

Generalization of Suppression in Norma Khouri's *Forbidden Love*

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to critique the repercussions of over-generalization of a social issue as depicted in Norma Khouri's *Forbidden Love*. The novel/memoir has been written against the 9/11 backdrop and as such serves as means of sensationalizing and exploiting a cultural event which unfortunately echoes in the East. The objective of this research is to highlight the responsibility of the writer in raising or negating awareness. Investigative journalism such as Anna Broinowski and Malcolm Knox's helps to highlight the repercussions of such canonship. Michel Foucault's theory of *Discourse Analysis* and E Ann Kaplan's *Imperial Gaze* have been employed to exploit the core text. The research proves that writers can fictionalize and fabricate events to sensationalize a social practice/ cultural dimension to over generalize and market a given perception. Thereby, helping to develop a condescending attitude amongst (Western) audience and reader.

Keywords: sensationalism, post 9/11 Arab world, honor killing, memoir, imperial gaze

This paper will focus on the way that culture, especially Eastern culture is being depicted by some diasporic Western writers such as Norma Khouri.

In *Forbidden Love* Norma Khouri has written a heart-wrenching story of herself and her best friend Dalia. Dalia is killed by her father who does so believing that his daughter's honor was lost, since she being a Muslim had a relationship with a Christian boy. She generalizes this heinous act of "honor killing" as being a common practice in the East and terms it as a norm in the Muslim world. Further, she claims to be a direct witness to an honor killing.

The contention presented in this paper is that the main crux of Norma Khouri's novel, namely honor killing does exist unfortunately in the Arab states as well as many other Eastern countries; however it is not rampant and writers such as Khouri have exploited these incidents to gain a readership. The pecuniary benefits accrued due to such an endeavor cannot be overlooked.

As Leila Pazargadi writes, "What are the dangers of liberal discourse that attempts to shape and liberate another culture and community according to European and American values?"ⁱ Such discourse not only strengthens the Western nations' convictions about their preconceived notions about Eastern women but it also provides them a more authoritative as well as condescending attitude. However, the question that remains is how fictionalized or generalized is such an account. An Australian blogger, Ren has commented about *Forbidden Love*

It's written very simply as an account of events through one person's eyes and it is an eye-opener to those who have very little understanding of Arab culture and what it entails for women. The other thing to remember about the story is that it's written from the viewpoint of one very unhappy and traumatized woman. Not all Arab women would feel the same way Khouri does. Not everyone would agree that her understanding of Jordanian law is correct, and many would deny that these irrational (to us Westerners) killings happen at allⁱⁱ.

Taking into account, the quotation given above, apart from honor killing being a shocking act for the audience, the reason for the world wide acclaim could be that she has written a text which falls into all the values which the feminists are fighting against (the suppression/oppression of women), and as such it encourages the feminist in the 'heroic struggle' that she has undertaken.

E. Ann Kaplan in her book, entitled *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze* remarks that "Western spectators eyes have been 'imperialized' ...throughout the history of Hollywood cinema-one of the most powerful cinemas globally"ⁱⁱⁱ. Kaplan discusses this imperial gaze from the vantage of cinematography; nevertheless the same aspect can be observed in writing of and from the East. Kaplan discusses the 'imperial gaze' but she does not

look into the elements orchestrating this imperial gaze. Additionally, there is a need to analyze how the 'imperial gaze' affects the feminist stance pertaining to oppression and subjugation. Kaplan discusses the patriarchal gaze put forth by the predominantly masculine field of filmmaking and photography but does not take into account how a woman views and uses this 'imperial gaze' on a more individualistic level.

The 'imperial gaze', or the viewing of other nations from a specific vantage point and in a specific way has a politics of its own which is composed of an amalgamation of Western and Eastern influences. Eastern writers like Norma Khouri have given an insider's approval to this image, as she says, "I must find a way to expose honour crimes for what they truly are: legalized murder... My fight will have to continue being waged far away from Jordan"^{iv}. Honor killing is not condoned to a great degree in the East, however there are figures such as "King Abdullah stood as an ally of women, publicly announcing that women's groups and women's rights organizations had his full support in the matter, and he urged Prime Minister Abdur Rauf S. Rawabdeh to amend all laws that 'discriminate against women and inflict injustice on them'. The National Assembly opposed the draft, not once but twice"^v. Jordanian law is unjust with reference to honor killing, there is no doubt about this fact and it cannot be refused by anyone. There are two penal codes, namely 340 and 98 which either exempt the perpetrators of such barbaric acts or reduce the penalty for such crimes. This in itself if not supports but at least mitigates the repercussions of committing such an act. Nevertheless, not all women in the East live under the threat of the heinous act of honor killing. Also, not all men are suppressors, there are many men living in the East who actually condemn this ruthless act.

Saba Mahmood comments on this aspect as she writes,

Since the events of September 2001, the Euro-American publishing community has produced a series of best-sellers that tell harrowing tales of Muslim (and at times Non-Muslims) survival under misogynist culture practices, that are supposed to characterize most, if not all, Islamic societies... Islam's mistreatment of women serves both as a site for diagnosis of the ills that haunt this faith and a strategic point of intervention for its construction^{vi}.

