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"Blood Messages never Arrive:" A Cultural Study of Manar's Rape Trauma in Ibrahim Nasrallah's Balcony of Disgrace

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Abstract

The paper titled "Blood messages never arrive: A cultural study of Manar's rape trauma in Ibrahim Nasrallah's Balcony of Disgrace" is a thorough examination of a persistent issue, which is the cultural reaction to rape and rape trauma within Arab communities. The Palestinian writer Ibrahim Nasrallah's Balcony of Disgrace (2010) narrates the story of a young protagonist, Manar, who works as a social worker in a high school near her home. One day, she becomes a victim of brutal rape—an act of revenge from her brother. As a result, Manar is labeled as impure and must confront the cultural doctrines of patriarchy. This study adopts a qualitative, deductive approach, drawing on Veeser's concept of "The Moment of Exchange" to critically analyse how Arab culture perceives and treats victims of rape. To conclude, regrettably that the cultural conventions often blame the victims while exonerating both the perpetrators and the executioners, thereby maintaining a harmful environment that discourages victims from seeking justice and reinforces societal acceptance of such violence.

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"الرسائل التي يحملها بريد الدم لا تصل أبدًا": دراسة ثقافية عن صدمة أغتصاب منار في رواية إبراهيم نصر الله شرفة العار

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الملخص

تُقدّم ورقة البحث "الرسائل التي يحملها بريد الدم لا تصل أبدًا: دراسة ثقافية عن صدمة أغتصاب منار في رواية إبراهيم نصر الله شرفة العار" دراسةً مُفصّلةً لقضيةٍ مُتكرّرة: ردود الفعل الثقافية تجاه الاغتصاب وصدمة الاغتصاب داخل المجتمعات العربية. تروي رواية "شرفة العار" للكاتب الفلسطيني إبراهيم نصر الله (2010) قصة منار، وهي شابة تعمل كأخصائية اجتماعية في مدرسة ثانوية قريبة من منزلها. في أحد الأيام، تقع منار ضحية اغتصاب وحشي، انتقامًا من أخيها. ونتيجة لذلك، تُوصم منار بوصمة العار، وتواجه المفاهيم الثقافية السائدة للنظام الأبوي. تتبنى هذه الدراسة منهجًا نوعيًا استنتاجيًا، مستندةً إلى مفهوم "لحظة التبادل" عند فيسر، لتحليل نقدي لكيفية إدراك الثقافة العربية لضحايا الاغتصاب ومعاملتها لهم. وخلاصة القول, للأسف, أن الأعراف الثقافية غالباً ما تلقي باللوم على الضحايا بينما تبرئ الجناة والمنفذين، مما يحافظ على بيئة ضارة تثني الضحايا عن السعي لتحقيق العدالة وتعزز القبول المجتمعي لمثل هذا العنف

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1. Introduction

Psychologically, rape is "traumatic for women due to fear of serious physical injury or death, and disruption of a woman's parental care as a result of which the woman's partner may abandon her" (Chaudhury, 2017, p. 2) especially considering that during the early 1800s, there was a lack of understanding about psychological trauma, and society rejected women who had been raped. They had no support system that would help them (Hall, 1988, p. 67). Unfortunately, such social abandonment is still current in Arab culture. Thus, rape trauma intersects with cultural perspective; consequently, this paper aims to examine the cultural response to rape and rape trauma by applying Professor Harold Aram Veeser's (1950-) "The Moment of Exchange" (Veeser, 1989, p. xiv). Specifically, it explores how the culture depicted in the novel Balcony of Disgrace responds to the protagonist Manar's experience of rape and its aftermath.

Balcony of Disgrace has attracted the interest of some researchers, although they are relatively few compared with the scale of this massive novel. In 2015, Sana Mahmoud Jarrar penned her interdisciplinary article titled "Balcony of Disgrace: A trial against honour crimes in which she examines the concept of honour killing, shedding light on the indulgent legal rules regarding such criminal practises against women, especially within the poor to middle-class Arab societies that exploit traditional notions of honour. However, the present study agrees that the novel offers fruitful commentary on gender and law, Jarrar's study mainly focuses on legal and feminist frameworks to discuss honour crimes without fully engaging with broader cultural processes that the current study aims to examine.

