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Women and Nature in Homeira Qaderi's *Dancing in the Mosque: An Afghan Mother's Letter to Her Son*

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between gender and nature in Homeira Qaderi's *Dancing in the Mosque: An Afghan Mother's Letter to Her Son* (2020). By engaging with gender studies and ecofeminism, this study aims to evaluate the aesthetic strategies that the author uses to portray the impact of the patriarchal system on Afghanistan Muslim women in Qaderi's memoir. This paper discovers how the protagonist, Homeira, is depicted as the victim of a male-dominated system in multiple aspects of her life. Indeed, the memoir depicts gender discrimination and gender stereotyping that affected Homeira's life as a marginalized person for decades. Furthermore, Homeira realizes that she should become a pioneer in empowering women to resist the patriarchal system in her country through many symbols, including the symbols of nature, as literary devices. Arguably, within the patriarchal ideology, several values of nature and women as the feminine aspect is seemingly used to oppress women because of the biological aspect of women as reproducing, nurturing, and breastfeeding. To challenge this female oppression, the author uses the symbol of nature, such as wings, birds, phoenix, and spiders in depicting how Homeira's struggles to achieve her freedom and gender justice. Indeed, the author also uses the symbol of books and stories to reveal how Homeira struggles to achieve higher education. Thus, Qaderi's memoir complicates the ideas of gender and nature to undermine the patriarchal system in her memoir set in Afghanistan and the US.

Keywords: *Afghanistan Muslim women, ecofeminism, gender, memoir, patriarchy, women and nature*

INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, women have been exploited in Afghanistan, especially under the occupation of the Soviets and the oppression of the Taliban regime. In the name of religion, male authority forbid Afghan women from education activities, political participation, and social occupation. The history of Afghanistan is linked to the patriarchal system and traditional tribal culture (Meera and Yekta). This system believes that the position of men is higher than women in various forms and patterns of behavior in society. When the country or government puts women in a noble position, society will reflect the women's honor. In a strong-religious country like Afghanistan, Curtis argues Islam may be seen generally known as a political rather than a religious concern. It is because Islam is sometimes associated with controversy rather than curiosity (qtd. in Djohar). Power in political and religious institutions in Afghanistan is monopolized by people who are influenced by religion and traditional conservative culture. The Taliban itself puts women as inferior; the discourse is

often used to women as a part of the oppressed group. During the colonization era, the consequence of patriarchy, imperialism, and ethnocentrism made social oppression that affected women's lives (Ashcroft et al.).

The patriarchal system leads to the relationship between gender to domination and subordination. Gender is associated with masculinity and femininity. Femininity is seen as a system of mandatory rules governing how women should behave, look, and attitude in a particular society. By contrast, masculinity is a cultural gender identity of men (Buchanan, 2010). The difference between man and woman is not only happening in modern times; it has happened for a long time. The concept of identifying women with nature dates back to the times of ancient classical mythology or philosophical trends. Nature is considered feminine because it is believed to have the same characteristics as women, such as reproducing, mothering, and nurturing (Argwal). Moreover, Walby stated that the most traditional approach to sexual difference is to see masculine and feminine identities as reflecting the biological structure of bodies, hormones, muscles, and genes (Walby). The equal position between women and nature makes women as the lower rank because men are more powerful and superior. In the patriarchal system, women place women in subordinated positions in the family and society sphere, especially in male economic-based and social-based honor (Hudson and Hodgson).

Ecofeminism considers oppression over women in a patriarchal society is connected with domination over nature. Ecofeminism consists of two words which are ecocriticism and feminism. Ecofeminism is a kind of criticism that combines ecocriticism to oppose anthropocentrism and feminism to criticize patriarchy. In short, ecofeminism objects to both anthropocentrism and patriarchy (You). The term ecofeminism itself was coined by the French science fiction writer and feminist, Françoise d'Ebonne in *Le Féminisme ou la mort* (1974). Ebonne believes the wielding of power by men threatens the environmental deterioration that affects the oppression of women over a few thousand years. Women are always in a marginalized position compared to men because of women's reproductive ability. Philosophical theorists recognize that women are associated with nature while men with culture. The domination is closely linked to masculinity, and the exploitation of nature is positioned to femininity. These ways of perceiving the world in binaries are called hierarchical dualism, which gave legitimacy to the position of the culture/nature and men/women (qtd. Eaton). The core belief of ecofeminism is to address the root that made the imbalance of power between gender to resist environmental disasters and humanity issues. Ecofeminism is a useful tool to assess the relations between the ecological crisis and women's oppression (Buchanan).