It is important to note that Mahmood focuses on the Euro-American canonship but has not delved on the Asian and Eastern canonship. Writers such as Khouri and Bapsi Sidhwa (*The Bride*) have not only diagnosed but also reinforced the need for not only intervention but also the 'imperial gaze' in all its condemnation as well as its condescension towards the 'savagery' of the East. Khouri has focused on a monochromatic representation of the East which depicts all women as being oppressed and all men as being savage and cruel (with the exception of the hero in Khouri's book, Michael).

As E Ann Kaplan writes, "Looking will connote curiosity about the Other, a wanting to know (which can of course still be oppressive but does not have to be), while the gaze I take to involve extreme anxiety- an attempt in a sense not to know, to deny in fact"^{vii}. Consequently, the question which arises is if the Western world looks at such accounts as Norma Khouri's *Forbidden Love* from a vantage point, does this then point to a denial of any similarity between the East and the West. Additionally, does this mean then that such writers are themselves trying to create this denial of equality in patriarchal terms between the East and the West.

At the end of *Forbidden Love*, Norma Khouri has included a title, What can you do? which states,

In fact, the voices of people in Western nations are particularly powerful because Jordan is desperate to give the impression that it's a modern, democratic state. For this reason Jordan hides honour killings from the Western world, but increased awareness and involvement by the international community will make it difficult for the Jordanian government to maintain that image to allow this practice^{viii}.

Statements such as these not only serve to inflate the imperialist's ego about its supremacy but they also concretize the already wary notions about the East. This is reinforced by Kaplan in her book, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze* who says, "Yet another aspect I wanted the title to include is that of the "American" look-the "look" that US media and advertising industries disseminate as some kind of ideal towards which all people living in America and counted as Americans must aspire"^{ix}. Thus, Khouri plays into perimeters of the 'gaze' directed at the East and exploits the "American" ideal which Americans will live upto in order to fulfill their duty as human beings and as a stronger, more powerful nation. Kadiatou Diallo comments about this book on the jacket blurb that "A compelling book about love and loss, friendship and strength... the power of Ms Khouri's storytelling makes you want to do something, anything, to make sure no one suffers that same fate. An incredible book"^x. The fact that steps need to be taken in order to eradicate honor killing cannot be denied because such acts should be abolished and are absolutely heinous; however it is not fair to generalize this act on terms of just a few accounts that are related. Since the object itself is lending to the perpetuity of the 'gaze', the Occidental obviously does not feel itself incumbent to look into the justness and authenticity of this 'gaze'. It has been handed a proof of its suspicions. The 'imperial gaze' did not need any justification of its perception of the barbaric Eastern culture hereto but such accounts have not only served to justify their stance.

Another reason that such writers are not only warmly received but also encouraged is that they give an insight to a world which seems like a mystery to the Western audience, an audience that does not have direct access to the exotic and therefore mysterious east as Jean Sassoon remarks, "Norma Khouri's courage and candour take us into the hearts and minds of a world that is usually cloaked in mystery... This extraordinary true story is well told, worth telling and impossible to put down"^{xi}. Khouri, in order to ensure the rapture of her audience has revealed the exotic mystery of the

eastern world. Thus, the initiates- the Western audience, are being given a rare view of the mysteries of the east which is an unjust act. This is apparent from the introduction as she writes, "But let me set the stage for this story by giving some sense of my strange, conflicted nation. Surrounded by Saudia Arabia, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Kuwait, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan sits at the beating geographic heart of the Arab world"^{xii}. This sentence not only 'sets the stage' for an initiation into the 'mysteries' of the oriental world, it also creates a paralleled situation in which all Eastern nations operate on the same mechanisms and machinations as its 'geographic heart' - Jordan Saudi Arabia, Iraq and other such regions are already considered to be the most oppressive nations on earth. The mystery of the East has been unveiled and it does not present a pleasant picture but one which is worse than the preconceived notions of such a place.

This takes us to the second point, namely what does such a rendering of the atrocities veiled by the mysteries of the Arab world entail. According to Khouri, this dilemma faced by the Arab woman is supra-national as well as supra-religious. As Khouri says:

I wondered. The gravity of Dalia's dilemma began to weigh heavily on my mind. How would my parents and brothers react to something like that? The killing and imprisonment of women who broke the rules wasn't just Islamic; it crossed religious lines. Now that the informal affection of childhood had been replaced with rigid control over me, I could picture my brothers battling with my father over who would cast the first stone^{xiii}.

Thus, this problem is symptomatic of all religions within Arab nations and leads to a monochromatic situation. It does not matter which Arab nation or religion a woman belongs to she is liable to face the same threats of suppression; she could be killed at any given moment under the guise of 'honor'. Such an account is an exaggeration when applied to all women who reside in the East.

Having looked into the how the 'imperial gaze' is created and what it entails, it is important to look into how far the gaze is actually justified. Leila Pazargardi writes,

Because life narratives are a work of the self, they often package the identity of the author in order to sell the authenticity of the memoir. The reader expects gestures of sincerity and trusts that the events recounted in the text are fact, with a few exceptions of uncovering memory ad poetic license. After all, works that are based on memory make allowances for the inability to recall the past accurately. But, what happens when the author violates this fidelity, and the trust of the reader^{xiv}?

