

Shame, Honor Culture: Women's Resistance and Double Surveillance in Short Stories by Abdullah and Jarrar

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Abstract. This research discusses how female characters in short stories by Shaila Abdullah and Randa Jarrar experience shame and honor culture, double surveillance, and women's resistance. This study aims to explore how honor and shame operate as mechanisms of patriarchal control, and how women navigate social pressures both in local and diasporic contexts. Using a qualitative method, this research analyzes textual elements, including dialogue and narration to examine these issues. Patriarchy Theory by Sylvia Walby, Intersectionality Theory by Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Postcolonial Subaltern Theory by Antonio Gramsci are applied to explain how gender, culture, and social expectations shape women's experiences. The results show that the main characters face double surveillance from family and society, creating psychological and social constraints, yet they enact subtle forms of resistance to assert autonomy and identity. In conclusion, this research highlights the persistence of honor culture as a social control mechanism and the strategies women employ to reclaim freedom and dignity.

Keywords: honor; patriarchy; resistance; shame; surveillance

Abstrak. Penelitian ini membahas bagaimana karakter perempuan dalam cerita pendek karya Shaila Abdullah dan Randa Jarrar mengalami budaya malu dan kehormatan, pengawasan ganda (double surveillance), dan resistensi perempuan. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana kehormatan dan rasa malu beroperasi sebagai mekanisme kontrol patriarki, dan bagaimana perempuan menavigasi tekanan sosial baik dalam konteks lokal maupun diaspora. Menggunakan metode kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis elemen tekstual, dialog, dan narasi untuk menguji isu-isu ini. Teori Patriarki oleh Sylvia Walby, Teori Interseksionalitas oleh Kimberlé Crenshaw, dan Teori Subaltern Pascakolonial oleh Antonio Gramsci diterapkan untuk menjelaskan bagaimana gender, budaya, dan harapan sosial membentuk pengalaman perempuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa karakter utama menghadapi pengawasan ganda dari keluarga dan masyarakat, menciptakan kendala psikologis dan sosial, namun mereka melakukan bentuk-bentuk resistensi halus untuk menegaskan otonomi dan identitas. Sebagai kesimpulan, penelitian ini menyoroti ketahanan budaya kehormatan sebagai mekanisme kontrol sosial dan strategi yang digunakan perempuan untuk merebut kembali kebebasan dan martabat mereka.

Kata kunci: budaya malu; kehormatan; patriarki; pengawasan; resistensi

INTRODUCTION

In world literature, the issue of patriarchy is one of the most frequently raised and discussed issues. Women are often viewed as subordinates whose freedom of movement is limited compared to men (Lindkvist, 2024). Based on Lindkvist's (2024) statement, it can be understood that women's voices

are often rarely heard. This causes women's freedom to determine their own lives to be hampered by societal demands, so that women are considered to have more limitations and less freedom. The culture of honor and shame is a social framework deeply rooted in society and plays a significant role in shaping gender relations. From this perspective, family honor is associated with women's actions, physical image, and moral purity, so the responsibility for maintaining the family's image falls on women. To protect their family's honor and dignity, women are positioned to obey rules, maintain behavior, and prioritize others above themselves, or are said to sacrifice their own interests. When women are deemed to have failed to meet societal expectations, the shame is felt not only by the women but also by their families. Shame is used as a powerful tool of social control, often more effective than physical violence in disciplining women (Singh et al., 2023). This results in an identity crisis and a loss of freedom for women due to surveillance and the fear of tarnishing the family's honor.

According to Nagendra (2022), women in patriarchal societies often experience a double burden, where they must balance traditional expectations within the household and social pressures in public spaces. In the case of the diaspora, however, cultural issues are often further complicated. The process of migration makes women think it can be an opportunity to find freedom by establishing a new identity, but instead, the community wants the traditions of their region of origin to remain in the "new" situation. In this context, the condition parallels the phenomenon of double surveillance, in which women's behavior is continuously monitored both by family and by the wider community. This results in double surveillance on women, because on the one hand they are required to comply with the norms of their home culture, while on the other hand they are also faced with the expectations of society in their new place. Moreover, this surveillance is both physical and symbolic in nature, so that every woman's behavior is seen as a representation of the honor of her family and community. This complexity is then depicted in literary works, and a narrative is formed about how women navigate forms of double surveillance in everyday life.

