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Revisiting the Past: Contribution of Counter-narratives in the Liminal Formation of Identity in Yasmin Crowther's *The Saffron Kitchen*

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Abstract

In diasporic literature the question of identity is entangled with the question of history in which fissures and blank spots of one's past play critical roles in the formation of a new identity. Yasmin Crowther's semi-autobiographical narrative, *The Saffron Kitchen*, recounts the story of Maryam who makes efforts to reshape her past by remembering events which have been disregarded by the patriarchal culture of her homeland. Oppressed, silenced and banished by the sovereignty of cultural and patriarchal discourse, Maryam's main concern is to reclaim her fragmented identity by revisiting and rewriting the past. This study traces the roots of gender discrimination not in political and religious discourses, but in the literary discourse and investigates the potentials of counter narratives to dismantle cultural hegemony. The aim is to show how these counter-narratives empower the female protagonist to reconsider her ambiguous past and provide her with a new space and a new identity which come true by putting together fragments of her shattered self. Applying Homi Bhabah's postcolonial theories and Foucault's notions of discourse and power, this study deals with the issues of giving voice, asking for space, redefining the past, and countering silence in Persian diasporic narratives. The study also traces the process of hybridization through counterhegemonic narratives. The final outcome of this study is an understanding of how the female subject reclaims the down-played parts of history and tries to find a space to speak and reshape her identity in the liminal space.

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Introduction

Yasmin Crowther was born in Britain to an Iranian mother and a British father. The main character of her novel, *The Saffron Kitchen*, is modeled on her own mother who grew up in Iran and migrated to England. Through the novel, she has tried to re-visit and redefine the concealed history, both personal and collective, obscured by the cultural hegemony of her homeland, Iran. She emphasizes that Iranian culture is an amalgamation of different traditions and beliefs and reflects different religious, ethnic, traditional, modern, national and local influences; nevertheless, she holds cultural and patriarchal hegemony responsible for neglecting and silencing certain chapters of Iranian women's history. Crowther criticizes contemporary narratives of Iranian history and demonstrates how many different expressions, narratives, mythologies and oral traditions are there to be found functioning to obscure the history of female subjects. By apprising the counter-narratives, the subject quests after new spaces to dismantle the dominant hegemony; and this lays the foundation for the female subject to reconstruct the liminal identity. The main story is set in a remote village in Northeast of the pre-revolutionary Iran named *Mazareh*, with London and Mashhad serving as minor locales contributing to the formation of characters' cultural identity. The protagonist's rebellious stance against the sociocultural norms of her time is divulged when she turns down an arranged marriage. Forced to spend a night with his father's servant, Ali, in a political upheaval, her father, an army general, feels terribly defamed by the event and, in utmost anger, accepts to send Maryam to study nursing upon the condition that Maryam takes the virginity test at an army hospital where she is raped as a punishment. The events traumatize Maryam and commit her to a stony silence for the rest of her life. Maryam, banished by her father, migrates to London. When her sister dies and her nephew comes to London to stay with her, Maryam decides to revisit her hometown, where she has left a painful and traumatic history. She hopes to revisit the past and rewrite the hushed up history to put together her fragmented self, and reconstruct a hybrid identity in the liminal space.

The main contention supported in the current paper is that Yasmin Crowther, in her novel, declares that identity is formed by the past, and fabricated from the fragments of the collective commemoration of the past. Accordingly, in studying the novel, there will be efforts to display how the author undercuts the official narrative of history by shedding light on what is beneath or omitted from it. Crowther focuses on gaps in the expressed history to bring to surface what has formerly been obscured: the victim of cultural hegemony and explicitly patriarchal and cultural discourse of power. To do so, the author narrates the common narratives concerning women and employs counter-narratives to express what has remained untold in recounting the history of subjects, particularly women. Also, the identity construction is also redefined via providing a new space, "the world in-between," in history. A new identity is consequently founded upon the wreck that has remained after the cultural hegemony and common narratives have been dismantled.

In the gaps of the evoked history, Crowther recounts how women have been silenced by the traditional culture, and how the resistance against the hegemony ends in demolition. In her novel, this aversion to cultural and patriarchal hegemony has to be enacted by female subjects who have been hushed or "dumbed." Crowther shows that there is an entirely different kind of history to be recounted. In general, redefining the past helps the author provide a basis to reshape the confrontation and resistance of her own gender against cultural hegemony and help women extend the definition of cultural identity to the third space which is way beyond the boundaries of cultural hegemony.