Seven years later, Sophia Yousri Salah Jumaa applied a descriptive realistic reading of Balcony of Disgrace in her article "Manifestations of the critical realist [sic] vision in place in the novel Balcony of Shame by Ibrahim Nasrallah." Her study concentrates on the roles of time and place in the life of the female protagonist Manar to present the psychological and societal realities associated with the notion of honour. The current paper attributes the attention to literary form and social critique, but this approach centers on narrative technique rather than on a concise cultural systems that inform concepts of honour and shame; in addition, it is in the Arabic language. Of similar importance, there is Ashraf Waleed Mansour, Visam Mansur, Shafiq Banat, and Mead Mohamad Banat's research "Balcony of Disgrace: The intersection of patriarchy and honour in Arab societies" (2024), which attempts to condense the

consequences of patriarchal ideologies in Arab cultures for both women and men by focusing on men's images from a shallow perspective, ultimately leading to honour killings. Nonetheless, the researchers use an interdisciplinary approach to connect social norms and individual identity. The present analysis agrees that patriarchal norms significantly shape identity for all genders; however, they primarily focus their study on social structure representation instead of the everyday cultural practices that challenge honour norms. The work undertaken here does reference to some daily practices that support patriarchy, such as Ameen's disagreement regarding Manar having a mobile phone, which he believes ruins her honour.

Thus, the current paper agrees with each study's insights into gender, law, narrative, and patriarchy, yet this research takes a cultural studies approach to address what is missing: an analysis of how honour and shame are constructed, maintained, and potentially contested through cultural narratives, rituals, and daily practices. Arab culture relies heavily on traditions. Fortunately, most of these traditions are benevolent, especially those rooted in religion. These traditions include maintaining family ties, showing respect to parents, being kind to war prisoners, the sick, women, children, and neighbours, practicing Al-Zakat, and providing hospitality to guests; in other words, they encompass all the chivalric characteristics. However, others belong to the pre-Islamic era known as the Age of Ignorance or Al-Jahiliya; these traditions are patriarchal in nature.

The Arab culture cannot dispose of patriarchy but instead persists in centring itself around the concept of honour. Unfortunately, the obsession with honour often leads to overlooking the reality of bloodshed and neglecting the religious, psychological, and legal consequences—all in the name of preserving cultural respect. Honour takes different forms; yet, its core is fundamentally based on women's virginity. It is heartbreaking that many women actively support the masculine circulation of virtue-saving practices. Thus, the current research applies the American professor Harold Aram Veeser's concept of "The Moment of Exchange," which is a process of three marketplace terminologies: circulation, negotiation, and exchange of ideas (Veeser, 1989, p. xiv)—to examine those patriarchal cultural dynamics.

Veeser believes that a profound relationship exists between culture and power. For Veeser, culture consists of "selves and texts" that are hostile to others, while disciplinary power is defined in terms of "the King, Religion," and "Masculinity" (Veeser, 1989, p. xiii). Even though he refers to "others" as "Indians, Jews, and

Blacks," this study considers "others" to be women depending on several studies; for example, Simon de Beauvoir (1908-1986) in The Second Sex (1949) (as cited in Tyson, 2006, p. 96) and Kate Millet (1934-2017) in Sexual Politics (1970) (as cited in Bressler, 2012, p. 150-51).

As Veeser suggests, circulation is not only a reference to money or knowledge. Instead, it indicates the "social assets," which include the prestige of masculinity and possessions within a man's family and community (Veeser, 1989, p. xiv). The patriarchal culture negotiates that a man will not be a real man if he lacks total control over what he owns; a woman is one of those properties. Such exchanges occur constantly; the social reward is that a man is regarded as dignified both within his marriage and in society. At the same time, women's obedience is exchanged for preserving their lives and being included inside the "cult of true Womanhood" (Welter, 1966, p. 151). The cult of true womanhood is built on some primary characteristics: purity, piety, domesticity, powerlessness, and submissiveness; otherwise, they would be punished by God, law, and society. This study discusses Balcony of Disgrace in light of Veeser's "moment of exchange," but first, an overview of the novel is needed to understand the context.

2. An Overview: Balcony of Disgrace

A man named Abul-Ameen has three sons, Ameen, Abdul-Ra'uf, and Anwar, and a daughter, Manar. As the years pass, Manar graduates from high school, and she decides to further her education at a university (Nasrallah, 2001, p. 24). This moment is when the first family meeting over her future takes place: Uncle Salim (Abul-Ameen's oldest brother) arrives at his brother's party at home; he witnesses that Abul-Ameen is not seated in his chair but instead standing and dancing in front of his daughter in spite of all his severe back pain, a scene that never pleases him (Nasrallah, 2001, p. 9).

Here, instead of congratulating Abul-Ameen for his daughter's success, Uncle Salim reminds his brother that females have nowhere but only their husbands' house, so it is time to obtain her married. As usual, Abul-Ameen is prepared to respond, saying, "She is still young" (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 10). This reply infuriates Uncle Salim, who, before departing, informs Abul-Ameen that "your stubbornness will lead you to an undesirable outcome" (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 10)— specifically, that attending university will ruin her honour and, as a result, that of her family. However, the first

patriarchal gathering deviates from the usual when Abul-Ameen turns down his older brother Uncle Salim's proposal and his request that Manar be allowed to earn a bachelor's degree.