This paper argues that in the short stories by Shaila Abdullah and Randa Jarrar, the culture of honor and shame functions as a mechanism of patriarchal control, resulting in double surveillance of women, and that female characters employ subtle forms of resistance to assert autonomy and reclaim their dignity, both in local and diasporic contexts. To explore this, the analysis examines four short stories by Abdullah and Jarrar, which depict women navigating patriarchal expectations and honor-based pressures. Two stories by Shaila Abdullah, *Moment of Reckoning* and *Amulet for the Caged Dove*, focus on the struggles of women within families that adhere to patriarchal culture. In *Moment of Reckoning*, Ayesha is considered a failure by her husband's family for not giving birth to a son, prompting her to run away in despair. Meanwhile, in *Amulet for the Caged Dove*, Tannu faces constant pressure from her mother-in-law, Amma, who enforces the notion that women are the guardians of family honor. Both stories highlight women's subordinate position under patriarchy and the psychological and social burdens imposed on them.

Similarly, two stories by Randa Jarrar, *The Life, Loves, and Adventures of Zelwa the Halfie* and *Lost in Freakin' Yonkers*, explore the experiences of diasporic women negotiating multiple cultural expectations. In *The Life, Loves, and Adventures of Zelwa the Halfie*, Zelwa struggles with dual identities, trying to reconcile her home culture's traditions with her Western upbringing, while facing societal stereotypes. In *Lost in Freakin' Yonkers*, the protagonist experiences pressure from her Arab family regarding pregnancy and social propriety, while also encountering Western social norms that mark her as "different." These stories emphasize the complex layers of double surveillance, showing how diasporic women must balance personal freedom with the collective demands of both their home

and host societies. Together, Abdullah's and Jarrar's works reveal the pervasive impact of honor culture on women and the subtle forms of resistance they employ to reclaim autonomy and dignity.

Based on the four stories above that the writer has read, all of them demonstrate a culture of honor that is very broad in its reach, even across borders. Shame is an effective mechanism that acts as social control for both local communities and the diaspora. According to Singh et al. (2023), shame functions not only as an emotional feeling but also as a social tool to discipline women to comply with prevailing norms. In these four short stories, the function of shame is reinforced through social control that limits women's autonomy. The analysis of these four literary works aims to reveal how the culture of honor works through surveillance and shame. Therefore, the short stories reveal women's resistance as a form of reclaiming their freedom and dignity. This resistance can be seen as a response to the restrictive control enforced by honor-based norms.

To analyze how these dynamics operate within the literary works, this paper employs three theoretical frameworks: Patriarchy Theory by Sylvia Walby, Intersectionality Theory by Kimberle Crenshaw, and Postcolonial Subaltern Theory by Antonio Gramsci. The three theories above are used to examine the textual elements in literary works such as dialogues and narratives. The theoretical approach is applied to the works of Shaila Abdullah and Randa Jarrar, whose writings foreground gender issues across various themes. Through a feminist perspective, this paper aims to analyze the literary works and uncover the issues conveyed by the authors.

The application of these three theories will demonstrate how the culture of honor and shame functions to control and limit women's freedom. Walby's theory of patriarchy reveals the subordinate position of women through social structures and ties their identities to reproductive roles and family honor. Moreover, Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality examines the interconnectedness of layers such as gender oppression, religion, culture, and immigrant interactions that result in a double burden, namely the continuous surveillance of women, especially in the diaspora. Moreover, based on the article by Shofa & Istiani (2025), it can be seen that the voices of women who are often marginalized or silenced by the dominant culture are depicted through Gramsci's postcolonial subaltern theory, and subtle forms of resistance that challenge patriarchy also complement it. This analysis will enrich our understanding of the depiction of Muslim women's identity and dignity amidst patriarchal pressures and societal norms.