This memoir is postcolonial literature that tries to show the gender issue of women in Afghanistan both in the domestic and social sphere. Based on the gender issue related to religion in Afghanistan, many Afghanistan writers produce their own stories to represent the condition of Muslim women. Bringing personal experience into the narrative can be a powerful tool in developing transnational movement to the reader. It is because writers portray context and complicated self-representation to rescue women perpetually in crisis (Mannon). Homeira Qaderi is an Afghanistan Muslim writer who depicted the patriarchal issue in *Dancing in the Mosque: An Afghan Mother's Letter to Her Son* (2020). As an Afghanistan Muslim writer, Homeira Qaderi has been drawing attention to the oppression of women in the patriarchal system and the environmental crisis in her country. The impact of male domination become the central issue of women's oppression and the devastation of

her country for the last forty years from the Soviet invasion to the reign and post-reign of the Taliban regime.

In this memoir, the story begins with the introduction of the character of Homeira. She is an Afghanistan woman who lost her child after her divorced. Afghanistan society labels a divorced woman as a bad mother and unwanted person. In response to her discrimination experience, Homeira writes a letter to her son and published her story in a book to tell the reader around the world within the context of Afghanistan Muslim woman who lives in a male-centered society. By describing her life from a young age, Homeira is oppressed by people who have power and control over her life, from her grandmother to her husband. The memoir depicted the character of Homeira with the concept of nature because Homeira shares the same biological aspect to getting pregnant as a mother. As a woman, education and gender equality are not important to her. Her family has determined Homeira's destiny to get married and do domestic chores at home. Not only marginalized in her own home, under the Taliban regime, Homeira also denied her to engage in any sphere, including the right to get a formal education at school. The only way to develop her knowledge is by reading books that her parents secretly saved at home. After years of being inferior, the memoir challenges Homeira's struggle to achieve gender equality in the patriarchal society.

The previous research carried out on the topic of patriarchy and ecofeminism are done in the past years. Many studies mainly focused on examining the oppression and the struggle of the characters in the written works. First, *Subversion of Male Unlimitism--an Eco-feminist Reading of A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Zhang You (2021). The main objective of this research is to analyze Laila and Mariam in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* through ecofeminist study and the concept of male power-unlimitism. This research examined women and nature inseparably linked as the victim of male domination for decades. Women characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* have the opportunity and responsibility to resist patriarchal oppression and protect their environment from fighting for gender equality in Afghanistan. Second, *Resistance in Nature: an Ecofeminist Study of Mahasweta Devi's Chotti Munda and His Arrow* by Arundhati and Dipendu Das (2019). This research examines the correspondence between land rights and human rights from an ecofeminist perspective. This research discussed how women's positions are equal to nature because of domination by men and how women's resistance to challenges the patriarchal system. Last, *Women, Nature and Capitalist Patriarchy: An Ecofeminist Reading of Margaret Atwood's The Year of the Flood (2009)* by Paula Wieczorek (2018). The main objective of this research is to explore the construction of nature, women, and animals that are dominated by the others by using the ecofeminist perspective of Maria Mies and Karen Waren. This research mainly discussed the male domination among capitalists that makes the female characters, Toby and Ren, exploited sexually and marginalized. This research concludes the exploitation of nature, climate change, and pollution harm human life, especially women. However, none of these scholars discuss women and nature in Homeira Qaderi's *Dancing in the Mosque: An Afghan Mother's Letter to Her Son* (2020) as this paper seeks to address. In our analysis, we try to answer the following questions: 1. How does the depiction of Afghanistan Muslim woman who experienced patriarchal oppression in Homeira Qaderi's *Dancing in The Mosque: An Afghan Mother's Letter to Her Son*? 2. How does the memoir challenge the patriarchal oppression through the symbols of nature?