In her book, *Resistance Literature*, Barbara Harlowe writes, narratives of resistance must not only undo records of hegemonic history, but also invent new forms to encode resistance by inventing spaces of resistance (189). Such spaces of resistance are fashioned in *The Saffron Kitchen* in several ways. Crowther achieves this by encoding the levels of language and narrative technique, and by concentrating on Iranian traditional-cultural knowledge and "regimes of truth" (Foucault 30). The paper discusses how the counter-narrative is used to resist the cultural and patriarchal hegemony in order to

dismantle it and thereby empower female subjects to construct a liminal identity.

Iranian authors, both individually and as members of a diaspora, need to come to terms with the fact that Iranian traditional culture is highly influenced by Islamic thoughts and beliefs, so it seems difficult to disregard Islamic faith when it comes to discussing Iranian culture, especially male hegemony (Blaim 93-107). Although the majority of diasporic Iranian texts has tried to relate Islam to cultural hegemony and blame it as a source of class and gender discrimination, Crowther has mainly focused on the role of cultural hegemony by which the history and identity of the female subjects have been “dumbed”. Georges Sabagh and Mehdi Bozorgmehr in a study entitled, *Secular Immigrants: Ethnicity and Religiosity among Iranian Muslims in Los Angeles*, discuss how Iranian-American autobiographers develop a multitude of approaches to distance themselves from religion and its accompanying traditionalism (453-6). Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi in *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography* argues that the dis-identification with Islam and identification with pre-Islamic Persia are essential parts of the representations of the past among diasporic authors (77). Numerous other studies have also focused on how the Iranian diaspora tends to disassociate itself from Islam and adhere to individual histories and private practices as alternatives to the official history. One of these alternatives is to rely on the counter-narrative techniques to bring to surface the hidden history. This technique plays a pivotal role in shaping women’s resistance against cultural hegemony, as well as forming the liminal identity. To do this, the current paper is divided into two main sections: the first section recounts the common narrative of women defined by the cultural hegemony and the next section deals with the counter-narrative of the past by which women redefine history, deconstruct the established hegemony and shape a new identity that falls in between.

The Narrative of the Past: The idea of “dumbed woman”

In her novel, Crowther constantly uses flashes of dreams, myths and folk tales in order to tell histories, never told previously, regarding the condition

of women in the traditional society and their resistance against patriarchal hegemony. She starts telling folk stories called “Gossemarbart” and “Zohreh” at the middle point between the main narrative sections. These tales are reminders of oppressed epistemology. Crowther draws the reader’s attention to the folk tales about the fourteen-year-old daughter of a shepherd who is forced into getting married with the cruel Khan as a price for her father’s overdue toll, and Crowther closes the novel by retelling the story of the stone woman, a girl turned into stone, located on the hills of the *Mazareh* village. The story finishes when the Khan, who has a dozen of other wives, imprisons the girl in his tower and waits for the day of the wedding. As she refuses to be obedient, the Khan orders his men to cut her tongue and her beautiful hair and slice her hands. Unable to speak, the girl wishes for freedom and relief from pain when the mythological old woman turns her into a stone visage overlooking her favorite land.

Gossemarbart smiled again. Her spirit danced with stars. And in the foothills near the mountain of her name, her body chose to rest as it does to this day, a stony woman, kissed by lichen, sun and snow, looking out over the land she loves. The villagers make their sacrifices to her, and she grants the wishes of those who are good. (238)

Although this narrative represents a female hero, the character is defined as a male’s object rather than a female subject. The women in these narratives are defined by the patriarchal cultural hegemony and they regularly deal with rejecting, resisting, disobeying and challenging male authority. The bifurcate fate of unquestioning obedience or imminent demise rests in the hands of the patriarchal hegemony, which leaves women with no safe alternative. I will argue that the silent woman as portrayed in Crowther’s narrative can be understood as a character challenging the historical, cultural and patriarchal issues that have forced her into silence. Silence serves as a means to cope with a problematic past and the current identity shifts. Crowther deals with the issue of giving voice and countering silence in her narrative. The specific aspects of resistance against cultural hegemony that we will examine in Crowther’s work involve giving voice and countering silence, asking for

space, redefining the past, and highlighting the construction of the new identity of female subjects. Accordingly, the myth of “Gossemarbart” and the “stone woman” are instances of oppressing and silencing Iranian women throughout history which seems to be inexorable even in this day and age. She goes through the excluded history of the oppression and provides them with a basis for a new identity formed in the third space.