Studies analyzing the experiences of Muslim women in literature may have created initial frameworks around the issues of identity, patriarchy, and honor culture. For instance, the study of diasporic Muslim women as depicted in Leila Aboulela's book *Minaret* (2005) focused on how women balance the complexities of core cultural practices while incorporating the customs of the host culture and the importance of identity negotiation in multicultural societies (Roshan K. & Abdullah Al Tamimi, 2024). Similarly, other scholars have analyzed the stories of Shaila Abdullah with a primary focus on the theme of patriarchy and oppression, describing women as experiencing severe confinement and mental imprisonment within patriarchal societies (Maimoona Moin & Maheen Fatima, 2023). Extending this line of inquiry, Randa Jarrar has been critiqued from a similar perspective where scholars argue that diasporic individuals undergo the experience of double alienation and identity crisis that is compounded by excessive control from dual patriarchal systems such as the Muslim home culture and the Western host community (Fitria et al., 2023). There is a strong correlation between these literary works that assert women in patriarchal societies bear a double burden, namely, restrictions in the private and public spheres (Aziz, 2023), and those that reaffirm the significance of struggle, women's self-rule, and social justice in the diasporic literature (Zainab, 2024). Collectively, these findings confirm that the issues of identity negotiation, patriarchal oppression, and the struggle

for freedom are central to the study of Muslimah literature. Although these works successfully identify elements of oppression and resistance, they tend to analyze them separately, ignoring how cultural control mechanisms such as shame and honor structurally interact with layered theoretical frameworks.

Previous work recognizes the relationships between patriarchy, the dual identity struggle, and the need for resistance in the narratives, but there is no prior work that looks at the interlocking control and resistance mechanisms in the context of honor and double surveillance, and the more subtle forms of Gramscian resistance. Specifically, there is unanimous acknowledgment in the scholarship regarding the patriarchal pressure by Maimoona Moin & Maheen Fatima (2023) and dual surveillance in the diaspora by Fitria et al., (2023) but the present study claims that the unique mechanism of shame and honor is the immediate shackle for the multilayered oppression of double surveillance. Moreover, there is a dearth of studies that attempt to amalgamate Sylvia Walby's structural patriarchal order with Crenshaw's Intersectionality and Gramsci's Postcolonial Subaltern theory, to examine how the more subtle, quotidian acts of defiance, which constitute the subaltern mode of resistance, can be, counterintuitively, acts of strategic resistance to the multilayered surveillance. This study contributes to the body of work by focusing on four particular short stories that highlight the internalization of the mechanisms of honor and the control they represent, and the various ways in which women in the local and diaspora contexts negotiate their control within these mechanisms. Therefore, this study contributes significantly to the study of Muslim women and the diaspora by introducing Walby, Crenshaw, and Gramsci to analyze how subtle everyday acts of resistance function as strategic agents of subalterns against layered surveillance.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to investigate how the culture of honor and shame functioned as a mechanism of patriarchal control that produced double surveillance, as well as how female characters enacted subtle forms of resistance to assert autonomy and dignity. The rationale for this study was to analyze textual elements, including dialogue and narration, within the corpus of four selected short stories by Shaila Abdullah and Randa Jarrar, thereby allowing the reader to critically evaluate the study's overall validity and reliability. Data collection procedures primarily involved close textual analysis (CTA), wherein passages and dialogue depicting control mechanisms, surveillance instances, and acts of subtle resistance were identified, selected, and extracted. The data analysis procedure involved thematic coding and theoretical interpretation. Walby's Patriarchy Theory and Crenshaw's Intersectionality Theory were used to frame the analysis of shame, honor, and double surveillance, while Gramsci's concept of the subaltern was applied to interpret the subtle, everyday actions as valid forms of resistance. These procedures were used to process and analyze the data in order to understand the problem and synthesize the findings regarding structural oppression and the strategies women employed to reclaim freedom and dignity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings showed that the culture of honor and shame acted as a strong social control tool in the narratives. This culture greatly influenced women's experiences in both local and diaspora settings. The analysis revealed that patriarchal expectations about female behavior and reproduction led to double surveillance. Female characters faced constant scrutiny from their families, which upheld honor, and from society, which imposed racial and cultural stereotypes. These pressures