Indeed, the first discussion describes how the depiction of Homeira as an Afghanistan Muslim woman in the memoir. In the second discussion, this research describes how the

memoir challenges patriarchal oppression through the symbols of nature. Thus, Qaderi's *Dancing in The Mosque: An Afghan Mother's Letter to Her Son* reveals how the character of Homeira has an equal position with nature in the patriarchal viewpoint.

METHOD

This research employs the technique of library research. According to George, library research is a technique of collecting data by learning and understanding the data related to the problems. The data is from books, theories, articles, and other documents to collect information for writing research (qtd. in Hashim and Ahmad). The primary data of this research is *Homeira Qaderi's Dancing in the Mosque: An Afghan Mother's Letter to Her Son*. We also use supporting sources from journal articles, books, and other reliable resources related to the topic. Descriptive qualitative research is also used as an approach to analyzing the information about the topic. The qualitative research analyzes the relationship between men and women regarding their gender. Following the main data, we use the descriptive method that analyzes certain contexts that appeared in society. As Haven and Van stated that qualitative research uses the data from the language from written text or verbal to reveal the data collection process (Haven and Van). Meanwhile, descriptive research is a method to describe the existing phenomena or the subject characteristic as accurately as possible (Atmowardoyo). This research uses descriptive qualitative research to analyze the gender issue among an Afghanistan Muslim woman through the data depicted in the memoir. The data is based on selected text and dialogue in the memoir related to the research topic to answer the research problem.

We collected the data by reading the memoir repeatedly, highlighting and taking notes for the selected text and dialogue, and collecting and finding secondary data related to the research. When the data have been collected, we use the theory of patriarchy by Sylvia Walby and ecofeminism to analyze the parallel position between woman and nature depicted in Qaderi's *Dancing in the Mosque: An Afghan Mother's Letter to Her Son*. It is important to investigate the interlinking between woman and nature to support the analysis of masculine attitudes to the feminine in the memoir. This research focuses on aspects in which Homeira metaphorically portrayed the equal position of woman and nature as feminine in the patriarchal point of view. The stages of analysis of the memoir are to explain the depiction of an Afghanistan Muslim woman and the memoir challenge of the patriarchal oppression.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Homeira Qaderi's *Dancing in the Mosque: An Afghan Mother's Letter to Her Son* opens with the introduction to the life of Homeira as a mother who lost her son in Afghanistan. The author's desperate story is punctuated by a letter to tell her son, Siawash. This memoir portrayed the character of Homeira as an Afghanistan Muslim woman who experiences patriarchal oppression both in the private and public sphere. Like other Afghanistan women, Homeira was struggling for a prosperous life in her daily life and getting an education in a formal school. The impact of male domination and colonization becomes the central issue of Homeira's struggle. She is dominated by people who have power and control over her life, from her grandmother to her husband. Those situations made Homeira experience gender inequality and live as a marginalized person. Homeira is being marginalized in the male-centered world because she shares the same value with nature based on their own

biological and psychological aspects, such as mothering and reproduction. The ecofeminism perspective is used to show the interlinking between woman and nature to support the analysis of masculine attitude to feminine from the patriarchal viewpoint in this memoir. To answer the research question, this part is divided into two points: the depiction of Homeira as an Afghanistan Muslim woman and the memoir challenging patriarchal oppression.

The Depiction of Afghanistan Muslim Woman in the Memoir

Homeira Qaderi's *Dancing in the Mosque: An Afghan Mother's Letter to Her Son* is represented an Afghanistan Muslim woman, Homeira, who becomes a victim of the oppression imposed by the patriarchal society. Homeira lives in a religious family and a conservative society that makes men have a privileged. During the war in her country, the power of men incessantly destroyed her environment from the Russian invasion, the civil war between the communist government and mujahedeen, and the Taliban regime. When Homeira was young, the tanks, jet-fighter attacks, and invisible bullets are rumbling in the street outside her house. Suffering from years of war, people in her city, including Homeira's family, have no resources to generate electricity, no food left to eat, and no cement walls to live in her home. The environment in Afghanistan is severely destroyed. At the same time, Homeira, an Afghanistan Muslim woman, is being marginalized.

