



**Betty Shamieh's The Black Eyed:
the Intersection of Gender and Race
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Abstract:

This research analyzes how the intersection of race and gender intensifies the suffering of female characters In Shamieh's *The Black Eyed*. They are doubly victimized at the hands of colonizers because of being women and Arabs in the same time. Colonization and patriarchy dominate and oppress these females in direct and indirect ways. Direct ways depend on acting different forms of violence against them such as marginalization, racism, enslaving their bodies, and employing these bodies to serve colonial agendas. Indirect ways depend on the colonization of these female characters' minds through repressive ideologies to make these women willingly obedient to patriarchal or colonial rule.

Key words: Betty Shamieh, *The Black Eyed*, gender, race, patriarchy, colonization, marginalization, racism, and ideologies.

Betty Shamieh's *The Black Eyed*: the Intersection of Gender and Race

1- Betty Shamieh's *The Black Eyed* (2005)

Betty Shamieh is a playwright, actress, and screenwriter. She is a Palestinian feminist woman. She was born in 1969 in San Francisco, California. She wrote about fifteen plays. Her work often explores the Arab experience through various lenses. Shamieh's *The Black Eyed* belongs to resistance literature. Contemporary Arab-American authors' literary works and performances have developed into a space for protesting such orientalist discursive practices.

This play tells the story of four Palestinian women of different ages. They wander around a room where martyrs dwell. The women span the centuries from ancient times to the present. They include Delilah, Tamam, the Architect, and Aiesha. Delilah, from biblical times (a very ancient period in which the books of the Bible are written) searches for Samson. Tamam lived during the Crusades (a series of military expeditions called Crusades launched from Christian Europe against the peoples of the Near East in the High Middle Ages) searching for her brother. The Architect who is the victim of the 9/11 attacks in the modern age searches for her lover. Aiesha as a suicide bomber wants to enter paradise thinking that she is a martyr. Aiesha lived in a historical age between Tamam's and the Architect's age.

2-The Intersection of Gender and Race Shaping a Horrible, Intensive Image of the Oppression of Arab Women.

Delilah is used as a tool in the game of politics. She is exploited by Samson, an Israeli leader who always kills the Palestinians, as well as by the men of her tribe. The men of her tribe deceive her to do what they want. They flatter and treat her as an honorable Palestinian woman who loves her tribe and welcomes to do anything for the safety of her people. They ask her to seduce Samson to uncover the secret of his power.



DELILAH.

Worse.

They made me think it was my idea.

They asked me to father's place at their meeting.

Even enough 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. (Shamieh 13)

Delilah does not use to have this respectful tone from the patriarchy. She is always in a frantic need to be respected by her patriarchal community. This frantic need blinds her eyes to the fact that her tribe's men flatters her to do what they want. Her tribe's men manipulates her mind through the exploitation of her subconscious need for love, respect, and appreciation.

The character of Delilah portrays how patriarchy intersects with colonization to oppress and dominate her. Her people force her to risk her life for the sake of their freedom. Delilah falls in love with Samson who betrays her. Delilah says, "I didn't know that there would be his lovers living there too, all Philistine women....I was surprised, my pride was wounded..." (Shamieh, 21). According to Mokbel, despite his love for her, Samson continues to be a womanizer and has no regard for Delilah's feelings. Her sense of exploitation and persecution is undoubtedly increased by this. (297)

Maslow's theory of hierarchy needs is used casually by Delilah's tribe men to manipulate her mind. Maslow creates the 'Hierarchy of Needs Pyramids' by putting human needs in a certain order :

1-Psychological needs such as eating, drinking, and sleeping

2-Safety needs such as protection from dangers

3-Love and belongingness needs

4-Esteem needs divide into two kinds: the first kind is the need to be appreciated by others; the second kind is self-appreciation

5-Self-actualization needs which means a person's self-realization of himself to be the ideal type of person he wants to be. (Genc and Uysal 215)

The colonial power (Israel) deprives Delilah of her safety needs. Delilah and her tribe are always insecure. Patriarchy deprives her of esteem, appreciation and self-realization needs in the same time. Patriarchy always looks down on her, so she lacks the feeling of receiving esteem from others. On the other hand, patriarchy uses repressive ideologies such as traditional gender roles to control her self-realization. She views herself from the lens of patriarchy. Suddenly, Delilah finds her esteem and self-realization needs are fulfilled by patriarchy in exchange for her consent to the seduction of Samson to uncover the secret of his power .