created serious psychological and social burdens. In response, the women found ways to resist, asserting their autonomy and dignity. The following sub-sections outline these main findings: first is the methods of control, next is the nature of double surveillance, and then the resistance strategies, all viewed through the frameworks of Patriarchy, Intersectionality, and Postcolonial Subaltern theory.

The Culture of Honor and Shame in the Stories

Patriarchy is generally known to reinforce women's subjugation within their lives. This aligns with the notion that Walby (1990) proposes, where patriarchy can be understood as a social system in which men are dominant while women are not, resulting in oppression and restrictions in various aspects of life. In this context, honor culture functions as a social mechanism for upholding patriarchal norms. Walby argues that in analyzing gender gaps, it is important to use the concept of patriarchy because this concept explains various aspects of subordination in households, families, and society with the depth, breadth, and interconnectedness of these various aspects (Noor Sanauddin, 2025). Women are often placed in positions of obligation to uphold the honor of their families and communities. In the story *Moment of Reckoning*, there is a quote:

"The infertility of Ayesha, Saeed's wife, had been a big issue for the longest time... The other three brothers' wives all had three, four children each and boasted of the majority of sons they had given their husbands as if that somehow put them on a pedestal" (Abdullah, 2005, p. 51).

Based on the quote above, it is depicted that Ayesha is unable to provide children, especially sons, to her husband, Saeed. Ayesha is considered a source of shame for the family. The women in the family, using the number and gender of their children as a measure of status, of course, this is a psychological burden for Ayesha. This excerpt from the story *Moment of Reckoning* clearly demonstrates how honor culture functions as a patriarchal control mechanism that links a woman's worth to her reproductive capacity, particularly in producing sons. Ayesha's infertility situation makes her a "source of shame" for her husband's family, especially when compared to her in-laws who "boast of having a majority of sons" as a marker of status. This analysis places Ayesha's experience within the oppression of powerlessness and the subordinate position of women who are subjected to sexism for failing to meet social and familial expectations. This is reinforced by the view in a related study that "Women are frequently viewed as beings who are incapable of making their own decisions, must marry, and must follow their family's traditions." (Djohar et al., 2023, p. 184).

This burden, exacerbated by the threat of Saeed's remarriage, emphasizes that Ayesha has no choice but to follow family traditions, thus demonstrating that oppression is a system that limits women's ability to achieve autonomy and self-dignity in a patriarchal-dominated environment.

"Ayesha sat down on the bed and started rocking back and forth, her knees drawn up to her chin, childlike in her movement. 'They are getting Saeed remarried, and I know he won't object. He wants a son one way or the other.' Her wild eyes scanned Shiwali's face. 'I'll die. I will. I'm not cut out for this.'" (Abdullah, 2005, p. 52).

This quote illustrates the psychological impact of patriarchal and honor-based pressures on Ayesha. The statement, "I'll die. I will. I'm not cut out for this," demonstrates fear and sense of failure she experiences for not meeting her family's expectations of bearing a male child. It emphasizes that in honor cultures, a woman's value is closely tied to her reproductive capacity, and failing to fulfill these expectations can generate shame, stress, and mental burden. Ayesha's reaction serves as tangible evidence of the internalization of patriarchal norms, which constrain women's agency while

reinforcing subtle yet powerful mechanisms of social control. In many religious institutions in society, male-dominated structures and masculine-centered language reinforce gender hierarchies and women's subordination; forms of patriarchy can constitute a hidden type of gender-based violence (GBV) (Ganira et al., 2025). This analogy is applied in Ayesha's story, where she is stressed because she cannot meet her family's expectations.