Three years later, when Manar is in third grade at the university, Abul-Ameen's health continues to deteriorate, making it impossible for him to continue taking her to university every day. As a result, he begs his son, Ameen, to do it (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 10). Nevertheless, Ameen lacks responsibility; he is preoccupied with an illegal relationship with their neighbour, Tamam, despite his lovely wife, Nabila, who suffers from "stones in her gallbladder" (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 12) as a result of her husband's mischievous actions. Eventually, Abul-Ameen gives Younis, a young man, his cab so he may work on it and drive Manar to her university (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 59, 61). He becomes another male family supporter, and Manar, who is inexperienced, truly trusts him (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 72).

Manar graduates from the university, and her family, particularly her father, is hilarious with her success, as if he was trying to tell everybody, especially his brother Uncle Salim and his son Ameen, that he has won the negotiation. Look, Manar has graduated, has a cell phone, and still, she is the same pure girl (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 26, 75-6). Now Manar finds a job at a school near her home so she can go there alone without any man's protection; she works as a social worker (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 94). In the meantime, Ameen finally has a taxi-driving licence (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 73). In this situation, Ameen decides to befriend Younis to learn the secrets of profiting before reclaiming his father's taxi; he devises a cunning plan. On his return, Younis accepts Ameen's friendship and even lends him some money as Ameen makes him believe that Nabila needs emergent surgery (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 85-6).

The next day, Younis is surprised that Abul-Ameen asks for his taxi's key, informing him that Ameen succeeded in obtaining the licence, which is a serious shock to Younis. He was with Ameen for two weeks without realising the truth (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 87). Moreover, before blocking Younis' phone number, Ameen tells him that he does not borrow any money from him. Now Younis rages with anger and swears revenge:

> Simple! But if you imagine that I will come knocking on your door like a beggar to demand my right, you are delusional... I will never ask you for it again, be sure of that, and be sure that when you completely forget that you took it, I will remind you of something that you can never forget. (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 88-9)

On the day of Ameen's marriage to Tamam, Manar tries to delay herself as much as she can to avoid attending the matrimonial ceremony (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 100). However, she spends the last few happiest hours with her boyfriend, Esam (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 100-3), who really loves her. He has not even attempted to hold her hand throughout all these years, which demonstrates the purity of their love (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 95). Manar is like Cinderella, careful about being at home not at midnight but before the sunset, as her father orders her (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 96), but does her story end happily like Cinderella's? This subject will be explored in the upcoming pages.

Continuing with the narrative, the Prince and Princess of Balcony of Disgrace walk side by side through the city while Esam tells her jokes; the hour is already late. Meanwhile, a car parks nearby—Younis (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 103) arrives. Without giving her a chance to think, he persuades her to let him take her home since it is late, and, as expected, she is not allowed to return with Esam due to potential gossip. Additionally, Manar already trusts Younis, as mentioned previously, which he exploits. At the same time, she remains unaware of Ameen's meanness towards Younis. Furthermore, she could never imagine any harm coming from Younis.

Manar gives Esam the final loving glance as if bidding a farewell forever. She gets in the taxi; Esam feels blue but powerless to act (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 103). Shortly after, she finds herself in a small dark room alone with Younis and a knife pressed to her neck if she resists (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 112). When the wedding music sound rises with Ameen and Tamam's laughter while Nabila dances in front of them "like any slaughtered bird" (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 83). Manar lives her worst moments; the horror of the scene robs her voice. She cannot react at first, but then she tries to scream. Despite her dry throat stifling any chance of shouting, she cowers in the corner of that miserable room, covering her body with her arms and legs. He throws her clothes at her, and she puts them on in a matter of moments (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 114).

Manar is shocked by the brutal offensive scene she has just experienced. she feels like a motionless corpse; yet, she has to move under Younis' pokes. Overhearing his message to Ameen, she understands that her rape is an act of revenge (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 114), resulting in the loss of her femininity:

> Tell your brother that what I did was his wedding gift. Tell him: If he were a man, let him try to reach me! He carried her in the car. He was careful that the first place she arrived was her house. . . . When she opened the door, a storm of songs rushed

towards her, and she walked towards her house like a corpse. (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 114)

Next, the paper will study how each group in Manar's society is reacting to her rape and rape trauma by using the "moment of exchange" technique.