Another example of the past narrative is the ethnic mythological tale of “Zohreh” told by the housemaid, Ehzat, based on a true story that had happened in her village. Zohreh is a beautiful girl, born deaf and dumb and left to her own care when her mother dies. She is left to live an unsheltered life of poverty and loneliness. When she grows up, village people notice her pregnant belly and their search to identify the father leads her into excruciating agony and gruesome torture. The head farmer, who is himself the man behind the scene, seizes Zohreh by the hair and commits her to death by stoning.

He dragged her to the square in the center of the square in the center of the village and brought the first stone, whispering like the wind, down on her soft skin and bones. (55)

Both of the narratives above can be studied by Homi Bhabha’s theory of hybridity. Miriam Ticktin applying Bhabha’s theory of hybridity in her paper titled, “Contemporary British Asian Women: Social Movement or Literary Tradition?” declares that if the colonial masculine subject has gone through this cultural construction, the feminine subject has been doubly erased. She has either been silenced or transformed into a stereotype: the silenced victim or the woman behind the veil (Ticktin 66-67). “Stone woman” provides us with spectacles through which the idea of stereotype can be looked at and grasped since disobedient female subjects are victimized by having their bodies turned into stone.

Since living in Britain has molded Maryam’s identity into a shape which is antithetical to what it used to be in her homeland, this eerie representation of female subjectivity can be called into question from the perspective of the hegemonic culture. These narratives construe an idea of culture which is at

the same time private and collective; they retain someone's personal history while belonging to a community. Diasporic texts like *The Sufforon Kitchen* create critical ways to challenge the hegemonic cultural practices and to produce counterhegemonic discursive practices in order to maintain the power of re-writing one's subjectivity. This kind of cultural discourse, according to Henri Giroux (1995) in "Women Writing Culture" opens up a third space to allow a dialogue with ourselves and the world, and central to that dialogue is a critical writing that refuses closure (195). This rejection of closure is related to the necessity to understand oneself as a historical subject, to understand one's origins and to use this knowledge as a starting point to rewrite the assigned identities. In the process of the narrativization of identity done as a questioning of the hegemonic discourse, history becomes a turning point to understand the complex relations that the discourse of power maintains.

Discourse, in Michel Foucault's term, is always an expression of power and subjects who use power are shaped by the very discursive structure they use. In this way, the realization of one's identity is already imbued with power (Dreyfus & Rabinov 46). In a traditional society, the most powerful discourse is the discourse of the men in power. This resembles the system usually called "identity politics" (Butler 148) in feminist and postcolonial writings.

The interesting point in the novel is that female identity is bonded very tightly to the matrilineal oral tradition and to the woman's heritage. In addition, a Persian mythology and an ethnically Persian past are mediated through the female figures. Moreover, this mythological past is essentially female, carried on by women who tell stories about their life with heroines as central figures, like the ones in "Gossemarbart" and "Zohreh" folktales. Margaret Dunn and Ann Morris in a study entitled "*The Bloodstream of our Inheritance: Female Identity and the Caribbean Mothers'-land*" argue that in postcolonial female literature like those in the Caribbean, the land and one's mother are co-joined. They go further by stating that if a woman is able to claim a connection between both, she is well prepared for a journey toward self-identity fulfillment (219).

In illuminating these fundamental ways of countering hegemony, Crowther tries to provide women with the power needed for resistance against this hegemony. The author, as a critic of cultural hegemony recounts the narrative of the female silences. She reads the dominant narrative of the past to lay the Persian cultural discourse bare by revealing how the female subject is eliminated. This can raise the consciousness of the public regarding the necessity to address the rights of the Persian women. Emphasis on silences and gaps would lead us to new interpretations if we realize whose story is omitted and how patriarchal hegemony counts as the defining factor in forming these gaps. As a final point, the main concern for recounting these narratives is to counter such silences in order to reconstruct and dismantle the cultural hegemony.