Similarly, in *Amulet for the Caged Dove*, patriarchal pressure is also expressed through Amma's obsession with Tannu or her daughter-in-law's fertility and the family honor. This is reflected in the quote:

"I would die if a thing like that happened to Raja's son," Amma said, biting her lower lip in apprehension and gazing at Tannu's flat stomach. She was again referring to the would-be grandchild as a boy. Tannu felt laughter bubbling inside her but faced her with a straight face as Amma concluded," (Abdullah, 2005, p. 4).

Amma's statement, "*I would die if a thing like that happened to Raja's son,*" while gazing at Tannu's stomach, which reflects how patriarchal expectations equate a woman's worth with her reproductive capacity. The emphasis on producing a male heir demonstrates how the family's honor is placed on the woman's body and fertility. Women's reputation for sexual purity is crucial to their status, and this is normal in honor culture (Foster et al., 2025). The representation aligns with Sylvia Walby's (1990) view that patriarchy operates through both private and public systems of control. The domestic sphere that is portrayed by Amma's continual surveillance functions as a space where women learn to internalize their subordination, cloaked in a veneer of affection, devotion, and religious obligation.

The enforcement of these patriarchal values becomes even more evident when Tannu refuses to comply with Amma's expectations, revealing how honor culture punishes women who challenge its moral codes. This is clearly illustrated in the following scene:

"Tannu breathed in sharply. "What? I will not go to that shrine, ever!" she cried. Amma slapped her across her face. "Don't you talk to me like that, you insolent, unproductive woman! Don't invoke God's wrath by being callous and shameless. If my first grandchild is destined to be a chuwa in the shrine, He will smile upon us and bestow another offspring on you soon after." (Abdullah, 2005, p. 4).

Later, when Amma slaps Tannu and calls her "an insolent, unproductive woman", the humiliation serves as a disciplinary mechanism that reinforces the culture of shame. This act illustrates how emotional and physical control are intertwined to enforce women's compliance within a patriarchal structure. Cultural and religious beliefs are relevant in shaping attitudes and behavior towards reproductive health, often leading to the emergence of stigma and misinformation (Ouahid, 2025). This section asserts that internalized patriarchal and religious norms not only limit women's agency but also reinforce the social stigma against infertility.

Double Surveillance or Oppression in Women's Lives

The reduction of women's value to their reproductive abilities, imposed through honor and shame, is in accordance with the signs of patriarchy, where patriarchy is widely understood as a social system where men as a class have more power and authority in various fields, in contrast to women as a class and where men can maintain their superior status through structural domination and oppression of women (Gruenbaum et al., 2023). In the quote, it is emphasized again that male domination is not only seen in individuals or their families, but also exists in a broader system, also called a social

system, where it binds women's value only to women's reproductive abilities. This opens up space for observing how strategies of surveillance and shame continue to be reproduced both in local contexts and in diasporic experiences. Such dynamics also manifest in the diasporic experience, as depicted in *Lost in Freakin' Yonkers* story.

"She'd covered for me ever since we moved to the States, essentially for the past four years. She covered for me when I got the clap and took me to a GYN. She covered for me after discovering a bag of weed though I told my baba it was just za'tar. She covered for me when I went to prom not with the Arab American ninth-grader and friend of the family Baba had chosen, but with a young black man I'd picked up at a club on an earlier night when Mama had covered for me. It was time for me to face the music, and the music coming from Baba was sure to be deafening" (Jarrar, 2016, p. 39).