Pazargardi has reached the crux of the situation; not only do such memoirs need to be read with an open mind, but it is also important to investigate the reality of such memoirs. The reader needs to question the authenticity and generalization of such memoirs. Are things really as bad as have been relayed through these novels or are these memoirs only a microcosmic and limited account of the actual circumstances? Pazargardi mentions a number of memoirs, two of which she emphasizes as being propagandist namely Khouri's *Forbidden Love* and Soud's *Burned Alive*. She goes on to state that both memoirs not only have discrepancies but some details have been fabricated.

In *Forbidden Love* sensationalism has been created through the fabrication of facts. Malcolm Knox, an investigative journalist at the Sydney Morning Herald, in his article entitled "Her Life as a Fake: bestseller' lies exposed" followed up the claims made by Khouri. He came across various startling facts. The first is that Khouri's actual name is Norma Majid Khori Michael Al-Bagain and she has lived not in Jordan but in America from 1973 to 2000. She then claims that she had four brothers and does not mention any sister, but she has a sister named Diane Bagain. She creates an image of herself as a virgin refugee whereas she is actually married and has two children. Khouri claims that her mother is still in Jordan whereas she lives in Chicago. There are also certain doubts as to the actuality of Dalia's figure.

In order to increase the shock value of her novel, Khouri has fabricated some parts of her own personal history so that she can exploit the Eastern woman's situation for monetary gain. She does not take into account the repercussions of the other's self being negated and the negative aspects of 'otherizing'.

The world conveyed through Khouri's book reeks of only oppression, fear and limitations. It is a world consisting of male dominance in its most extreme form. The male members of Jordan dictate everything that the female members do; the way they dress, where they go and come, who they are allowed to meet etc. It gives the reader an impression that the entire Eastern region is the epitome of men who are barbaric and ruthless. Nevertheless, Anna Broinowski, who directed a film entitled *Forbidden Lie\$* uncovers the truth about how other women in Jordan and other Arab countries are actually treated. During Broinowski's documentary, Amal Al-Sabbagh, a prominent Jordanian female activist comments, "She ruined the reputation of Jordanian women, saying that they were imprisoned in their homes and so on. Jordanian women have excellent educational levels that are gradually being translated into participation in the workforce. Her tone conveys that all Jordanian women live under traditional practices which is wrong"^{xv}.

Unni Wikan, a social anthropologist, comments that "... argued that honor was not just a male prerogative; that one should examine the everyday rather than the spectacular exceptions; and most important, that although honor ideals are valued in Omani society, in real life there are other cherished values and principles as well that produce surprising tolerance"^{xvi}. Thus, as Wikan points out there is a need to arrive at the core of such a society rather than the 'spectacular' or in this case 'carthartic' and 'alluring' surface. It is not fair to base all assumptions on only one or a minority of facts/statistics. Khouri, at numerous points in her book highlights the oppression of Eastern women, to give examples of a few: "It was not uncommon to hear of women being physically abused not only by their husbands or fathers, but also by their sons and brothers for minor reasons-preparing the wrong food for dinner, or taking too long

with the laundry”^{xvii}. What she doesn’t mention is that it was only common in a specific class and not something that was practised in the entire Jordan. Similarly, Khouri earlier states,

We are now allowed to study any subject we want as long as the men in our families-our fathers, brothers, or, if married, husbands-give us their permission....Yes, Jordan can claim many women doctors, but partly because a woman dare not be seen by a male doctor for fear of the kind of gossip that could threaten any life...It’s a male-dominated world with very limited and controlled ‘freedoms’ for women^{xviii}.

Khouri has presented this story as being emblematic of the whole of Jordan. The world conveyed through Khouri’s book reeks of only oppression, fear and limitations.

Khouri through her rendition of Dalia’s honor killing serves to deepen the negation of any evolution that the diaspora could have undergone as she writes, “When I see people on the street free and open with their affections, holding hands, hugging and kissing, I catch myself thinking it is wrong and shameful”^{xix}. The diaspora is not yet free of its barriers and neither can it be according to Khouri. Being displaced in Greece, Khouri claims that “As I speak out from abroad, adding my voice to the fight for Jordanian women, I am still, personally, fighting the taboos taught to all of us from birth in an Arabic culture”^{xx}. Therefore, displacement and liberation from the oppressive country does not lead to a complete liberation, in fact it only serves to deepen a sense of alienation from any freedom that could be obtained. The Eastern woman is bound by the precedence of ancient customs.

Dr. Nadia Anjum contends in her article entitled, “Diaspora Indexicality: Acculturation in Hanif Kureishi”, “how ‘other’s’ view others, and how in the act of ‘otherizing’, the entities get pushed to the periphery where a new community, a new self starts brewing. The peripheral force then formulates, dictates and establishes its own perimeters; it constructs its own parameters; it constructs its own regime which flexes enough to claim within the mainstream, a space of its own”^{xxi}. What Anjum points to is a positive creation of the ‘other’s’ space and the creation of a new identity. However, the creation of the new self is positive but it also has another aspect, namely that of eradication of any positivity. Another situation is created when the other side is when the self is not allowed to be created, Khouri by writing her novel, has negated any space or self that the other could have been afforded. In fact, the ‘self’ is not only crushed in Khouri’s book but it is also overtaken by the space which is placed upon it by the ‘other’. This act of ‘otherizing’ is self damaging with no positive end when it comes to *Forbidden Love*. Khouri writes, “We cling to the fading hope that someday we’ll be released from this prison, not really believing that we can be the agents of our own freedom”^{xxii}. The ‘other’ itself does not allow any regeneration as it believes and presents itself as being irrevocably restrained. This negation of the ‘other’s’ reprieve leads to catharsis of the Western audience.