3. "The Black Flag:" Balcony of Disgrace's The Moment of Exchange

Patriarchal disciplines play a decisive role in the community depicted in Balcony of Disgrace. Such communities venerate cultural norms even more than religious orders, despite the novel's Islamic background, which includes the Quranic verse "But whoever kills a believer intentionally—his recompense is Hell, wherein he will abide eternally, and Allah has become angry with him and has cursed him" (The Quran, Sahih International, n.d., An-Nisaa' 4:93). For sure, they further know the Prophet Mohammed's (peace be upon him) hadith: "Everything of a Muslim is sacred to another Muslim: his blood, his money, and his honour" ("The characteristics... honour"). However, when the issue is related to the circulation of masculinity, society reverts to practices similar to the Al-Jahiliyah age and the idea of "blood for blood." The question here is whose the blood belongs to, the criminal's or the victim's? Why? The answer will be addressed in the following pages.

Balcony of Disgrace operates on Veeser's concept of "the moment of exchange," in which powerful members (males) are hostile (either directly or indirectly) towards powerless members (women). However, both groups must adhere to the texts (patriarchal rules) that the selves (patriarchal men) have established to achieve a desirable exchange and ensure the continued circulation of masculinity (Veeser, 1989, p. xii).

To contextualise this analysis, it is important to go back a step before Manar's rape. Ameen manipulates Younis (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 85-7). The exchange in such a case, depending on Veeser's concept of "the moment of exchange" (Veeser, 1989, p. xiv), is survival of the fittest, focusing not on murder but on preserving one's manhood and prestige within the community. Ameen wins the first round and proves his masculinity (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 89). As a man, Younis is determined to respond forcefully, believing that the outcome will guarantee his masculinity and enhance his prestige both in his own eyes and within society. Thus, Younis negotiates a knockout. The knockout is family honour; in such cultures, honour is primarily measured through women's purity. The rape is done; Younis wins the second round (Nasrallah, 2011, p.

114). The exchange involves a prestigious Younis at the cost of Manar's purity; as a result, the family's name is "stained" that requires more blood to cleanse it.

First, Nabila and Um-Al-Ameen learn about Manar's pregnancy and immediately have one haunting response: "slaughter" (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 142–43), without asking about the circumstances of the pregnancy, as there is only one result—murder, as such reality has been built in their unconscious by the texts of the moment of exchange because, according to the rules, deviating from the traits of the cult of true womanhood, namely purity (Welter, 1966, p. 151), should be exchanged for murder. Nevertheless, Um-Al-Ameen and Nabila attempt to save Manar by terminating the three-month fetus (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 144), which suggests that they believe in the necessity of offering a blood sacrifice to the god of patriarchy to preserve its blessing. On this occasion, Manar will be excluded from the cult of true womanhood because, when she offers her foetus as a sacrifice, her identity remains impure. Thus, she must refuse all proposals—meaning she will never marry to keep her secret hidden (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 133)—or else murder will be her fate.

Next, there is Ameen, Manar's elder brother and the main one responsible for her rape, who has to respond to this transgression. Initially, he negotiates the killing of Younis (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 154-55). Yet, Younis's blood is insufficient to purify the family's name, so this negotiation will still fail to save Manar from slaughter. Consequently, he bargains over his sister's situation because he feels remorse for her innocence and attempts to save her life through abortion, aiming to keep her impurity a secret from the public. Therefore, Ameen provides the three female members of the Abul-Ameen family, Um-Al-Ameen, Manar, and Nabila, three days to terminate the pregnancy (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 160, 162). If they do not comply, he is unwilling to risk contradicting the patriarchal demand for women's purity, even though she is the victim, as the consequences would affect his prestige as a man.

To end Manar's pregnancy, the three miserable women engage in a patriarchal "negotiation" (Veeser, 1989, p. xiv). The educated class, especially the physicians, are the first group they encounter, who also engage in their negotiations. The first doctor rejects the abortion, as it is against his professional ethics. When Nabila requests an abortion, he restrains his rage because he recognises that their predicament challenges traditional masculinity. Therefore, as a man belongs to the same patriarchal society, he advises them to locate the person responsible for this disaster (Younis) "before the

time is too late," because if Manar's belly becomes bigger, even marriage will not be an option (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 145).

The second doctor compromises his professional integrity on two occasions: first, by negotiating Manar's life for a large sum of money that the female characters cannot afford; and second, by refusing to perform the surgery to avoid potential social issues when he sees Ameen involved, which leads him to change his mind to maintain his peace (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 147, 162). In summary, the elite's response to Manar's pregnancy demonstrates that both doctors conform to patriarchal texts: the first doctor believes in, respects, and follows the rules of the moment of exchange, while the second doctor embodies a cynical, self-interested identity, leaving Manar and her companions with no real support—only further evidence of a society that sacrifices women's autonomy and dignity to preserve its oppressive traditions.