The experience of diaspora subjects the female protagonist to continuous moral observation from both her family and the broader Western society. The main character narrates

"She'd covered for me ever since we moved to the States, essentially for the past four years... She covered for me when I went to prom not with the Arab American ninth-grader and friend of the family Baba had chosen, but with a young black man I'd picked up at a club"

It reveals how her mother's act of "covering" functions as both protection and surveillance. The repetition of this phrase underscores the persistent scrutiny over main character's behavior as she navigates two contrasting cultural spaces. Within the home, she is monitored through the moral codes of honor and modesty upheld by her Arab family; outside, she faces the Western gaze that stereotypes her ethnicity and sexuality. Immigrant or diasporic women face numerous challenges and opportunities when negotiating their cultural identities and gender roles. Often, they are on the verge of wanting to belong to new cultural spaces in the diaspora while still maintaining their cultural identity from their home countries (Bhandari, 2024).

In *The Life, Loves, and Adventures of Zelwa the Halfie*, the protagonist's reflects:

"Was she killed because she was half ibex? That would never happen now. Halfies have done a lot since those days; we've gotten a lot of recognition; we're protected by laws; we have more rights . . . we're . . ." (Jarrar, 2016, p. 198),

It reveals her internal struggle with identity and belonging. Despite claiming progress and protection, Zelwa's tone of hesitation underscores the persistence of marginalization in new forms. The feeling of being a "halfie" half human, half ibex symbolically represents the fragmented immigrant experience, where their identity in the diaspora is never fully recognized by either the home or host culture. Within diasporic settings, this ambivalence reflects how women experience multiple and overlapping systems of surveillance, such as familial, cultural, and racial. Zelwa's struggle for recognition in the West faces the same obstacles as other minority groups, where their complex identities are often reduced and stigmatized. This is reinforced by the view in a related study that:

"Muslims have long been the subject of ridicule and victims of the bad stigma of Western society, various slanders are directed at Muslim minorities there with the assumption that Muslim minorities in the West are very easy to be used as scapegoats for all the actions they have committed." (Hidayah & Djohar, 2024, p. 147).

This stigma is not only racial but also intersectional, placing diasporic women like Zelwa under constant surveillance, limiting their freedom to define themselves, and maintaining their vulnerability to discrimination despite the existence of "laws" that protect them. Intersectionality exposes the "processes of differentiation and systems of domination" that sustain inequality through interlocking hierarchies of race, gender, and nationality (Al-Faham et al., 2019). This framework helps illuminate Zelwa's predicament as a diasporic "halfie," her identity is continually negotiated within structures that both promise liberation and reproduce exclusion.

The conditions above illustrate the double surveillance experienced by women in diaspora, where familial and cultural expectations intersect with external social judgment, leaving them constantly observed, constrained, and negotiated between two systems of control. The marriage of moral demands from the culture of origin with racial stereotypes from the West creates a layered and complex oppression. In applying intersectionality theory, individuals can experience various forms of oppression simultaneously, and these forms of inequality do not function independently but are interrelated and mutually reinforcing (Atewologun, 2018). Through this lens, the main character's experience can be read as an intersection of gender, race, and cultural displacement where patriarchal expectations from her Arab background collide with racialized perceptions from Western society. This layered oppression confirms that the struggle of diasporic women is a continuous search for justice and self-autonomy, which is strengthened by the view in the related source that:

"I examine these Muslimah literary texts by thematizing the portrayal of how Muslim women, or Al-Muslimah (Muslimah), struggle to seek gender justice and social justice while living as minorities in the host land." (Djohar, 2024, p. 6).

This quote reinforces that double surveillance is a manifestation of structural oppression that requires women to constantly balance the integrity of their personal identity with contradictory cultural and racial demands, while simultaneously seeking justice and self-autonomy.

Women's Resistance in the Stories

The stories not only portray patriarchal control and intersectional oppression, but also reveal how women are constrained within both familial and cultural structures and expose moments in which these women begin to resist and reclaim their sense of self. In this regard, Gramsci's postcolonial subaltern theory provides a lens through which to examine how women, despite being silenced, can still act assertively by providing subtle everyday resistance. In postcolonial subaltern theory, subaltern people "cannot speak" not because they are mute in the literal sense but because their representation is already embedded in the dominant discourse (Green, 2002). This means that all their actions and voices will always be controlled and misinterpreted by the dominant or powerful party.