‘Catharsis’ refers to the purgation and cleansing of feelings and relates to pity and fear in the form of such incidents as honor killing. In the framework of Khouri’s *Forbidden Love*, such a situation is presented which will create a cathartic effect in the sense of ‘purging’ the Western audience through viewing such a devastating situation which will never arise for them since they believe themselves to be the liberated, modernized lot.

The Arab world presents something which is exotic and alien to the Western audience and thus can be distanced from oneself. Western women uncontrollably feel pity for the victims of such ‘honor killings’. This happens because the Western audience is the viewer, an onlooker or the subject and not the object of such accounts.

The cathartic hold that Khouri practices on her readers undoubtedly leads to compassion and sympathy for the plight of the Arab woman. Simultaneously, after reading such tragedies, it leads to a sense of wellbeing and unburdening of emotions for the Western reader. Taking into account the first three requisites of tragedy, as defined by Aristotle, namely the seriousness of action, the completion and the magnitude, Khouri has incorporated all three in her novel and she has also been successful in creating a cathartic effect. However, her novel is not based on ‘mimesis’ or imitation but is rather life itself since it is a memoir not fiction. Having said this, the formative implications of being a real account means that it will not only be taken more seriously than a tragedy but the magnitude is greater as it is not only the affect which is created on the audience but also the political overtones of a post 9/11 world which has formed negative opinions about the Arab world and its culture. Thus, by conveying honor killing as the norm in the Arab world, Khouri has created an atmosphere which is conducive for a catharsis of the Western audience. By thinking that the Arab world is full of female oppression, the West can distance itself from such a region while at the same time feeling horror for the victims of such oppression. A Western critic Anna Broinowski says as much in an interview,

She is the classic misery memoirist, in that it was her victim status that gave her the glamour and the fame, and to understand Norma you need to understand the environment that allowed her to flourish, and it was ... she is of the Jerry Springer generation, so this a generation that cashes in on public misery. The importance of what you have suffered increases with the number of people who know about it. So the more famously you can declare your suffering, the more of a celebrity you become. It’s a badge. And she’s very much American in that way-she sees nothing wrong in telling as many lies as possible about what she went through^{xxiii}.

Thus, the Aristotelian concept of catharsis is now not used for only purgation and cleansing but it is a means of exploitation and a seduction of the audience. It now has duplicit connotations: it allows the reader a release of negative emotions while at the same time affording people like Khouri not a cathartic release but a means to exploit the cathartic release sought out by the ‘Jerry Springer generation’; a generation which thrives on viewing violence and then considering itself as being better than such violence and violent outbursts.

This cathartic release creates a sense of superiority in the Western viewer as already discussed ; books like Khouri’s tend to create superiority in the Western audience. It also creates superiority through the distancing effect of catharsis in

the western audience as Yasmin in says “I have had an unhappy life. Yes, white people would like an exhibition of my misery. But before I go emotionally nude for them, tell them to look at their own history”^{xxiv}. Such a statement is emblematic of the ‘imperialized’ fighting back. Khouri has however gone ‘emotionally nude’ so that she can exaggerate the ‘exhibition of misery’. As she writes, “This book is my start. I realize that my words alone will not change what is happening, but I hope that they will bring to light what has been shrouded in darkness for centuries”^{xxv}. The shedding of light on such incidents is positive due to its active nature but at the same time it is a negation of any objective, unbiased viewing of the Arab world and its cultural basis.

As mentioned by Saba Mahmood and Leila Pazargardi, the ‘imperial gaze’ strengthens the Western readership’s convictions but the actual impact on the Western women of its counterparts has not been discussed. Such writings serve to create a cathartic as well as catastrophic effect. ‘Catastrophic’ in the sense that it destroys the image of all male members of Arab society and they can never regain a semblance of any humanity they may have. Such writing is also cathartic on a two fold level: Firstly, it provides a means of confrontation with such barbaric practices; secondly, it creates a feeling of superiority in the western women who receives purgation and superiority through reading of an act which will never happen to them and only creates a spectacle for them.

This ‘catharsis’ helps to attract and retain a Western readership while simultaneously creating a sense of justification in the Western mind of its right to view the East as the East has been viewing itself. This sense of justification is aptly emphasized by Kaplan who contends that, “The gaze is active: the subject bearing the gaze is not interested in the object per se, but consumed with his own anxieties, which are inevitably intermixed with desire.... The object is a threat to the subject’s autonomy and security and thus must be placed, rationalized and, by a circuitous route, denied”^{xxvi}. However, in Khouri and other eastern writers’ case, the object’s perception of itself is what leads to a refutation of any parallel situation on the subject’s part. The Western women would never experience a similar situation as such acts are not only unheard of but never take place in the West. As Khouri says, “Thousands of women are being legally murdered every year, for reasons that would be unheard of in Western countries”^{xxvii}. Therefore, the ‘gaze’ directed towards the object is in fact a way to distance oneself from the ‘other’ while at the same time denying any similarity with the ‘other’. Bapsi Sidhwa writes, “But Carol, a child of the bright Californian sun and surf, could no more understand the beguiling twilight world of veils and women’s quarters than Zaitoon could comprehend her independent life in America”^{xxviii}. Even writers like Najib Mahfouz who have not presented honor killings but the dynamics of the Egyptian household have presented the Eastern female as being suppressed and subjugated which gives the impression that the entire East reeks of such suppression against women. Amina, an Egyptian housewife in Najib Mahfouz’s *Palace Walk* is also suppressed; she has to obey each and every rule dictated to her by her husband. Even in religious affairs she has to obey him, so much so that she is not allowed to go to a shrine without male accompaniment and when she does, she is banished from the house. Aminah’s suppression is symbolic of the difference between an eastern female and a western female.