My grandmother believed that one of the most difficult tasks that the Almighty can assign anyone is being a girl in Afghanistan. As a child, I didn't want to be a girl. I didn't even want my dolls to be women. In those days, apparently, I knew more ways that led to hell than the streets that led to my house (Qaderi, 2020, p.1).

In Afghanistan, being a girl becomes the most challenging task to do. Homeira lives in a society where men control women in many aspects of life as an Afghan woman. The narrative "*I knew more ways that led to hell than streets that led to my house*" means Homeira's life feels tormented as she does not live safely in her own country. For Homeira, Afghanistan is a dangerous country where the army cease-fires and keeps her stuck inside the house. Afghanistan is the land of invisible bullets, the land of a death foretold, and the land of dejected youth. She is waiting forever for dreams that will never come true. War is the optimum way to hold power, and massive destructive actions are compelled by wielding wanton patriarchal desire in her country. War not only exploits the environment but also oppresses women. According to Meera and Yekta years of war and violence in Afghanistan have led to violent behavior (Meera and Yekta). This practice is very cruel, but they affect each other. Women are one of the most vulnerable sections that have been brutally affected.

Afghanistan's environment is unsafe for women because of the wielding power of male authority. Male dominance may be related to stereotypes, especially for people who are raised in patriarchal family environments. As a result, gender inequality affects various aspects of people's daily activities, which separate the role of men and women (Cho and Jang). In the memoir, Homeira is denied to do any activities outside her home. Under the Russian occupiers, the school is closed. Education for the woman is not important for her family, especially her grandmother. While growing up, Homeira likes to visit Laila to write stories. Homeira is a daughter who loves to play and study outside her home. However, her grandmother always reminds her that a woman should stay at home.

Don't dishonor your sister and yourself before everyone's eyes. You know that the walls of her house are the best witness of a girl's purity. If you are a stranger to those

walls, you will have no respect in this city. (Qaderi 82)

From the narrative quotation above, the house becomes the center of Homeira's activities. Even though Homeira is not married yet, what Homeira does to write stories is unnecessary in Afghanistan because her main role is to do domestic chores. The family is generally considered the center of a woman's life and the foundation of gender inequality. Women increasingly spend more time in the household and are responsible for domestic chores (Walby). Homeira's grandmother holds the traditional understanding that a woman should depend on a man since it was her fate. The memoir shows that patriarchy is not only implemented by men, but also by Homeira's grandmother as someone who has power in her family. According to Dobie, the patriarch can also refer to someone who approves of such a system, usually an older who becomes the founder of the current ruler of the group or family (Dobie).

Patriarchy is described as an institution or social system led by men. It can also be applied to anyone who agrees with this system (Benstead). The patriarchal mindset that relegates women's roles and contributions only at home creates a vicious circle of dependency and deprivation for women. This oppression affected women socially, economically, and not only politically, but also psychologically (Meera and Yekta). In the memoir, Homeira experiences discrimination after she gets married. His husband's family has a stereotype that a woman should accept her womanhood and depend on her husband. Her husband's family implemented an ideology that a woman should not have a higher degree of education. It not only happened to her but occurs to most Afghanistan women. Nevertheless, Homeira does not accept by his husband's family because she decides to continue her education at an Iranian university and postpone her pregnancy. Because of her decision, Homeira experience discrimination at his husband's house. Her sister-in-law also expected her brother to have another wife to be polygamous. It can be seen from the quotation below:

But I insisted that I could, and eventually my sister-in-law—who was always waiting for the day that I would begin throwing up in the morning—began to lose hope. She couldn't help but say, often, that a dry tree deserves to be sawed off. (Qaderi 114)

The quotation above explains that Homeira's role as a wife is to get pregnant. Homeira is described as a dry tree because she cannot give birth to children like a tree that cannot produce fruit. In a narrative, *a dry tree deserves to be sawed off* means that Homeira is not an ideal wife because she cannot get pregnant. Homeira can be replaced with another wife or be divorced because she cannot give birth to a son. In this case, Homeira and nature shared the same value because of their biological traits by having a womb in reproduction. The traditional role of women in both the private and public sphere was systematically becoming housewives. Historically, the womb can be an argument for controlling women because of their biological role. As the primary objective is to generate their husband's interest in the child, the womb may be a worse fate for women (Romanis et al.). Highlighting the position of women, Shailaja B. Wadikar stated that women are positioned with tears in their eyes and milk in their breasts for standing at the crossroads of history for centuries. In a patriarchal society, women are exploited, victimized, and tortured because of a man-centered world (qtd. in Sharma).