In *Moment of Reckoning*, Abdullah portrays this form of quiet resistance through Shiwali's subtle assertion of control in her marriage. It can be seen in the quote:

"On days when the whole house quieted down for a lazy afternoon siesta, she would prop herself up on a pillow, sipping a cold limbo paani in her charming way, and bombard him with questions—about his governmental work, his past, his present, his likes and dislikes. He tried to answer her questions methodically, perhaps feeling that it was the ice-breaking moment in their relationship, but to his dismay found himself utterly exposed when at the end of the inquisition, Shiwali would slip away from his side without so much as a comment or a loving word, making Arbaz feel used, as if layer by layer she had peeled off his soul but in

essence managed to be more of a stranger to him than ever before" (Abdullah, 2005, p. 48).

This excerpt shows that Shiwali's behavior represents a form of psychological resistance within a domestic sphere that seeks to confine her. Instead of directly confronting her husband, she reverses the power dynamic through intellectual dominance, interrogating him and then withdrawing emotionally. Her silence becomes a strategic act of defiance, reclaiming autonomy in a space where she is expected to submit. Within the framework of subaltern theory, social change arises not only from collective action but also from individual awareness and action, which are the primary forms of resistance to domination. This view emphasizes that resistance does not always take large-scale or confrontational forms, but also from simple, everyday actions (Smith, 2010). This was done by Shiwali who was enjoying time with her husband. Still, Shiwali instead asked a lot of questions "about his governmental work, his past, his present, his likes and dislikes" this made her husband "utterly exposed" which is naked but not literally naked but emotionally naked. Shiwali just left without giving any comment or emotional validation to her husband. Shiwali's act when she was asking repeated personal questions to her husband and then withdrawing emotionally was a form of resistance in a simple daily action that she did but still showed resistance and was able to make her interlocutor silent.

However, while Shiwali's resistance occurs through psychological maneuvering within the domestic sphere, Abdullah also portrays another form of resistance that emerges through spiritual refusal. This shift shows that women's resistance in honor-based cultures is not singular; instead, it adapts to the specific pressures imposed upon them, whether domestic, cultural, or religious. When patriarchal expectations become intertwined with ritual obligations, acts of inward defiance become a powerful way for women to reclaim their agency. "Gramsci's concepts of 'war of position' and 'passive revolution' further clarify how gender and tourism are shaped in theocracies. The war of position describes gradual ideological struggles within civil society, where marginalized groups slowly undermine dominant norms." (Seyfi et al., 2025). Through this lens, the next example illustrates how spiritual resistance becomes another tool against patriarchal hegemony.

Tannu shows a similar form of subtle resistance in *Amulet for the Caged Dove*, where her quiet prayer becomes an act of reclaiming autonomy over her body and reproductive choices. Faced with a cultural expectation that glorifies motherhood as a means to preserve family honor, Tannu rejects this demand by whispering,

"O Lord, please do not give me a child because of my presence here... I am not strong enough to make an offering of my firstborn." (Abdullah, 2005, p.13).

In a context where infertility often results in shame while childbirth is tied to the family's moral standing, Tannu's refusal is a direct challenge to the belief that a woman's worth lies solely in her reproductive capacity. Her prayer becomes a symbolic reclaiming of her body from the cultural and religious expectations imposed on her. This act of spiritual refusal aligns with Shofa and Istiani's (2025) claim that women frequently "resist patriarchal hegemony by asserting control over decisions related to their bodies and their children". Her refusal also reflects a broader form of resistance commonly found in patriarchal narratives. Safdar (2024) demonstrates a similar pattern in her analysis, stating that "Zara challenges the traditional system through her ideas and actions. Zara's wish for 'free will' and refusal to follow the appointed path for her represents a permanent human desire for self-control." Like Zara, Tannu's defiance emerges not through open confrontation but through an insistence on bodily and spiritual autonomy, small, personal acts that quietly disrupt the structure that seeks to control her.