The Internalization of Cultural Hegemony in the Feminine Narratives

Despite women's consciousness about the unfair prevalence of patriarchal hegemony in traditional societies, not only have they internalized it, but also acted as transformers of this discourse. The majority of the narratives indicating the silence of female subject is retold and remodeled by women. Women have entirely neglected the prevailing norms of extreme patriarchal hegemony and the key institution in developing this hegemony is legitimized by traditional women since conforming to social patriarchal norms brings women advancement through adherence to male-defined norms. Women in Crowther's novel are depicted as the main sources of recounting the past narratives. Fatima, the maid in the kitchen in Maryam's parental house, for instance, is the symbol of storytelling in the novel. However, she represents the forgotten role females can assume in fighting the patriarchy and traditional-cultural hegemony; she gives voice to the ethnic Persian mythology. Although Fatima is the symbol of women's suppression in the Iranian culture and tradition, Crowther recognizes the character's dignity, and highlights her ability and knowledge in the areas of cooking, cultivating, making tea, and using herbs. Fatima seems to have identified with the agonizing legacy of Persian patriarchal supremacy, yet has easily succumbed to this cultural hegemony.

Maryam's internalized identity politics is the consequence of patriarchal hegemony and discourse of power which is demonstrated in the roles of her father functioning as a punishing father at home and a general of army in politics. She is taught to believe in gender and class hierarchies, traditional education and superiority of men both in family and social discourses. The following passage from the text portrays Maryam confronting the traditional hegemony which dictates class discrimination. Later, she experiences the gender discrimination:

Ali comes every day now and walks me to school. This morning we stopped next door at Aunt Soraya's and she gave us both nougat for the walk....

"you are a lucky boy," she says, "to have that job with my brother. You should be tending sheep, and don't you forget it. I am watching you, Ali." She wags her finger at him. "And you take care to walk two steps behind my niece when you take her to school. I see you two walking over your books. I don't miss a trick." (46)

The traditional culture can also oppress the ethnic population when it is perceived by them as a scientific fact. In the context of race and gender hierarchies, the mechanism of oppression seems to be natural because the scientific discourse is affected by the official media, bureaucratic system and religious codes. Crowther has tried to show how such attitudes were dominant when she was a teenager and how it still goes on in modern time. He meets Hassan at *Mazareh* and the reader finds out that Hassan has two wives, as Maryam's father did. Women still live and they are still treated almost in the same way they were treated years ago. Hassan's daughter, Farnoosh, is a nurse in the village; a job that Maryam likes to practice, but she is trapped in a small building in a remote village and her desire to visit London is just a distant dream. Thus, the cultural situation for women has not changed a lot.

Internalizing the cultural tradition gives boost to the life of the dominant hegemony and this, as a consequence, leads to the oppression of class and gender. When Maryam returns back to Mashhad from *Mazareh* after spending a short time there with Sara, she notices a slight change in the deep-seated

beliefs and traditional viewpoints of the inhabitants. Her niece, Shirin, rejects accepting Ali at her home because her grandfather has condemned him. It seems that the patriarchal hegemony represented by Maryam's father is still ruling over the behavior and attitudes of people even years after the death of the patriarch.

"We've been waiting for you too long." Shirin smiled her most charming welcome. "The samovar is ready. You must both want hot shower.

"Ali is here too." Maryam turned to the truck.

Shirin stopped and stared at her. She frowned her fingers clasped beneath her chin. "I am so happy to see you here, *Khanoom* Mazar. You are welcome in my home, my aunt, but please tell me what I should do. We are good family. You know the stories. I'm sorry, but I cannot have Ali here, under the same roof as my children, as you. My husband won't permit it. Please don't ask it of me." Her eyes were beseeching beneath their black mascara.

Maryam looked up at the sky and its yellow moon. "So the world doesn't change." (243)

Cyrus Amiri in a study titled *Two Thousand and One Scheherazades*, quotes from Mino Moallem who maintains that "the tropes of Muslim woman...as the ultimate victim of a timeless patriarchy defined by the barbarism of Islamic religion and in need of civilizing have become very important components of Western regimes of power and knowledge." (52) Amiri argues that Maryam goes back to *Mazareh* only to find out that nothing has changed for women after five decades (62). The narrative of a young girl, Hassan's daughter named Farnoosh, in *Mazareh* is the narrative Crowther has used to compare the situation of women of her country at the present time. In terms of being a victim of patriarchal hegemony, Farnoosh has much in common with Maryam as a young girl.