After Um-Al-Ameen fails in her negotiation with the two doctors in relation to the moment of exchange's texts, she considers seeking help from a midwife. She begs the midwife, who must be in a different neighbourhood to avoid detection, to assist Manar. In response, the midwife refuses the operation, as Manar is in her third month, which may cause her death and consequently legal ramifications (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 165). The heartbreaking reality is Um-Al-Ameen's determination to take that risk, believing that failing to terminate the pregnancy would ultimately result in Manar's death (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 165). Unfortunately, in this tense situation, a woman from their neighbourhood witnesses Manar's pregnancy, which will eventually lead to her tragic fate (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 165).

This woman continuously repeats, "Have mercy on us, my Lord. Oh God, save us. Oh God, save us!" (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 165). In fact, she forgets God's doctrine regarding gossip: "And do not spy or backbite each other. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his brother when dead? You would detest it. And fear Allah" (The Quran, Sahih International, n.d., Al-Hujuraat 49:12). Within a few hours, Manar's impurity becomes public gossip. The balconies are filled with whispered negotiations: "Have mercy on us, O Lord, and cover her up! As if the scandal were still a secret!" (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 166). Imagine if this woman had truly adhered to God's instructions and remained silent.

Ironically, women in Manar’s community reveal a personal duality (Al-Wardi, 1965, p. 81), as they simultaneously plead for God’s mercy regarding this scourge while also fuelling sedition with their gossip and gazes from balconies. Indeed, they eagerly anticipate the bloody scene, eager to witness Abul-Ameen’s family sacrifice their daughter’s blood to purify their name and honour. Once again, no one enquires about the identity of the perpetrator; the only concern is Manar’s slaughter, as such an “exchange” relates only to the victim and her family, not the perpetrator, based on the texts of the moment of exchange in the patriarchal societies.

The gossip spreads like dark smoke and reaches Uncle Salim’s house, prompting him to arrive at his brother’s house with a black flag to negotiate the family honour, which extends to uncles, cousins, and their daughters in such situations. The “selves” bargain about the "circulation of masculinity" that has been broken by Manar (Veeser, 1989, p. xiii) when she fails to keep her purity trait (Welter, 1966, p. 151); thus, as long as Manar is alive, the other family girls are considered impure, as if Manar’s rape were contagious. The following quotation presents the males’ response to maintain this “circulation of masculinity” with a critical tone:

> Before noon, Salim approached from afar, his black cloak flying behind him in his anger, his eyes filling with blood, and in his hand a black flag, the flag of shame... “I pray to God that there are men in this house who will do what they have to do to protect their honour. I will wait until tonight, and if you do not act, my house will be full of her male cousins!” (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 167)

This meeting lasts only for a few minutes (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 167-68) because it does not warrant more time; the outcome of the negotiation is obvious. One might observe that only Uncle Salim speaks, while nearly everyone else, including Manar herself, endorses his words without reacting to the impending death at her doorstep. The negotiation intentionally takes place loudly at Abul-Ameen’s household gate, allowing every neighbour to hear (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 167-68), which serves as a mechanism to boost their masculinity (Veeser, 1989, p. xii, xiv).

Regrettably, all the neighbours seem to support such a negotiation, and none intervenes to remind them of God’s speech (referred to earlier). In such societies, a woman is merely an object (Papadaki, 2024, p. 1)—or a fruit, as this study suggests—that should be uprooted when it becomes rotten. Manar is now considered impure and

must be removed to protect the other fruits. Desperate to escape her reality, Manar tries to stab herself, seeking to detach herself from the family tree as if she had never existed. Here, her parents and Nabila watch her suicide attempts but never move to stop her, as if they wished her dead. Manar endeavours three times, but all her efforts fail (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 173-4).

Uncle Salim arrives in the afternoon (possibly during the Dhuhr (noon) call to prayer, denoting his ignorance of God's doctrines), and Ameen performs at 5.00 pm (he performs the ritual for the god of patriarchy to kill the impure girl) soon after Manar has failed in committing suicide (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 173-4, 179). However, Anwar declines Uncle Salim's negotiation and instead threatens to kill anyone who tries to harm his sister. This stance delays Ameen from carrying out his mission, and the police are there (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 174-5, 178-9).

Within a few hours, Ameen is released, and all witnesses, including Manar and Anwar, testify in his favour (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 180-81). However, although the policemen are aware of Ameen's intent to kill, they act carelessly (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 180-81), as they, too, endorse the dominating notions of masculinity that prioritise male aggression and honour over the safety of the victims. Balcony of Disgrace portrays a society where such exchanges are embedded in the collective unconscious. Each one of them sympathises with Ameen rather than Manar, viewing him as a real man who is justified in avenging his honour and prestige. They would do the same if they were in his situation. This attitude is evident in their indifference to Manar's suffering and their negligent handling of the case as a crime (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 181-2).