According to the cultural traditions of the Palestinian community, women are regarded as the honor of their men. Appropriately, these men are responsible for protecting their women from any danger, especially sexual abuse. Still, Shamieh portrays Delilah's people as pimps who order her to practice prostitution. What is the secret of this odd portrayal of Palestinian men as pimps? Deliberately, Shamieh portrays this image to reflect two important things: the first one is how the effects of war have the power to change the cultural traditions of people. Delilah's tribe gives up its cultural traditions, which place men in the role of the protector or savior of their women to win the war .

Shamieh's *The Black Eyed* resembles Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* on this point. Brecht's play portrays how the mother gives up her natural feelings as a mother to make money from the war. For this mother, the most important thing is to sell her goods to the war soldiers. She never feels sad and sorry for the murder of her children at the hands of these soldiers. These two plays portray how war can distort human nature and the cultural traditions of people .

The second one beyond this odd image of Delilah's tribe is reflecting how Delilah is victimized twice at the hands of patriarchy as well as colonization. Delilah fulfills submissively her tribe men's



desire to seduce Samson to uncover the secret of his power. Ironically, after Delilah finished her mission, her tribe men described her as a whore who tempts men.

DELILAH.

My people!

My people called me a whore.

I overheard a young man from my own clan say.

CHORUS(TAMAM, ARCHITECT)

The whore did her job and she did it well.

DELILAH.

He did not call me

The daughter of an honorable man.

Or a good woman who loved her people. (Shamieh 130)

The tribe men use Delilah's body for taking revenge upon Samson that kills hundreds of Palestinian people every day. Samson kills Delilah's brother. Delilah says, "Samson snatched up my brother first, but killed him last. He made a game of dangling him, chocking 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" (Shamieh 15).

Delilah's mind is colonized by the idea that a woman can dominate men by using her body for the seduction of men because women's bodies are considered men's weaknesses. Delilah says, "He said the only weakness that man has is for women. And then in perfect time, they all turned and looked at me. It was then that I offered to try"(Shamieh 14). Through this idea, patriarchy can` distract women's attention from the real forces which women can use for dominating men. These real forces may include women's economic power through having an independent income, women's political power through having the right to vote, and social power through having the right to work any job. The colonization of Delilah's mind by this idea makes Delilah struggle for tempting

Samson instead of the struggle for her social, political, and economic rights .

This idea of 'women's bodies are men's weaknesses' makes Delilah feel so hopeless that she cannot dominate men other than the use of sexual power. The chorus (Tamam, Architect) addresses Delilah, "It comes down to the basics. You knew the only power you had over men was sexual" (Shamieh 12). Delilah is driven to be a whore instead of being a member in the tribal council which take the important decisions about the tribe. She might obtain the political right to make plans for the destruction of Samson instead of tempting him. Elwezy writes that despite her desire to participate in this struggle differently, her people force her to engage in prostitution (115). Delilah is deceived by her people who flatter her power of seduction. Exum, for example, argues, "Delilah's power over Samson ultimately is appropriated by an androcentric agenda to serve male interests" (89).

Aiesha as a female suicide bomber experiences the horrors of colonization. She faces many forms of violence. She does not state any specific details about her suffering. Aiesha states, "The Crusades were nothing compared to the Palestinian and Israeli wars I lived through"(Shamieh 45). She adds, "Live my life on earth in my dirty, crowded refugee camp in the place that your parents abandoned"(Shamieh 84). She reacts to the horrors of colonization by exploding herself to kill as many Israelis as possible she can. She justifies this behavior, "oppression is like a coin maker"(Shamieh 31).