Regarding gender relationships, men play an important role in the family while women play an expressive role. Men are responsible for working outside the home while women are responsible for taking care of the family's needs inside the home. These roles must be

maintained separately; otherwise, there may be a conflict between occupational structure and kinship system (Walby). In the memoir, Homeira and her husband's conflict is portrayed when she dedicates her life to working and teaching at university. As an Afghanistan Muslim, she is not respected for how much she helps the financial of her family, but to dedicate her life as a mother at home. As a wife, Homeira also expected to accept his husband's polygamy since it is a tradition in the Afghanistan family.

"I sold my jewellery to pay its down payment. I have brought my son to this world here. I am not allowing it". His jaw dropped, but soon he glared at me and scoffed, "My right has been decided by my religion and the Prophet, not by you." (Qaderi 125)

From the quotation above, it is portrayed the picture of woman's oppression. Even though Homeira helps his husband to help his family financially, Homeira's presence has been ignored. In Islamic law, which most Afghanistan families accept, polygamy is normal, and it is allowed by a husband. When Homeira refuses her husband's polygamy, her husband divorces Homeira and separates Homeira from their son. Men have more rights to choose their wives, while women cannot speak about their decision. Rather than that, the position of man is domination while the position of woman is subordination. According to Soraya, in countries where religion dominates society, the religious ritual comes from a dominant process of social interpretation (Soraya). This happened in countries that follow the strict lines of Islam, such as Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, the preaching blindly declared that women's status and options are limited because the position of men are stronger than women in multiple aspects of life.

Women's oppression impacts male domination in the social and domestic sphere. According to Walby (128), patriarchy is related to male violence. Male violence itself is a form of man control to treat a woman as their desires, such as rape, wife-beating, sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, and sexual assault. The memoir depicts Homeira, who experiences sexual harassment by a bicycle man. Since Afghan women cannot go outside without a mahram, Homeira went alone and took a shortcut. Then, the bicycle man tried to rape Homeira:

His hand also tugged at the hem of Homeira's burqa. Panting, the bicycle man wrapped himself around me like a snake. I looked at the end of the alley, at the green door to Leila's house. The end of the alley was at the other end of the world. (Qaderi 91)

The quotation above portrays male violence by describing the relationship between nature and gender. The use of animal terms refers to man and woman. The bicycle man is depicted as a strong animal-like snake, while Homeira is depicted as a bird. Freud portrayed snakes along with reptiles and fish among male-sex symbols and the most important symbols of the male organ (qtd. in Orzechowska). In nature, strong animals will prey on weaker ones. It is conveyed by the narrative *the bicycle man wrapped himself around me like a snake* which means the bicycle man can exploit Homeira's body. In nature, the snake can prey on the bird; likewise, in society, men have the power to rape women. Men demonstrate the attitude of exploitation, while the woman and nature demonstrate the attitude of raped, control, and penetration. Warren stated that in language, gender can refer to the particular word that is commonly referred terms. The word can be related to nature because it is gendered as feminine or vice versa (qtd. in Tong and Botts).

Homeira's family, especially her husband, does not care about her education or her career. Homeira's role is only appreciated when she stays home to do domestic chores and care for her family. In a patriarchal viewpoint, the position between Homeira and nature shares the same value that is linked with biological and psychological aspects such as reproducing and nurturing. The patriarchal mindset is also embodied in Afghanistan, where male domination cannot be separated from the strongly religious institution and the traditionally conservative culture. In a patriarchal system, men always have the character of domination, oppression, and power that oppress Afghanistan women in various aspects of life.