It seems that Crowther wants to say that the situation of women has not changed from the time she left her homeland. Looking through the Saidian lens, Roksana Bahramitash believes that in the orientalist discourse "occident

is progressive and the best place for women, while the Muslim orient is backward, uncivilized, and the worst place for women” (224). Accordingly, the constructed identities of Sara and Farnoosh, serve as a model, suggesting that the women who could find an opportunity to form an identity in the liminal space is able to speak. Sara, who has grown up in the multicultural space, has created the third space in which she is able to negotiate her identity both in western community and her mother’s homeland. Maryam can see her past and present situation in the life of Farnoosh and Sara respectively. Farnoosh, who wishes to escape her doomed fate, reminds Maryam of her own past when she paid a high price to find a space to speak.

The Narrative of the Present: Counter-narrative to dismantle the cultural hegemony

The term counter-narrative is used to describe ethnic or decolonizing voices which disturb the univocal or dominant discourse. Crowther’s narrative, whenever concerned with history, could be called histories of oppression by patriarchal and dominant traditional culture run by cultural norms and old-fashioned beliefs about women. *Mazareh*, the village she visits is a bearer of concealed ethnic history. The narrative of “Gossemarbart” beginning very early in the novel and finishes at the end is the concealed mythological history of the home town of Maryam.

Francoise Lionnet in *Decolonizing the Subject: Politics of the Gendre in Women’s Autobiography* asserts that postcolonial authors such as Michele Cliff use counter-narrative strategy to “let the narrative show how the authority is construction of language, and how the multicultural subject is always the site of contradictions” (329). This strategy is compatible with those used in Crowther’s novel. She has tried to subvert the common form of narrative by means of several counter narratives and foregrounds these counter narratives as the foundation to shape the discussed liminal identity. Here, in this section of the paper the method of this foregrounding is investigated.

While creating historical counter-narratives, the author problematizes the traditional versions of the history expressed to the reader through

flashbacks and recalling. Maryam, who has lived for more than three decades in the west and has adopted a new version of identity which can be called a hybrid one, has returned to rewrite the dominant version of history in her own way. Here in this section of the paper, we deal with some counterhegemonic cultural practices.

One of the counter-narratives worth considering in the novel is the role of education in developing counterhegemonic thought. Ali was a servant boy who taught himself English using his master's books and he was supposed to teach Maryam English and escort her to school. Ali is the most influential character who turns Maryam against the destiny her father craved. Later, at the novel, when Maryam visits home, she finds Ali working as a schoolteacher in the village. It seems he plays the role of a guru who tries to enlighten people through education, which seems the best counterhegemonic cultural practice. Ali once helped Maryam to learn English verses which changed the attitude of the young girl in her traditional society and guided her to resist her cruel father and enabled her to meet her ambitions.

The cultural-traditional narratives of Maryam's homeland are "Gossemarbart" and "Zohreh"; however, at every available opportunity, she also recounts other narratives which have disparate themes. The oriental/occidental dichotomy of the narrative can be regarded as the pivotal theme from a postcolonial point of view; however, Crowther focuses on counter-narrative to represent the emancipated picture of a woman countering the condition of women in the past and modern Iran. The ethnic narratives of women recalled by Maryam, who has heard them in her childhood, recount the lives of oppressed women who couldn't escape death, torture, captivation, silence and mortality, while Maryam tries to dismantle this narrative and open a new space. Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" is one of the poems which she learned from Ali. "Dover Beach" is a poem with such concepts, as faith, love, time, coming of age and consciousness and existence (Brown & Bailey 831). The poetry once served as a window guiding young Maryam to her self-realization by which she could speak and escape the long lasting silence of women; it also provided her with an opportunity to negotiate another identity shaped in liminal space.

There is another effort made almost at the end of the novel to help the young generation find their way to shape their own identity in the liminal space. When Maryam visits Ali at school in *Mazareh*, he asks her to entertain students by telling them a story. She recites an English story named "Hansel and Gretel" that she used to tell her daughter, Sara, as a bed-time story. To enlighten students, Maryam resorts to some narratives they have never been exposed to and this way she hopes to positively contribute to the formation of the liminal or the third space. Narratives from English literature inspire freedom, love, sweetness, dream and even sexuality. Arnold's "Dover Beach" reminds Maryam of liberation from the cruelty of both her father and society. She tries to help the young generation to reconsider the mythological narrative of the past and embrace love, salvation and freedom in their heart and mind. The two above mentioned narratives are signs of the liminal formation of identity by which the author helps the young generation of her homeland to shape a new identity in the liminal space: a space where in which the prejudices of cultural hegemony do not prevail.