Aiesha does not narrate the details of her oppression, but she declares that her life is more miserable than Tamam's life. The Crusades rape Tamam and kill her brother. Aiesha invites the reader indirectly to imagine which type of miserable life she lives. Aiesha addresses Tamam, "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"(Shamieh 45).

The number of female suicide bombers increased in the 21st. Dworkin interprets this phenomenon, "Their societies are so oppressive and demeaning that these women are left only with the option of exploding their bodies to advance the cause of women in their societies: The more women want to prove their worth, the more

women suicide bombers there will be" (qtd. in Amireh 232). Respectively, the oppression of patriarchy motivates women to explode themselves to prove that they love and defend their country as the same as men. Patriarchy looks down on women and considers them inferior to men. On the other hand, women have the lion's share in the suffering from colonial domination because of the war crimes such as racial rape. Thus, patriarchy intersects with colonization to create Aiesha's tragic end .

The Architect is the main character in the play. Her narration for her story is the longest one. Shamieh employs deliberately this character to reflect the suffering of Arab women in the modern age. The Architect's tale is common. The Architect expresses the experience of Arab women living in Western countries. The Architect cannot assimilate into the culture of the Western country she lives in. Her inability to assimilate impedes her success in her work and in her personal life. The legal frame of any relationship between men and women is marriage. This is a common strict tradition in Arab culture. On the other hand, western traditions allow men and women to make relationships without any limitations. The Architect loves her employee who has an Arab father and a Western mother. He has no idea of the Arab culture. The Architect says, "But you won't know our customs. Half-breed! Your mother was not Arab"(Shamieh 54).

This is an important message Shamieh wants to deliver to the patriarchy and the colonization: women as mothers have a prominent role in bringing up the future generation. This Half-breed has an Arab father and a Western mother, but he has no idea of the Arab culture. Mostly, mothers' effects on their children are more influential than fathers' effects. Shamieh has a hidden message for Arab men who bring their children from Western women. She portrays the future of these men's children through the image of a Half-breed. Those children would suffer from cultural estrangement .

Tamam portrays how gender intersects with race to oppress Arab women. She is from the Crusade Age. She is the seventh sister in her family before the delivery of a boy. Her brother is a member in a resistance group which works against the Crusaders. They arrest him with a "weapon in his hand and curses of his lips"(Shamieh 38). The soldiers rape her in full view of her brother to force him to tell them something they want 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"(Shamieh 39).

This racist rape of women has a strong relationship with the colonizer's understanding of the nature of women's position in the third world. This nature views the rape of women as unbearable humiliation for these women's communities. The communities of those women carry a humiliating stigma forever. Tamam's body is exploited to achieve political aims. Violating Tamam's body is used as a weapon against Palestinians. The Crusaders know the position and the value of women in the Arab cultural traditions. Women are viewed as preservers of traditions. Arab women represent the honor of their men. In this way, the rape of these women represents shame upon their men and their community. Deliberately, the soldiers rape Tamam in full view of her brother not only to force him to uncover secret information but also to humiliate him and show that they have much power over Palestinians. From the dawn of history, the rape of women is a common crime in wartime. Iadicola and Shupe state that rape has always gone hand in hand with religious crusades, revolutions, liberation movements, and imperial conquest wars. Rape has been employed as a form of victory compensation. (132)

Tamam is portrayed as a real Arab heroine. She gives a wonderful example of endurance. She faces this brutal crime with silence. She does not want to show her weakness in front of her enemy so she does not cry, scream, or ask for the help of her brother. She uses her silence to reassure her brother that she is ready for sacrificing her life for the sake of her nation. She does not want her brother to tell the soldiers his secret information related to the resistance Palestinian group. Tamam describes the details of this horrible situation. Moreover, she describes her feelings along with her brother.

TAMAM .

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

They tied down the only one who could.

So I silenced myself.



That was the only to tell my brother I
didn't want him to tell.

I flinched when I had to ،

But I kept my breathing regular.