Challenging of the Patriarchal Oppression

Qaderi's *Dancing in the Mosque: An Afghan Mother's Letter to Her Son* portrays Homeira as being oppressed by the patriarchal society. Since the society in Afghanistan has a strong religious legitimacy, women have no resistance to challenging the patriarchy and hegemonic power. As an Afghanistan Muslim woman, Homeira believes she is responsible for fighting for her rights as the marginalized people in her own country. Homeira wants to get freedom through higher education and achieve gender equality in Afghanistan. To see how Homeira resists patriarchal oppression, the memoir uses symbols, such as books, universities, and education to show Homeira's struggle against the patriarchal system. According to Ribo, the symbol is anything that represents a certain meaning to the narrator or characters (Ribo). Symbols are not only recognizable with objects or things but also represent cultures, values, individuals or groups of people, ideas, beliefs, and cultures.

Having a Higher Degree in Education

In the memoir, Homeira is portrayed as a woman oppressed by the male domination in her family. Homeira is not only being subordination in her family but also in society. The Taliban regime makes regulations restricting women's activity, including closing all the girls' schools. The Taliban is rumored to search every house for guns, books, and televisions. According to Hasnul Djohar (2020), these rules are the negative effect of normalizing power (Djohar). For Homeira who cannot study at school, the book is a source of her happiness. To keep her book safe, Homeira's father wrapped her books in thick plastic and buried them in the soil. Every year, at the end of May, Homeira would dig up the books her father buried to stay hidden from the Taliban. She lifts the books from the iron chest and spreads them out in the sunlight to dry. For Homeira, literature is different from war; she likes to read the book and flip through every page. For Homeira, her only enemy is only Taliban, who shoot people with a gun, as seen from the quotation below:

And every year, I would beg, "Please, Agha, take the books and hide them in the cellar so we can read them at night." Baba-jan always intervened. "You shouldn't take the risk. Don't bring danger into this house. We should bury the enemy under the ground." "But Baba-jan, these are only books, not enemies," I said. (Qaderi 81)

The dialogue above explains how important a book is for Homeira. The memoir describes a book can sharpen a woman's mind and life. By reading books, Homeira thinks she will improve her knowledge and creativity. Homeira reads the book as the activity of resisting patriarchy in silence. Apart from doing domestic chores, women also have activities to develop their knowledge. Historically, Afghan women's pathways to knowledge and education were side-tracked by strict rules and discrimination. They wrote their names on

the pages of history through their resistance movements for equality (Meera and Yekta). Despite this problem, Afghan women never give up.

The memoir also represents a deliberate attempt by Homeira to be a part of the country's recovery and rebuilding through education. Homeira does not give up on fighting for education in Afghanistan due to the war and patriarchal society for decades. When the Taliban closed the girls' schools, she worried that the girls in her country would grow up illiterate. Because she cannot go against the Taliban with a gun, she chooses to fight by teaching children secretly.

I was thirteen in the day I began home-schooling the girls. Our yard was so crowded with eager students that Madar moved her kitchen to a smaller room so that I could use the biggest room in the house for teaching. Agha borrowed a blackboard from the boys' school, where he was teaching. (Qaderi 45)

From the quotation above, Homeira thinks the only way to express her voice is by teaching children to read and write the language with a pen and book. Her action in dealing with the gender issue comes from her value of being a woman who cares as a human being. If the Taliban discover that Homeira is teaching children secretly, they will whip her in public. Even though she knows the consequence, she still fights for education in her motherland. Homeira feels the responsibility and obligation to protect her country by teaching the children as the future generation to be literate. It is the women's responsibility to realize the real initiator of the land environmental crisis and protect the woman in the male-dominated society that has long been oppressed by patriarchy (You).

After she married, Homeira lived with her husband's family in Iran. The modern era in Iran makes Homeira begins to think about gender equality. Tehran was astonishingly modern in its attitudes toward women because women could work, study, and walk outside their homes without being accompanied by Mahram. For Homeira, living in Iran is a dream because women have the freedom to get an education. Even though her husband's family still has a stereotype who expects Homeira to do domestic chores at home, Homeira makes her own decision to chase her education until she finishes her doctoral degree.