Crowther writes from the perspective of an Anglo-Iranian subject who lives in the world "in between." The identity of the Iranian subject is constructed in between those political, historical, cultural, racial and biological discourses which shape the reality of the diasporic Iranian identity. In her narrative, history is always multidimensional and multilayered. She knows how intricate and fragmented the Iranian past can be and the story is narrated, in line with this fact, in fragments, which sometimes distracts the reader by constant changes in the setting and point of view. Fragmentation of Iranian cultural spaces, which is reflected in the narration, is a part of the author's strategy of writing. It is the deconstructive power against cultural hegemony and the official discourse of power. Fragmentation serves as a strategy for creating a new identity. Since the writer struggles to achieve coherence out of the fragmentation, she tries to create a text which may find its forte in its representations of fragmentation. At this point, Crowther comes close to what Homi Bhabha calls "the hybrid strategy or discourse, which opens up a space of negotiation." (34), the space "in-between" or the third space. Crowther creates spaces for Iranians, especially those living in the

diaspora, by giving them a new place in history. Their hybrid cultural space or in-betweenness is turned into a position where a person is able to detect him/herself historically and construct an un-omitted identity.

This process of relocation seems to be conceivable only by breaking up the cultural hegemonic discourse of “home” which excludes or silences its indigenous subjects. Raising up the ethnic histories, she gives to the oppressed people, particularly women, a position of subject-in-history. They are offered non-oppressed representations of the past, and they themselves are no longer represented as silenced women, called *Zaiefae* in Persian culture (a word created by the patriarchal discourse to dub women as members of the silent weak gender) (Moin Encyclopedia).

Clarisse Zimra discusses the opposition to oppression in *Writing in Calabash: Writing History in the Female Francophone Narrative*. She asserts that tradition and history can be articulated through opposition which she calls the “Logos of the Father” and “Silent song of the Mother” (Zimra 156). Like Zimra, Crowther emphasizes the disregarding of the father’s place-time, which hides the silent presence of a mother as yet not fully understood. In *The Saffron Kitchen* the protagonist recalls the way she grew up in the midst of a patriarchal and cultural hegemony. Maryam’s father is the bearer of the hegemonic version of history while Ali serves as a savior who helps Maryam open a new space in which to construct her identity.

Maryam is described as a mysterious woman whose husband, Edward, has tried a lot to know her deeper. However, everything seems hopeless since Maryam keeps living in her own world where she keeps concealing her secrets. She is trapped in her past life which makes her live in nightmares. Love is a part of history that Maryam needs to reclaim and rewrite in her revisitation of the past. The history of her love which was demolished under the force of patriarchal hegemony is worthy of reconsideration, and the use of counterhegemonic narrative contributes to the formation of a liminal space in which a female subject would be able to speak. Her reunion with Ali, her father’s servant, whom she once loved, is indicative of a counter-narrative which builds up resistance against the dominant cultural hegemony. As an unheeded part of her life, this love remains unsolved and unspoken since she

has never tried to break this stony silence and express what she desires. She is longing for something not yet improved. This longing is represented in her yearning for her former teacher, Ali. Rejoining Ali is an attempt to break the silence and negotiate her identity constructed in the diaspora. This reunion provides her with enough courage to express the feelings formerly hushed up under the cultural hegemony. She has been able to adopt an identity which could not be constructed in the cultural discourse of the homeland. The following passage depicts the reunion of the lovers, Maryam and Ali, who have found a space to express and speak what they could not tell each other a long time ago. Maryam can now speak out freely since she has formed a space to speak:

Ali breathed out, seconds passing. "I'm sorry, Maryam for this moment, for that one night, for its damages, and for every night since."

"No need, Ali, no need."

They stood apart from each other, looking at the ground, until Maryam stepped forward and again held out her hand. Ali bowed his head and this time gently closed his fingers around hers and the cold gold. They walked slowly along the edge of the plateau, saying nothing.....