From a Gramscian perspective, Tannu's act operates as a form of war of position, where the contestation of power takes place internally and ideologically. This is reflected in the explanation that such resistance emerges through "gradual ideological struggles within civil society, where marginalized groups slowly undermine dominant norms" (Seyfi et al., 2025). Tannu's prayer subtly destabilizes the hegemonic belief that bearing children, particularly sons, is a sacred duty of women. Her refusal, though quiet, challenges the ideological foundation of the honor culture itself. Instead of accepting the ritual as divinely ordained, she reclaims her relationship with God as separate from the patriarchal system, transforming her spirituality into a site of resistance. Thus, her act becomes more than a private plea, it is a rejection of hegemonic control disguised as religious obligation.

In everyday life, verbal resistance is also a form of everyday resistance carried out by Subaltern women to challenge the hegemony of patriarchal culture, which demands obedience in personal and spiritual matters. In the story *Lost in Freakin' Yonkers*, there is a scene where the main character calls her mother, and her mother forces her to marry her boyfriend.

"Why, habibi? Come on, do the conversion, and get married. We're all waiting for you." She sounds unconvinced and hurried. Who is "we"? I imagine that Mama had picked up a few Hell's Angels and a couple of squeegee boys for wit nesses on her way into the city. "He's not even here," I say. "He's not converting. I don't want him to convert. He'll be a shitty Muslim and a shitty husband too." (Jarrar, 2016, p. 36).

From this scene, it is clear that the mother is trying to encourage her daughter to marry her boyfriend, but it is clear that her daughter rejects it. This is in line with this idea:

"Muslim women are perceived as oppressed by men and patriarchy who are forced into arranged marriages and wear the hijab and also as the 'Other' or dangerous foreigners who are not accepted as part of Western society." (Djohar & Komalasari, 2024, p. 129).

The article emphasizes that Abdullah's novels serve as a tool to counter the voiceless image often attached to Muslim women in the West. The main character sharply rejects the demands of marriage, saying, *"He'll be a shitty Muslim and a shitty husband too,"* challenging this passive image. This strategy can be classified as a gradual ideological struggle, or war of position, which is in line with the view that: "The war of position describes gradual ideological struggles within civil society, where marginalized groups slowly undermine dominant norms." (Seyfi et al., 2025). With this cynical rejection, the narrator claims the agency of Muslim women to resist patriarchal family coercion, demanding gender justice over personal and religious choices, demonstrating women's agency operating within boundaries, where subtle negotiations and disagreements coexist.

Together, these examples demonstrate that women's resistance in Abdullah's stories operates through layered, subtle actions that challenge patriarchal authority from within. Whether through psychological strategies, emotional withdrawal, or spiritual refusal, these women carve out spaces of agency in systems that attempt to silence them. Through Gramsci's subaltern framework, their voices though constrained, emerge through everyday acts of defiance that destabilize hegemonic structures and reclaim their sense of self.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the findings of this study reveal that the mechanisms of shame and honor operate not only as abstract cultural values but as deeply embedded systems that shape women's emotional, social, and spiritual lives. In both Abdullah's and Jarrar's works, women are positioned within multilayered structures of surveillance that regulate their bodies, choices, and identities. Yet, despite the weight of patriarchal expectations, these narratives demonstrate that women continue to create small but significant spaces of resistance. Whether through psychological strategies, spiritual refusal, or identity negotiation in diasporic settings, the characters reclaim agency in environments that seek to silence them. These acts of resistance, although subtle, challenge the hegemonic ideals that define their worth in relation to family honor and cultural propriety. They illustrate that resistance need not be loud or confrontational to be transformative. Instead, everyday practices and quiet refusals can slowly destabilize dominant norms and open pathways for autonomy. Therefore, the stories by Abdullah and Jarrar not only expose the burdens imposed by honor culture but also celebrate the resilience and self-determination of women who navigate, resist, and ultimately redefine the boundaries placed upon them.

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