I passed many an examination and, with fear and excitement, was admitted to the PhD program at Tehran University, one of the best universities in Tehran. I couldn't believe it myself. The day I received my admission letter to the doctorate program, I knelt down and cried tears of joy and triumph. (Qaderi 117)

From the quotation above, the memoir describes that education has an important role in resisting patriarchal oppression. Since childhood, Homeira has liked reading many books. It motivates Homeira to keep being a literate, independent, and educated woman. She became more empowered and fought for equal opportunity to attend a university that thrilled her. Even though there was so much freedom to live in Iran, Homeira wanted to return to Afghanistan. She established her niche in society by working as an adviser in a ministry and a professor at the university. Particularly, capitalism and war transformed the traditional woman into a new woman in an attempt to erase and deconstruct the gender binary system. This type of woman who burdens their oppressive past has made arduous efforts for women's rights in the public sphere (Bellour).

Moreover, the memoir uses books to represent intellectuals and education in depicting the protagonist empowering herself and other women to resist the patriarchal oppression. After getting married, Homeira lives under her husband's authority. Homeira's husband does not support her activity of reading the book or go to universities, especially after

Homeira has a son. He also didn't show up at the unveiling of Homeira's new novel because he was embarrassed by the presence of other men. After fighting with Homeira, he chooses to have a second wife and divorce her. Homeira knew she was making the right decision by divorce from the patriarchal man for a long time, among books and friends. Then, Homeira writes a letter to her son, who has separated from her because she did not get her child custody.

Anyway, I felt as if my books were my children—they were like daughters, each of whom symbolized empowerment for women. Come to think of it now, I don't think your father had any interest in my daughters. (Qaderi 115)

From the quotation above, the memoir represents Homeira, who never wanted to define herself solely only as a mother. The memoir aims to tell the reader that the book symbolizes empowerment for women in getting a higher education. It represents a woman's voice and rebellion against the patriarchal stereotype. Books became a tool that ignited women's desire to get an education. Homeira claims her rights as a brave woman in her country. In this way, the memoir reveals that education belongs to everyone regardless of gender. Women's equality is not just a humanitarian issue, but it is a peace issue that is globally acknowledged. Women ensure equal participation of women and men worldwide in many aspects of life. Women's emancipation is recognized as an important factor in the development of Afghanistan country (Roshan).

The patriarchal oppression is not a barrier to getting higher education through the symbol of stories. After being oppressed, Homeira moved to California, where she took up residence to present the plight of Afghan women in several cultural forums after she finished her education. Even though Homeira had moved from Afghanistan, she still resisted patriarchal tyranny by writing stories and publishing several books.

I can barely let myself remember it, but as I sit here in California, I can't help wishing that you were in my arms. I wish your father was on his way home and that I was sitting here writing stories without any worries. Yes, I still write, but I pay for these stories with your absence and I am anguished that they aren't worth losing you in the process. (Qaderi 122)

The memoir shows how important education is to a woman under the male hegemony. No matter how hard Homeira speaks loudly to declare her rights, patriarchal society never heard her voice. Because there is no freedom for women, Homeira chooses to speak through her stories. Afghan women's literature provides a compelling and heartfelt narrative of women's resilience and empowerment, highlighting the complexity of life in Afghanistan (Imran et al.). As an Afghanistan Muslim woman, Homeira chooses to tell the reader around the world about women's oppression in her motherland through her writing. Homeira believes that her stories can be a tool for showing the social change in the male-centered society world. According to Hasnul Djohar (2021), minority writers have an important role in understanding other communities in different parts of the world such as Chinese, Arab, and African cultures by telling people their stories different from mainstream (white) readers' traditions (Djohar).

From the data above, the character of Homeira can resist patriarchal oppression. Under the patriarchal ideology, Homeira's family believes that education for the woman is not important, especially under the colonization. The education for Afghanistan women was also limited because the Taliban closed all the girl's schools. Homeira realized the importance of education for women at that time. Homeira has to against her grandmother

and her husband to read books and study at Iranian University. Homeira also teaches children in the mosque and secretly writes stories in Laila's house under the Taliban regime. To have a higher education, the memoir uses the symbol of the book and stories as a tool to question the patriarchal system.