While discussing the effect of the story of honor killing on the Western audience, it is also important to look at the vehicle used to convey this story, namely the language. It is through language that Khouri attracts and retains the reader’s attention. Khouri uses sensationalized language such as the use of words like ‘barbaric’, ‘brutalized’, ‘codified’ etc. in order to augment the effect which has already been created on the readers. As Michael Foucault contends, if statements are given force by their institutional setting or the authority of their utterer, it is also true that only certain statements can be uttered appropriately within a particular institutional setting *by virtue* of their sense. Foucault discusses utterances in relation to power hierarchies in the framework of history, politics etc. In Khouri’s case, it is not so much a case of politics as it is of the way these utterances are used to grasp the reader’s attention. Language gives Khouri the means to control her readers. In the statement given above, Foucault mentions the ‘authority of the utterer’ and its relation to ‘discourse’. Khouri’s intent is to not only expose a real crime but also to market her book; therefore she cleverly plays with words and uses language as her mode of sensationalism. Khouri’s ‘authority of utterance’ is one of the main factors what lead to the marketability of her book. Her story begins with the statement,

Jordan is a place where men in sand-coloured business suits hold cell phones to one ear and, in the other, hear the whispers of harsh and ancient laws blowing in from the desert. It is a place where a worldly young queen argues eloquently on CNN for human rights, while a father in a middle-class suburb slits his daughter’s throat for committing the most innocent breach of old Bedouin codes of honor^{xxix}.

As can be seen from the quotation, Khouri effectively grasps the reader’s attention through her use of a poeticized form of language, which is enhanced by the juxtaposition of the two dimensional ‘sense’ in the Jordanian framework: namely that of a world which has a liberated young queen while simultaneously killing its female members for honor.

All the lexical items and their arrangement have a method and aim behind them; they serve to provide Khouri with the power to attract and retain the reader’s attention. For instance, in the line, “Dalia asked me one day, her eyes betraying a hint of conspiratorial glee”^{xxx}; the use of words such as ‘hint’, ‘conspiratorial’ and ‘glee’ all serve to create an atmosphere of scheming and suspense. Khouri does not use deadpan language but rather language which has been designed to keep the readers engaged.

Michael Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge & Discourse on Language* writes,

I suspect one could find a kind of gradation between different types of discourse within most societies: discourse "uttered" in the course of the day and in casual meetings, and which disappears with the very act which gave rise to it; and those forms of discourse that lie at the origins of a certain number of new verbal acts,

which are reiterated, transformed or discussed; in short, discourse which is spoken and remains spoken, indefinitely, beyond its formulation, and which remains to be spoken^{xxxii}.

Therefore, it is safe to assume that Norma Khouri has written in a style which is not a part of the everyday effaceable colloquial aspect of language. What she has written will be 'reiterated and transformed or discussed' again and again. This is what she claims is her basic aim as she writes, "And I pray that whoever reads this book, and hears the words I have been able to find, will voice their outrage, as I have here"^{xxxiii}. Thus, Khouri means to put language to a dynamic and active purpose and not simply as a means of narration. It is important to look at how she uses language as the vehicle for her aim to galvanize her readers into action and retaliation against what she has presented as the generalized barbarism of the Arab world. Language is not used to only narrate Dalia's killing but also to embellish and enhance the horror of what has happened to her.

Khouri has also used language stylistically to support the thematic concerns of her novel. It is as Foucault says in *The Archaeology of Knowledge & Discourse on Language*, "Whether it is the philosophy of a founding subject, a philosophy of originating experience or a philosophy of universal mediation, discourse is really only an activity, of writing in the first case, of reading in the second and exchange in the third. This exchange, this writing, this reading never involve anything but signs. Discourse thus nullifies itself, in reality, in placing itself at the disposal of the signifier"^{xxxiii}. In terms of *Forbidden Love*, two of the categories defined by Foucault can be seen namely that of 'originating experience' for the West; it is a new experience and 'a philosophy of universal mediation', which relies on reading and exchange is a two way process. She is making the experience for the West. Additionally, this reading and exchange as Foucault contends is actually subservient to the signifier, the author or the creator of the series of the words. Khouri has made this subservience clear in her selection of words, syntactically as well as semantically and the way in which she has stylistically arranged her novel. The stylistic arrangement supports and is supported by the thematic concerns of the novel. Khouri does not plunge into the killing of Dalia right away but rather brings about a climatic ending. She begins with both girls first conspiring to get permission for their salon, then there is a romantic interlude between Michael and Dalia and then finally comes Dalia's tragic death.