At the police station, the moment of exchange occurs once more on three levels. First, the officer interrogates Manar for nearly the entire evening about the rape and its circumstances, during which he observes her fear and tiredness. At least he could offer her a cup of water (Nasrallah 180), but such a girl does not deserve mercy, so he performs his duty as a police officer without forgetting his cultural background. He negotiates her impurity with improper treatment as a punishment for her destruction of patriarchal texts, as if he were trying to please the god of patriarchy in this way.

Second, the jailer at the officer's door harshly orders her to follow him to the prison. When Manar refuses to be in prison with the criminals, he asks mockingly and

contemptuously, "Are you more honourable than them?" (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 184). Manar remembers her sin and submissively follows the jailer's demands, as if the prison were the exchange she deserves for her impurity. Finally, the situation is worse when two of the night-shift officers decide to enjoy their rotation. As a result, poor Manar is forced to retell her rape story in detail, without any consideration for her feelings (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 185-87), although these officers are responsible for her protection. That night, Manar wishes for death and weeps extensively, feeling that this suffering is the consequence of her disobedience to the moment of exchange's texts (Veeser, 1989, p. xiii), as if she were the criminal, not Younis.

The next day, Manar and the other prisoners are taken to the Reformatory Centre. Once again, she experiences ill-treatment—this time from a female correctional officer who attacks her honour and femininity, cruelly suggesting that she should have died before being raped. When Manar refuses to submit to a humiliating inspection that requires prisoners to remove their clothes to search for sharp objects, the officer's words—echoing the sentiment of the previous night's policeman—cut deeply: "You want to say that you were raped and that makes you different from them?! If you had the slightest sense of honour, you would have died before you allowed him to do that!" (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 189-90). Ironically, Manar endures two of her worst days: first at the police station, then at the Reformatory Centre, both places meant to be safe refuges. Instead of physical harm, she is subjected to psychological torment, a punishment meted out to satisfy the demands of patriarchy—this is the only exchange she receives.

Resuming with the previous night, the police undermine Ameen's ambition to reclaim his manhood among his neighbours. Furthermore, the police officers stripping away the black flag provokes Uncle Salim's fury, spurring him to bring forth another black flag, underscoring his emphasis on their masculine values. Uncle Salim scolds Abul-Ameen and his sons even more harshly than before for failing to maintain the circulation of masculinity (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 181). However, the next day, Esam returns to ask for Manar's hand, unaware of the current events. Painfully, Abul-Ameen answers, "Did you not see the black flag?" (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 196). Although Esam sees it, he associates it with Palestinian martyrs. This conversation indicates that Manar is facing death, even in the eyes of her father, who loves her deeply. This conclusion suggests that the "exchange" should prioritise the circulation of manhood while denying Manar any opportunity to be married or simply live peacefully.

Nonetheless, there is another group Manar encounters during her pregnancy: the prisoners. At the police station, she initially faces intense psychological pressure from officers to recount her rape. Yet the prisoner, Widad, who is in her fifties, immediately recognises Manar's pain upon seeing her small belly—without questions or judgement. Widad gently embraces her, smoothing her hair, wiping her face, sensing her fear and sorrow, and promising her protection (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 184-85). After three months of silence, holding in the traumas of rape, murder, and pregnancy, Manar releases them all in Widad's arms (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 185). Unlike her family or the police, Widad offers the protection and emotional assurance she desperately needed. Thus, Widad chooses not to treat Manar as an object of exchange but instead as a human being. For Widad, the moment of exchange is invalid.

Continuing with the prisoners' community, this time at the Reformatory Center, there is another more empowered woman named Shamah. She notices Manar's innocent demeanour and miserable conditions. Similar to Widad, Shamah adopts Manar under her wing, providing her with the maternal support that the helpless victim needs (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 192). She affectionately calls her "My daughter" (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 199). She becomes her godmother, encouraging her to embrace life because she carries it within her. Like the other prisoners, Shamah does not consider her pregnancy a source of shame or criminality.

These prisoners seem to have freed themselves from the oppressive dictates of a patriarchal god and instead uphold God's teachings. They understand from the Quran that taking a life is a grave sin and that goodness is the rightful path: "The mercy of Allah is near to the doers of good" (The Quran, Sahih International, n.d., Al-A'raaf 7:56). Consequently, they extend a helping hand to Manar as God orders in His Quran, and Manar gratefully accepts that assistance. Manar begins to overcome most of her traumas—rape, murder, and the trauma of pregnancy—and decides to start a new life (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 225). They have refused to participate in the moment of exchange, just like Anwar.