I 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. (Shamieh 40)

Tamam gives a wonderful example of courage and endurance. Thus, she is not inferior to her brother in this concern. She can calm herself down to avoid showing terror and weakness. Women can be heroines who defend their country and fight the enemy; however, the patriarchy underestimates the value of women in this concern. This ideology is reflected in the name of 'Tamam'. Tamam repeats that her name 'Tamam' means enough. Tamam is the seventh sister of her family before the delivery of a boy. It seems that Tamam's family gives her this name to show their disgust and disappointment at the birth of girls. This family says enough for the birth of girls because they want a boy; this phenomenon is called "son preference."

TAMAM.

My name is Tamam.

It means enough.

I was called that because my family wanted

CHORUS(DELILAH, ARCHITECT).

no more daughters

TAMAM.



I am the last of seven sisters, good luck for the family.

Because, after me, a brother was born.

The only one.

CHORUS(DELILAH, ARCHITECT).

Why do our people rejoice when a boy child is born?

TAMAM.

Because times like these are all for soldiers

To fight

The European and their Holy War

Crusading against we people who lived here before.

(Shamieh 37)

Ironically, Tamam herself prefers the birth of a boy. Her mind is colonized by the idea that girls are naturally inferior to boys. Moreover, she believes that the birth of boys is the hope of her community to win the war against the Crusades. She loves her brother very much .

TAMAM.

You are the most precious thing in the world to me. The fact that you exist makes the earth spin on its axis, it's rolling for joy because you are here. The sun shows up to see you, and the moon chases the sun off to be in your sky, and none of them love you like I do, brother.

(Shamieh 44)

Tamam's mind is colonized by the idea of gender power dynamics. In other words, Tamam as a woman used to perceive that the power related to her gender is her femininity. Patriarchy gives women the traditional power related to their gender as women. That is why, women tend to be weak, cute, and seductive to dominate others. There is a common claim in the Arab patriarchal society that suggests that a women's power lies in her weakness. Accordingly, the more they become weak and cute, the more men attract to them.

This repressive ideology manipulates women's minds to serve the benefits of patriarchy.

Tamam uses her femininity to rescue her brother from the Crusaders' fists. She goes to see her brother in jail and to pay his ransom. She remarks, "Most of my people looked at the Crusaders with every ounce of hatred a human heart can hold...I was smarter than that. I knew I must navigate through the maze of might, and did my best to be kindly...hoping perhaps that I would remind them of a woman they knew, [Chorus] or would have liked to know" (Shamieh 39). The chorus repeats, "I am a pretty woman. It is not a boast. It is a fact. Looks are a commodity, an asset, a possession I happen to possess" (Shamieh 39). The guards thank her for the baskets of food she brings them as a gesture. Then, they rape her in front of her brother .

Additionally, Tamam's mind is colonized by the idea that males are the center of the universe. She overestimates the role of males and underestimates the role of females. She believes that nothing has value including her without her brother. Tamam says, "Everything will be empty if you are not here. I will not forgive you if you leave me. I will not be comforted. I will not be"(Shamieh 44). Iadicola and Shupe categorize this type of violence within family violence and refer to it as Domestic patriarchy, also known as a gender regime where stratification is based on both gender and age, with adult males at the top, children at the bottom, and women in the middle. (155)

The Palestinians like the birth of boys because they realize the important role of males in the war against the enemy. It is known that males have more physical power than females due to the biological construction of both of them. Appropriately, males can fight the enemy better than women. There is no doubt that this idea is a physiological fact, but it can never be a justification for the preference of males over females. Moreover, it can never be a reason for looking down on women in the colonized countries. Simply, women also can be heroines who write history.

3- Political Abuse of Women

The title of the play *The Black Eyed* means "Alhour" in Arabic. Elwezy refers that Alhour is always a virgin. In Paradise, virgins (attractive young women) are produced as a reward for loyal

Muslims (89). Ironically, Delilah and Tamam lose their virginity in the context of the exploitation of female bodies in the game of politics. Sex is a minor theme in Shamieh's play; however, it is influential in the lives of most characters in the play.

Sexual abuse is used as a political weapon for showing the domination of the colonizer over the colonized and the domination of men over women. Tamam is raped in full view of her brother to humiliate him. Samson enslaves the bodies of many Palestinian women. Delilah says, "...and I said, "yes, I can." I didn't know that there would be his other lovers living there too, all Philistine women, like myself. I had never met any of them before. They were poor girls. At home, we did not run in the same circles. Do you understand?" (Shamieh 18).