The mediator being Khouri is creating mediation between honor killing and the Western audience. If the stylistics of her novel are analyzed, we will see that "it is structured as a classical romance novel, complete with a tall, dark handsome love object who is not a sexist brute but evokes throbbing mutual attraction... an element of terror is added through the graphic violence of slasher films"^{xxxiv}. As is the case with all romance novels, the description of the protagonists is alluring. The protagonist, Dalia and her lover, Michael are shown as attractive Arab specimens. About Dalia, Khouri writes, "*Ya gazelle* is slang for especially attractive women-those with the melting eyes of a baby deer, like Bambi. Dalia definitely fitted into that category. She had waist length, thick, wavy tresses, perfect light olive skin, and full lips. Most of all, she had these mesmerizing dark brown eyes..."^{xxxv}. At the same time, Michael is the attractive, dark and handsome hero of the heroine's dreams, "*Tall, quite a bit taller than Dalia, ...Broad shoulders, thick, short, dark brown hair, black eyes...His eyes were dark and penetrating, thick eyebrows, and long thick lashes...Small, straight nose, full lips, square jaw line, thin moustache. He'd look better without the moustache, but they seemed to be an Arab man's fashion statement*"^{xxxvi}. The plot also revolves around the classic 'star crossed lovers' who can never hope for a consummation or fulfillment of their love but which turns towards a Romeo and Juliet like ending with if not two but one tragic death. Michael is the quintessential chivalric hero who puts his own safety at risk for damsels in distress. He not only arranges for Khouri to flee the country but "has left the military but is still in Jordan, is active in this work, helping other women, putting himself at great risk. He will always my ally in this struggle, and I owe him more than I can say in words"^{xxxvii}.

Khouri uses words and terms in specific semantic relation with other words in order to deepen the oppression faced by Dalia and other Arab women. For instance, Khouri introduces Dalia and her circumstances as "She wasn't permitted to eat at the same table with, or at the same time as, the men in her household. She had to cook the meal and quietly serve it to them. Only when they had finished and left the room were she and her mother allowed to eat the leftovers. She was not allowed to leave her house unless she was accompanied by one of the men in her family"^{xxxviii}. In the example given on above, it is important to note it is not 'she cooked the meal and quietly served it to them', but the auxiliary verb "had" to cook the meal" is used in order to emphasize the duress under which she is placed. Similarly, within three lines she has highlighted the coercion practiced on Dalia with terms such as, 'wasn't permitted, not allowed', which frequently appear throughout the novel. It is not only the case with Dalia but with Norma herself as well, "My family didn't follow this custom. Men and women were allowed to eat together, but the women were expected to serve the men, and could not begin eating until the oldest male had started. Dalia and I were both expected to cook the meals and clean up afterwards although our mothers usually prepared the evening meal"^{xxxix}. It is important to look at the connotations of both examples, as there are certain subtle differences. The choice of words that Norma uses to describe her treatment at home is much more subtle as compared to Dalia's. Since Dalia is the victim Khouri has employed more aggressive words such as 'had', 'not allowed', 'not permitted' etc. but in her own case Norma being the observer and not the victim has used words such as 'were allowed', 'were expected' which have a much milder import. This is a deliberate effort in order to make Dalia look much more suppressed than Khouri although their situation as described by Khouri herself is almost the same. It is also important to point out that Norma does not highlight Dalia on the basis of her religion but on the basis of her being the victim, the representation of the Eastern suppressed woman.

Not only is Dalia's 'plight' emphasized through Khouri's semantic selection but also through the syntactical arrangement of her novel. Throughout the novel, Khouri successfully creates an atmosphere of not only romance but

intrigue. The two friends are continuously shown as evading and devising devious schemes in order to evade any untold consequences. They begin by smoking cigarettes, “a taboo cigarette seemed like a great adventure”^{xli}. Then they turn into the ultimate spy who “had to start thinking creatively, and with an espionage agent’s attention to detail”^{xlii}. Khouri and Dalia work together just like a team in order to fool Michael. This mechanism again functions as a gimmick to attract more readers. Passages such as the following create suspense and a need to read to the end of the novel,

First, Jehan asked Michael to buy magazines and books about exercise and weight training. We left them lying around the salon in places we knew Mohammed would see them. Once we saw him reading the magazines and books, Dalia and I started talking, in Mohammed’s presence, about the exercises we’d supposedly begun doing and mentioned that they increased our strength and energy. After a week, he began asking us questions. We knew we had him hooked. ...We savoured our first small taste of success at manipulating and deluding men—the only route, for millennia, to any kind of power for Arab women. It gave us a little confidence, subdued the fear a bit^{xliii}.

This again gives the reader the impression that confidence is something that the Eastern women are completely devoid of, something that cannot be associated with Eastern women in general. In order to ensure that her novel does not become a run of the mill romance story, Khouri has incorporated this espionage/ thriller like atmosphere. Something that again aids in keeping the reader engrossed and convinced.