However, the moment of exchange acquires a new dimension when the delivery day arrives and the abortion does not take place. If the baby is born at home, the family is compelled to kill both the mother and the child. This phenomenon is evidenced by Shamah's story (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 214–16), in which she kills her granddaughter because she understands the consequences of illegal childbirth. Nevertheless, as far as

Manar is concerned, she gives birth at the Reformatory Centre, ensuring that the authorities assume responsibility. In cases of rape, the relevant institutions have their negotiations regarding preserving the "circulation of masculinity," in which they have resolved to relocate the baby, leaving the mother alone within the four walls of the Reformatory Centre, unknowing her baby's destiny; this is the exchange that she deserves according to the texts (Veeser, 1989, p. xiii).

The unfortunate new mother, Manar, is denied any enduring happiness, as the officials arrive in the morning to take her baby away, despite her hopeless cries of "I want my son" (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 213). Ironically, she appears to be in a punishment centre rather than a reformatory, enduring yet another trauma. In this condition, the exchange operates as follows: the victim of rape must remain separated from her baby unless the perpetrator agrees to marry her, allowing them to raise their child together. Another possibility is if the victim marries another man who accepts the child as his own, thereby accepting Manar to become the mother. If neither of these situations occurs, she will never have the opportunity to see her child again, as these are the only two options in which the "circulation of masculinity" will be maintained:

> Everyone in the prison knew that reuniting her with her son would require a miracle, nothing less. Few were fortunate enough to reunite with their children after they were taken to special care centers. She never imagined she would one day marry Younis so her son could return to her. And she wasn't allowed to take him anywhere. or to marry a man who accepts letting him live with them under one roof. (Nasrallah, 2010, p. 213)

However, while Manar grapples with a new trauma—losing her newborn baby—her family seeks a way to appease the patriarchal god. The male members conspire to use their cunning to manipulate her second brother, Abdul-Ra'uf, who resides in Dubai, into unwittingly playing a role in the arrangement. In this bleak patriarchal society, Abdul-Ra'uf, who opposes the moment of exchange, offers a glimmer of hope. The men of Manar's family and relatives plan to feign a desire to rescue her from the Reformatory Center. Given that the community will reject her as both an impure woman and a prison returnee (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 221-2).

The "selves" (Veeser, 1989, p. xiii) negotiate with Abdul-Ra'uf and an elder to forge a pact with the government to ensure Manar's protection. Abdul-Ra'uf must agree to take her to Dubai to reside with him and his family, which would place her in

a safer environment, away from the threats posed by her community (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 221-2). Upon her return, Manar also welcomes the decision and promises Shamah to embark on a new phase and forget all her past sorrows (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 225).

Within ten days, Manar bids farewell to the old man and his daughters, asking him to deliver a letter she has written to her family (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 228). Ameen manipulates Abdul-Ra'uf into bringing her to see their mother one last time. Upon arrival in their old neighbourhood, they are surprised by a cheerful commotion. The victim realises that she cannot escape this moment of exchange. Um-Al-Ameen's weeping is intertwined with the family males' celebration for Manar's soon-to-be murder, creating one of the most horrific scenes that could satisfy their masculinity. The neighbours stand motionless on their balconies, witnessing the spectacle (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 231-2). What a victory! It really deserves all this celebration; finally, they win for the god of patriarchy, leaving the only true God behind.

Uncle Salim pulls Manar out of the taxi, pushing her to the middle of the road, and in a loud voice full of pride, he tells Ameen to have his turn (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 232), as if they were in the wrestling ring; they want to give their rival the finishing blow to claim the golden belt. Interestingly, Manar destroys her brother and the other male members in a manifest show-off in front of the neighbours when she stands firm, facing Ameen, enduring one blow after another from his butt pistol without begging for mercy or attempting to escape; actually, he wants her to run away to be pulled back from her hair for a more dramatic display:

> He wanted her to run, to chase after her and shoot her in the back, but she didn't run. He wanted her to cry, to scream, to beg, but she remained silent. . . . He struck her with the butt of his gun. She swayed slightly, then looked at him silently again. He yelled in her face, "Scream!" But she didn't scream. (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 232).

Ameen is confused by his sister's strength and stability, forcing him to depend on his reactions for the desired striking effects. Everything is silent; Ameen gives his strikes—one, two, three—and Manar's body hits the ground with a thunderous crash (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 233), the sound reverberating through the onlookers' nerves. Yet, what of their consciousness? Has it been stirred? Nevertheless, the executioner, Ameen, persists with his shooting, convinced that such dramatic effects are required to justify the golden belt. At the same time, the director, Uncle Salim—a title laced with irony, as this study suggests—permits him to finish the scene before promptly swapping the black flag for a white one (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 234). This act symbolises

the males' success in sending the object of shame to the second life, thereby ensuring that only pure women and esteemed men remain to carry on this life according to the texts of the moment of exchange (Veeser, 1989, p. xiii).

