (UNICEF 2016). Five years ago, studies showed that fifty percent of women who have undergone FGM live in just three countries: Egypt, Ethiopia; and Indonesia (UNICEF 2016). Latest studies show that the Arab League Region contains six countries with the highest prevalence rates of FGM cases (in females aged 15–49) in the world: these are Somalia (98%), Djibouti (93%), Egypt (87%), Sudan (87%), Eritrea (83%) and Ethiopia (74%) (Barrett, Bedri and Krishnapalan 2020, 3). As a result of Arab Middle Eastern standards, women find themselves torn between their attempts to achieve standards of universal beauty, sometimes risking their lives to accomplish this goal, rather than hiding their attractiveness lest it leads to risking their lives through genital mutilation, sexual harassment or rape. The intersectional reading of their interlocking matrix of oppression proves the uniqueness of the Arab Middle Eastern female’s experience.

In conclusion, both texts deal with the kind of oppression a discriminated category suffers from. Writers introduce female characters whom they refuse to give names and remain nameless throughout the play. Texts refer to issues like violence towards women, body shaming, emotional hunger accompanied with female empowerment and group support. They incorporate dancing and handholding between the female characters. They do not end by suggesting solutions to the examined problems, yet women end up victorious and powerful not by achieving love but by getting hold of their lost confidence. The plays capture the process of transitioning. Shange's female characters transition from death to life; while Soliman's dolls transition from inanimate commodities behind glass windows to strong women who speak for themselves and can face an audience.

The plays could also be regarded as an example of the application of the intersectional approach needed to explain the unique suffering of every discriminated category. The intersectional reading (of the texts) provides a deeper and more inclusive understanding of the characters' overlapping identities and their experiences with different forms of discrimination. Though women's oppression in patriarchal communities can be considered a universal issue, intersectionality advocates refuse to believe that all women share the same experience. Inequalities position people at different levels of the social hierarchy. Intersectionality as a methodology proves that identity is created through fluid matrices of privilege and that oppression cuts across identity categories. By adding the colour or the cultural or geographical factor, readers stop homogenizing categories and take into consideration the social factors and accumulations that lead to the uniqueness of the experience of every oppressed group, presenting more effective solutions through more understanding and less judging.

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