Another aspect of Khouri’s lexicological choice is her use of words. Throughout the novel, there is no positive word associated with any of the Arab men, with the exception of Michael. Micheal of course, being the hero, cannot be maligned. Where other writers such as Bapsi Sidhwa have portrayed the antagonists as being human and a combination of both good and bad as Sidhwa writes, “Even more in the way he turned his eyes from her mortified nudity, he tried to show his respect. In a moment he restored to her her dignity...Sakhi pulled her to him. Hiding her face on his chest, she felt filled with life”^{xliiii}. Sakhi who is the antagonist starts off as somebody who cares for Zaitoon, it is later that he turns into a monster. Khouri, on the other hand shows no such capitulation or kindness/temperance in the Arabic male. Throughout the novel, the Arabic male, and not just one but all are categorized under the same umbrella of Chauvinism. Some male characters in *The Bride* are sympathetic towards Zaitoon’s plight such as the Major and Ashiq Jawan but in *Forbidden Love* there is no apparent leniency and all Arab males are depicted as apathetic and hard, forbidding characters.

As a Laghoda contends “Or is it possible we romanticizing the position of the Other, assuming in a kind of sympathetic reverse discrimination, that being suppressed or a victim necessarily gives one a clearer vision than is granted to power holders?...under what conditions are we to value each and on what criteria are we to do the valuing?”^{xliv}. This romanticizing of the ‘other’ gives means to the ‘other’ to exploit the way in which the ‘imperial gaze’ is directed and the extent to which the imperial gaze is justified. Writers such as Khouri have served to not only exploit the ‘imperial gaze’ but to deepen it. A post 9/11 scenario points towards a discriminatory view being leveled towards the Arab world and culture, with Arab men being at the heart of all problems. Additionally, all Arab women are viewed as being subjugated and suppressed regardless of their social class.

Since Khouri is not just writing from the viewpoint of an outsider, the subject but also as the object she only deepens the pre-misconceived notions. She seduces her reader’s intellect and the power to reason in order to gain not only readers but also to ensure that she will be able to market and sell her book successfully. Broinowski comments on this by stating during an interview,

And it was a time in which there was an absolute explosion of Western interest in the Middle East. And the publishers were very much at the forefront of people trying to cash in on that. So there were a slew of misery memoirs featuring repressed-looking-burqa-clad women on the covers; a kind of Middle Eastern kitsch Mills and Boon culture. And it wasn’t so much the real Middle East, as ‘Middle East Inc.’, which is like a Western commodified, packageable, saleable image of the Middle Eastern that Western readers were hungry to know about. Why? Because George Bush, one of the lines he was pushing at the time was, ‘We will go there to liberate their women/And because there were a whole lot of middle-class readers in the West-America and Australia and elsewhere—who were feeling guilty about the idea that we should go and kill people and throw bombs on them, it assuaged their guilt to feel that somehow there was a feminist motivation behind this invasion, to free these repressed women from these tyrannical, misogynistic, barbaric, backwards Arab males’^{xlv}.

Such memoirs are important in order for a dynamic change to take place but it is also imperative that writers of such accounts realize and understand the implication of the generalization created through their novels. They are morally obligated to not generalize such incidents and present a dichromatic instead of a monochromatic rendering of the picture.

Portrayal of the Eastern women’s plight is acceptable and praiseworthy as long as it is counterbalanced with an accurate and holistic portrayal of the Arab culture. Not all Arab women need to be rescued or ‘liberated’ from the Arab male. They are not subalterns who cannot speak, but being comfortable in their roles and their life they may not have to speak out, they may not be as oppressed as Khouri has painted them to be. In Broinowski’s documentary *Forbidden Lies*, Al-Sabbagh claims that Arab women are not as oppressed as they are portrayed. They work outside their homes, they are independent enough to come and go as they and do not always have to wear a hijab or have a male accompany them each time. This safely applies to many women throughout the East in countries like Pakistan and India also.

However, writers like Khouri, as Leila Pazargardi says,

Very simply, the market's "exoticization" of Muslim women writers begins with their marketing strategies: most visibly through their book covers. Most book covers of contemporary Muslim memoirs feature veiled women. For instance, when considering the cover of popular Muslim women's memoirs, such as Leila's *Marriage by Force*, Mukhtar Mai's *In the Name of Honor*, and Norma Khouri's *Forbidden Love*, one sees the repeated use of veiled women, often set against an embellished background of Middle Eastern design^{xxlvi}.

Pazargardi has commented on the visual aspect of exoticization and Khouri has presented the discursive aspect of 'exoticization'. Where the publishers are complicit in using the veil, Khouri as the author is guilty of exploiting the background story of the 'veiled figure'. It is important to note that the 'burqa' is not limited to Muslim women only, rather it represents the burqa- culture, in other words this image is an attempt to portray the suppressed culture of the Eastern women. In fact, a French graffiti artist, who goes by the pseudonym of Princess Hijabi has painting hijabs onto starlets and other scantily clad women. She claims that she is not a member of any political, religious, or anti-ad group, and that she only does it out of a sense of artistic responsibility. Therefore, the use of the burqa or veiling is not only limited to the East but is cross cultural, such as nuns wearing the headscarf or the veil that Christian women wear at funerals. However, only Eastern women's veil is associated with oppression and subjugation. This is what Khouri and other eastern memoir writers have exploited; the use of the burqa to connote oppression and subjugation in the eastern framework. There is no doubt about the fact that even today burqa is imposed on some women spread across the East, which obviously speaks for their oppression but that cannot be labeled as a norm of the East.

In spite of the negative implications, Norma Khouri conveyed a scenario which is not discussed to a great extent especially in Jordan. She has combated the age-old tradition of honor killing. Thus, she stands with writers such as Bapsi Sidhwa (*The Bride*), Mohammad Hanif (*Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*), who have tried to pinpoint the incidents dealing with 'honor killing'. However, she could have written in the fiction genre instead of claiming to write a memoir.