She looked at the back of Ali's hand, the dark hairs and thick veins. "We have grown old", she said, her hair blowing free from her scarf.

"I am older when you are not here, *joon-am*."

She smiled and rested her head back. "*joon-am*," she echoed. "I never thought to hear those words." (159)

This longing for an old love is a metaphor for Persian ethnic history. Negotiation of new identity is manifested in the *rekindlement* of her love for Ali. Furthermore, Maryam invites Sara to *Mazareh* to show her how she is devoted to her past and her people and she tries to help Sara to appreciate the reason behind the desire to rejoin Ali. They both agree that they are old and that they cannot re-experience the night they spent together. And, Sara is summoned to witness that Maryam doesn't mean to mistreat her family; she rather intends to escape the predicaments of the patriarchal history and hegemony by which she has long been tormented.

Conclusion

Yasmin Crowther raises the question of history and past as the most essential topic in the consideration of hybrid identity formed by subjects who have lived in diaspora. Hybrid subjects will be confined to their hometown's history unless they can figure out their own place in the history or past. History must be restated and rewritten in such a way that a person excluded from the registered chronicles of history can still have knowledge of his/her own past. Crowther shows that our identity is shaped by our past, and her novel indicates how complicated the situation is in Persian traditional cultures in which people have lived under compelling cultural hegemony of patriarchal powers that have disqualified and denied certain chapters of history. Maryam as well as the author wants to reclaim her identity that has always been spurned. She does this by deconstructing common narration of the history and resists the hegemonic version of history by conjuring up the past and rewriting it based on her own experience. Thus, if history is a narrative structure, it can be deconstructed and retold from another point of view. This point of view is the history of an oppressed woman, Maryam, who was not only degraded by being made to undergo the test of virginity, but also punished, banished and exiled by her family. Her past is not only conjoined with the western history and culture in a diasporic setting, but also tied to the ethnic and local Persian folks and myths. The study shows that the first victims of cultural hegemony and discrimination are women. Crowther has highlighted the role of women in revealing reality and resisting this hegemony both today and in the past. She uses strong female metaphors and feminist mythology when she tells the story of "Gossemarbart" and Zohreh and thus refashions the traditional representation of the past.

The process of reconsidering history is visible when the novel's protagonist lives in her mature adult age in London and decides to visit home. Maryam has been able to form a new identity through living in diaspora; she has also managed to speak out what women, who were historically silenced, wished to express. She has to revisit her past and rewrite history to prove herself by resisting the cultural hegemony that punished and banished her. She aims at redefining herself as an Iranian woman when she goes back home

from exile. She needs to reconstruct her ethnic identity, thereby to achieve unity and wholeness.

In this novel, the personal and familial history of Maryam is put next to the history of Iran and this intentional juxtaposition results in the emergence of a complex web of stories that represent Persian history from a different perspective. She explores the convergence of personal and collective history. The novel, therefore, draws parallels between Maryam's life and Persian history. Maryam seems to be a split character in *The Saffron Kitchen* trying to figure out her own place in history. Her daughter, Sara, who was born and grown up in London, unaware of her mother's past, is unable to recover her mother's history and she cannot master the historical discourse because she has no narrative authority that might enable her to capture the fragmented history of her mother's past. Sara, who has the diasporically-formed identity of the second generation of Iranian migrants is summoned to Iran by her mother to have a firsthand experience of what she has seen in her mother's memorial objects, and what she has heard from her.

Perhaps, the confrontation of Sara, Maryam and Farnoosh builds up the overall image Crowther tries to portray. Maryam has been able to create an identity in the liminal space. She has had an opportunity to create a hybrid identity in the adopted land of diaspora, she revisits her past in order to fill its gaps, amend her ethnic identity and gain wholeness. Sara, who has lived as the second generation of Iranian immigrants in the diaspora, stands where her mother stands now: grown up liberated, emancipated and able to speak out her desires. Farnoosh who struggles to set herself free, metaphorically stands for the unchanged condition of women in cultural hegemony of Iran. If we want to put them in chronological order of forming their identity, Farnoosh's predicament mirrors the unchanged history of old times. She is the one who desires to create a new identity that can be shaped in the liminal space. Maryam stands in the midst of this history. She is the one whose identity has been shaped in the liminal space; and Sara belongs to the modern time: a woman who has liberated herself from bonds of hegemony.

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