One might picture the little girls watching in fear as Abul-Ameen's gaze follows his daughter's blood slowly trickling down the doorstep, while her black shoes beside her are submerged in a small pond of her blood (Nasrallah 232). Tragically, society faults the victim, while overlooking the perpetrator, who may have already married and started a family. In contrast, Manar's child will grow up in the shadow of anonymity, never knowing his parents' identities because he is a fruit of revenge. These responses reflect the cultural manifestations of patriarchy that distort judgment and perpetuate injustice based on the conventions of the moment of exchange (Veeser, 1989, p. xiii).

The reason men easily negotiate women's lives is due to the minor legal consequences they face. This study indicates that the rules of the moment of exchange influence the law in Arab culture. The rules view a male's misdemeanor as a way to redeem his honour. Shamah's disclosure to Manar stands as evidence of this disparity. She receives a seven-year prison sentence for killing her granddaughter after discovering that her daughter is pregnant and about to give birth. In an effort to shield her daughter from her sons' anger and violence, Shamah kills the innocent newborn baby girl. Conversely, if one of her sons were to stab both her daughter and the newborn, his punishment would likely amount to only six months, simply because he would be seen as defending his honour (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 215-16).

Now, consider what happens after Manar's murder. The celebration is soon coming to an end. Every male member of her family goes home, along with their neighbours. For a few days, the crowd will discuss the courage of these men in defending their masculinity and prestige (Veeser, 1989, p. xiv), ignoring the truth that looms in the aftermath: "Or do those who do evil deeds think they can outrun Us? Evil is what they judge" (The Quran, Sahih International, n.d., 29:4). However, while Manar is watching from Heaven alongside other victims of rape, Nabila is washing out her (Manar's) blood that remains there when the old man arrives at Abul-Ameen's house to give them Manar's letter.

The whole family is going to gather one last time regarding Manar; Nabila is going to read that letter with tears and a painful voice. In this moment, Ameen's joy in his manhood fades into a brief sadness, but not regret, as the patriarchal values permeate his veins. Meanwhile, Abdul-Ra'uf and Anwar feel regret for their failure to protect their sister. Um-Al-Ameen is lost in the world of depression. Finally, Abul-Ameen will ask Nabila to give him that precious letter from his daughter, refusing any help as he pushes his wheelchair towards his room. The letter rests in his lap. He will spend the rest of his life rereading that letter several times a day, shedding regrettable tears, and questioning himself whether his prestige was worth sacrificing his pure, innocent daughter.

However, in the real context of the novel, the old man who promised to deliver that letter to Manar's family ultimately breaks his promise because, unfortunately, "blood messages will never arrive" (Nasrallah, 2011, p. 5). Such reality underscores the futility and tragedy of Abul-Ameen's family, leaving the characters' hopes and regrets unresolved. The withheld letter symbolises lost connections and deepens the sense of sorrow in the context of Balcony of Disgrace. Nevertheless, if Abul-Ameen regrets the moment of exchange, then he is too late to recognise that the moment of exchange is a patriarchal trick because manhood exists in Prophet Mohammed's (peace be upon him) hadith "Take good care of women;" he likens them (women) to fragile vessels, saying, "Be kind to the fragile vessels" (Al-Jabali, 2013, p. 3).

Conclusion

The paper has come out with the following conclusions:

1. Balcony of Disgrace (2011) by Ibrahim Nasrallah analyses the fate of a rape victim, Manar, within a society governed by patriarchal rules of Al-Jahiliyah rather than Islam's doctrines, through the application of Aram H. Veeser's notion of "the moment of exchange."
2. The novel's cultural context is made up of a number of groups—including the police, doctors, neighbors, relatives, and Manar's family—who regard her as impure and believe her murder is justified. The only exceptions are her two brothers, Abdul-Ra'uf and Anwar, who offer a glimmer of hope within this gloomy patriarchal novel.
3. Nasrallah aims to highlight the injustices within the judicial system portrayed in the story, particularly highlighting the lenient punishment of the perpetrators (only six months, as Shama tells Manar) and the authorities' decision to take Manar's baby away

when the child is just one day old. Thus, the depiction of Manar's humiliation by police officers and the legal system, both in the police station and later in the Reformatory Center, serves to emphasize the injustice faced by victims of rape.

4. Since Manar is innocent and a rape victim, the only group that could be compared to Abdul-Ra'uf and Anwar in their response to her situation is the Reformatory Centre's prisoners.

5. Consequently, this research aims to highlight a significant issue in Arab culture: the negative reaction to the concepts of rape and rape trauma, which diverges from Islamic conventions and basic human values; therefore, this paper advocates for both the rights of rape victims and the principles of Islamic faith.

6. Finally, it would be recommended that further papers be written discussing this realistic novel, Balcony of Disgrace, to let the blood messages arrive.

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