Delilah knows that she sells her body but she does not feel ashamed of this reality. When Aiesha calls Delilah a whore, Delilah replies, "Words like that do not mean anything here, because up here we know there is not a woman alive who does not sell herself" (Shamieh 33). Aiesha believes that Delilah's seduction of Samson as a tool to deceive him is a cowardly behavior, which is appropriate for weak women. Aiesha believes that sex can be a reward for great works in the afterlife. Aiesha explodes herself to kill the Israeli people in the hope of having sex as a reward in the afterlife. Aiesha says, "Maybe that's true of weak women like you, but women like me take matters into our own hands and we get our rewards. The minute I got to the afterlife, I have a hundred men of every hue. That is what I believed I would get" (Shamieh 33).

While Delilah uses sexuality as a means of achieving great work for the sake of her community, Aiesha desires sexuality as a target or a reward so she tries to do great work for her community. Tamam questions how Aiesha knows that exploding herself to other people would be rewarded by having men in the afterlife. Tamam cannot believe that there is a religion that invites its followers to violence and rewards this violence with sexuality in the afterlife. Tamam says, "In what religion text did you find that if you blew yourself up you'd have a hundred men of every hue"(Shamieh 34)?

Aiesha feels confused about this question. She replies, "Okay, my interpretation is a rather loose one. But, hey, it's heaven. That's what I believed, that's what I got" (Shamieh 35). Shamieh wants to refer to the roots of terrorism: those Muslims who make violent acts

hoping to be rewarded by heaven in the afterlife have a misinterpretation of religious texts. Therefore, Shamieh invites all people for seeking the right understanding of Islam. Shamieh challenges the "consensus on "Islam" as a kind of scapegoat for everything we do not happen to like about the world's new political, social, and economic patterns"(Said, Covering Islam 43).

In brief, sex in this play is used in different contexts. The Crusaders rape Tamam to show their domination over her brother who represents the Arab men. It is known that crimes of rape are very common in wartime. The rape of women is used as a tool to humiliate and dominate the other side. Like Tamam, Delilah's body is also exploited but in a different way. Delilah is used as a tool of seduction in the game of politics. Her tribe orders her to seduce Samson to uncover the secret of his power. Respectively, Tamam and Delilah's bodies are used as puppets in the game of politics, which is called political sexuality. Thus, patriarchy in the case of Delilah and colonial power in the case of Aiesha use sexual abuse to dominate and oppress women in the game of politics.

4- Language and Style of Writing in Betty Shamieh's The Black Eyed:

The following paragraphs analyze the language and the elements of style Betty Shamieh uses in her play such as setting, plot, characters, imagery, diction, tone, mood, syntactic structure, and rhetorical, literary, and sound devices .Language is the most important component in dramatic work because it conveys characters' ideas, feelings, and attitudes. Shamieh's style of writing contributes to the audience's understanding of the play's themes.

The four women in the play are regarded as round characters. Each one has a complex and fully developed character. Each woman resists a different oppressive power in the age in which she lived. Shamieh unites them in the afterlife as protagonists of the play. Probably, Shamieh wants to shed light on the role of women in the resistance to oppressive power through the ages. The male characters in the play such as Aiesha's brother, Samson, and The Architect's lover are regarded as flat characters because they have a one-dimensional character, typically not central to the story. Accordingly, this play is a feminist literary work that criticizes patriarchal and colonial discourses.

The plot of this play uses flashback technique in which the plot happens from earlier four different ages interrupt the story's current events. The conflict of the plot comes from external things such as the horrors of colonization and patriarchy. The main plot of the play is composed of four separate sub-plots. Each woman has her own story in a specific historical period. However, Shamieh delineated them skillfully together .

Shamieh gives a friendly and sympathetic tone toward the position of women in the third world. She has an aggressive tone about the horrors of colonization. The prevailing mood or atmosphere produced by the characters' stories is the feeling of loss, alienation, terror and inferiority.