Honor killing and suppression of women does take place in the Eastern world. There are numerous instances of honor killing and suppression is also rampant in the East. Nevertheless, such cases do not depict the whole Eastern culture and society.

Writers who are writing in such a situation where the world is ready to believe any kind of violence linked to the Arab world, need to rid the Occidental framework of their prejudices and strive to clarify the situation. Presenting honor killing to the audience should not be one dimensional in fact it should be a balanced and multidimensional portrayal.

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Notes

- ⁱ Pazargardi, Leila, "Marketing "Honor Killing" Memoirs: Confronting Western Depictions of Muslim Women," *Thinking Gender Papers: UCLA Centre for the Study of Women*: 1-12, accessed January 4, 2010, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/57k2604f?query=%27Honor%20Killing%27%20Leila>.
- ⁱⁱ Ren, "Forbidden Love (Honour Lost)", *Blogcritics*, May 31, 2003, <http://blogcritics.org/forbidden-love-honour-lost/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ann E. Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 219.
- ^{iv} Norma Khouri, *Forbidden Love: a harrowing true story of love and revenge in Jordan*, (London; Auckland; New York: Bantam Books, 2003), 248.
- ^v *Ibid.*, 240.
- ^{vi} Saba Mahmood, "Retooling Democracy and Feminism in the Service of the New Empire" *University of Nebraska Press* 16, no.1 (2006): 120.
- ^{vii} Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze*, xviii.
- ^{viii} Khouri, *Forbidden Love: a harrowing true story of love and revenge in Jordan*, 254.
- ^{ix} *Ibid.*, xii.
- ^x Kiadatou Diallo, introduction to *Forbidden Love: a harrowing true story of love and revenge in Jordan*, (New York: Routledge, 1997).
- ^{xi} Jean Sasson, comment on *Forbidden Love: a harrowing true story of love and revenge in Jordan*, (New York: Routledge, 1997).
- ^{xii} Khouri, *Forbidden Love: a harrowing true story of love and revenge in Jordan*, 8.
- ^{xiii} *Ibid.*, 41.
- ^{xiv} Pazargardi, "Marketing "Honor Killing" Memoirs: Confronting Western Depictions of Muslim Women," 6.
- ^{xv} Amal Al-Sabagh. *Forbidden Love*, directed by Anna Broinowski (2007; Adelaide: IndiePix Films). DVD.
- ^{xvi} Unni Wikan, *In Honour of Fadime: Murder and Shame*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 25.
- ^{xvii} Khouri, *Forbidden Love: a harrowing true story of love and revenge in Jordan*, 42.
- ^{xviii} *Ibid.*, 10.
- ^{xix} *Ibid.*, 246.
- ^{xx} *Ibid.*, 246.
- ^{xxi} Nadia Anjum, "Diaspora Indexicality: Acculturation in Hanif Kureishi," *Narratives in Cultural Discourse: Research Essays (Contemporary British Fiction)*1 (2011): 29.
- ^{xxii} Khouri, *Forbidden Love: a harrowing true story of love and revenge in Jordan*, 11.
- ^{xxiii} Anna Broinowski, interview by Monique Rooney, *Humanities Research* 16, no.1 (2010): 129.
- ^{xxiv} Hanif Kureishi, "Borderline" in *Outskirts and Other Plays: The King and Me/Outskirts/Borderline/Birds of Passage*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 141.
- ^{xxv} Khouri, *Forbidden Love: a harrowing true story of love and revenge in Jordan*, 249.
- ^{xxvi} Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze*, xvii.
- ^{xxvii} Khouri, *Forbidden Love: a harrowing true story of love and revenge in Jordan*, 247.
- ^{xxviii} Bapsi Sidhwa, *The Bride*, (London: McDonald-Futura Publishers, 1983), 181.
- ^{xxix} Khouri, *Forbidden Love: a harrowing true story of love and revenge in Jordan*, 1.
- ^{xxx} *Ibid.*, 15.
- ^{xxxi} Michael Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 34.
- ^{xxxii} Khouri, *Forbidden Love: a harrowing true story of love and revenge in Jordan*, 247.
- ^{xxxiii} Michael Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 37.
- ^{xxxiv} Lila Abu-Laghd, "Seductions of the 'Honor-Crime,'" *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 22, no. 1 (2011) 28.
- ^{xxxv} Khouri, *Forbidden Love: a harrowing true story of love and revenge in Jordan*, 20.
- ^{xxxvi} *Ibid.*, 24-25.
- ^{xxxvii} *Ibid.*, 250.
- ^{xxxviii} *Ibid.*, 19.
- ^{xxxix} *Ibid.*, 82.
- ^{xl} *Ibid.*, 22.
- ^{xli} *Ibid.*, 67.
- ^{xlii} *Ibid.*, 92-3.
- ^{xliii} Sidhwa, *The Bride*, 162,164.
- ^{xliv} Laghd, "Seductions of the 'Honor-Crime,'" 122.
- ^{xlvi} Anna Broinowski, interview by Monique Rooney, 31.
- ^{xlvi} Pazargardi, "Marketing "Honor Killing" Memoirs: Confronting Western Depictions of Muslim Women," 3.