The setting of the main plot is a room where martyrs dwell in the afterlife. This room is an Ahistorical setting - not grounded in any real historical period; imaginary or fantasy. Palestine is the setting of Tamam, Delilah, and Aiesha's stories. The Architect's story happens in America. The Architect was the victim of the 9/11 attacks. Tamam lived during the Crusades (a series of military expeditions called Cursades was launched from Christian Europe against the peoples of the Near East in the High Middle Ages). Delilah is from biblical times (a very ancient period in which the books of the bible are written). Aiesha lived in the historical period between The Architect's age and Tamam's age.

Shamieh employs many different literary devices such as metaphor, personification, paradox, irony, and simile to create horrific and shocking images of the exploitation of women in the light of colonization and patriarchy . She uses many sound devices such as alliteration and assonance to create the music which has influenced the audience's feelings.

Shamieh uses many wonderful images in this play such as Tamam's description of her love for her brother. She describes him as the center of the universe. The sun and the moon are rolling for joy because he is here. This image reflects how far Tamam feels inferior to her brother. Willingly, she behaves him as superior to her and her other six sisters. She regards herself as good luck for the family because after her a brother was born. This image highlights Tamam's colonization of mind by the discourse of traditional gender roles which suggests that men are naturally more superior, responsible, and reliable than women . Shamieh creates a horrific image of Tamam's rape at the hands of the Crusaders in front of her

brother to humiliate and force him to uncover the secrets of his community. It highlights the suffering of women at the hand of colonizers in the context of war crimes.

Shamieh uses a variety of sentences such as declarative, imperative, interrogative, and exclamatory sentences. The structure of sentences in the play varies between simple, compound, and complex sentences. This great diversity of syntactic structures creates the vivid language of the play. According to Jones, Shamieh employs theatrical techniques like abstraction and repetition to create a narrative difference that matches the cultural difference of her characters, writing in a style different from American realism. (3)

Shamieh uses many different rhetorical devices such as rhetorical questions, repetition, and parallel structures which serve the themes of the play. For example, she starts and concludes with the same rhetorical lines "Unanswered questions, Unquestioned answers. I do someone good dead. I do someone dead good" (Shamieh ١٠). Shamieh does not know the answer to the question of how the Arabs shouldn't behave violently with the imperial power which makes every effort to use all forms of ethnic violence against the Arabs. Shamieh challenges the Western community to find answers to this question. The repetition of these lines pays attention to the issue of violence and counter-violence. "How do you survive in a violent world and not be violent" (Shamieh 82)?

In brief, the four women in Shamieh's play are doubly victimized at the hands of colonization because of being women as well as Arabs in the same time. In this way, gender intersects with race to shape a horrible image about the suffering of these women. This suffering is reflected in the sexual abuse of these women in the game of politics. Shamieh's style of writing in this play handles this issue in a very skillful way.



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بيتي شامية ذا بلاك آيد: تقاطع الجنس والعرق بواسطة رضوى

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المستخلص:

يحلل هذا البحث كيف أن تقاطع العرق والجنس يزيد من معاناة الشخصيات النسائية في رواية شامية ذات العين السوداء. لقد وقعن ضحية مزدوجة على أيدي المستعمرين لكونهن نساء وعرب في نفس الوقت. ويهيمن الاستعمار والسلطة الأبوية على هؤلاء الإناث ويضطهدنهن بطرق مباشرة وغير مباشرة. وتعتمد الطرق المباشرة على ممارسة أشكال مختلفة من العنف ضدهم مثل التهميش والعنصرية واستعباد أجسادهم وتوظيف هذه الهيئات لخدمة الأجناس الاستعمارية. وتعتمد الطرق غير المباشرة على استعمار عقول هذه الشخصيات النسائية من خلال الأيديولوجيات القمعية لجعل هؤلاء النساء مطيعين عن طيب خاطر للحكم الأبوي أو الاستعماري.

الكلمات الإفتتاحية: بيتي شامية، العين السوداء، الجنس، العرق، السلطة الأبوية، الاستعمار، التهميش، العنصرية، والأيديولوجيات.