Having Freedom by Achieving Gender Equality

Afghanistan is strongly led by the male domination that lasted for decades under the war and patriarchal oppression. In the memoir, Homeira is always seen as inferior to men. She has no resistance since Afghan women have no voice to speak for their rights in both the private and public spheres. After being silenced for decades, she chooses to fight for the same right as men in all aspects of their life regardless of her gender. To resist the patriarchal oppression, the memoir uses the symbol of nature to describe Homeira's struggle to achieve gender equality in her own country.

As a marginalized person, Homeira always dreams that women can get freedom in any aspect of life in Afghanistan. The memoir describes Homeira as a phoenix who can fly freely in the sky with its wings, as the quotation below: "I wished that just once, the phoenix could rise from the ashes of Herat and fly to Kabul and bring my mother on its wings," (Qaderi 123). From the quotation, Homeira realizes that Afghanistan did not have freedom for women, especially in the city of Herat. Under the patriarchal oppression, Homeira's life is like a trapped bird that is drenched in the rain and unable to fly in her motherland. Then, Homeira imagined herself as a phoenix representing Homeira's dream as an Afghanistan Muslim woman to have a new chapter of life in Kabul where people shared gender equality between men and women. Cities like Kabul are havens for modern Afghans who do not prefer traditional morality. Afghan society did not mind when women walked without Mahram with makeup on their faces and without burqa mandatory on their heads. Homeira wishes that she will die and be reborn as a phoenix that rises from the ashes. The phoenix is a creature in nature as a symbol to represent a totem that is adopted from spiritual significance by the ancients as an emblem of nobility and dignity (Zhiwen et al.).

In her family, her grandmother always tells Homeira that a woman's destiny is to stay at home. She should bring honor to her family by getting married, keeping her distance from non-mahram, and doing domestic chores. Whenever her grandmother tells her to do many things that she dislikes, Homeira ignores her. During the war, Homeira's mother also forces Homeira to stay at home within the bounds of her small window to keep her safe. However, Homeira thinks girls still can do anything outside the home like boys, such as go to school, climb the tree, playing with her neighbor.

My mother was like a spider trying to safeguard me within her web. But I was a wild, stubborn baby spider. I kept tearing her web apart to escape. I never tired of the struggle to get outside. I was always looking for a chance to sneak into our walled garden. (Qaderi 2)

From the quotation above, the memoir describes Homeira as a spider representing networking that Homeira builds outside her strict family's boundaries. A web from the narrative above is depicted as a house as the center of a woman's life and activity. Since Homeira is supposed to be obedient to the oldest or the head of the household, Homeira does not feel afraid to break the traditional rules in her family that have strong boundaries with patriarchy. The memoir shows how Homeira broke the double-standard treatment that infuriated her in her family. Every time Homeira had a chance to sneak and go outside her

house by hiding from her family sight secretly. Echazu argues that societal rules mark women's behavior more than their gender. Therefore, women are more aware and avoid malicious behavior because they live as a minority. It makes women more aware and sensitive to breaking the rules (qtd. in Konte and Tirivayi).

Women in Afghanistan lose their fundamental rights to become qualified women because education seems unnecessary for women in patriarchal ideology. Consequently, women were dependent their life on other men only to be a housewife and a mother. Despite being separated from her son in another country, Homeira hopes she still can advocate for women's rights and empowerment by writing stories.

Instead believe in yourself, for it is you and I together who must create a new Afghanistan. I look forward to the day when the two of us will live in a society of equals. Even from the darkness of this dungeon, I look forward to the day when a blue sky will unfurl its bright and beautiful horizons. Nobody is going to give us this blue sky for free. We must take it by and for ourselves. (Qaderi 7)

This quotation illustrates how the memoir depicts the protagonist's struggle for woman's freedom by achieving gender equality against patriarchal oppression. The darkness of this dungeon from the narrative above means how Afghanistan Muslim women live without freedom. They are confined because of the different treatment of gender, such as cannot go to school, cannot work in public, and cannot go out alone without a mahram. After being silenced for decades, Homeira hopes her country will have bright and beautiful horizons, and Afghan women will have a new chapter of life where gender discrimination disappears. Homeira's struggle will not be obtained easily; it takes struggle and time to change the patriarchal mindset in his country. Then, she becomes the representative voice for her fellow women who could not express their rights openly by speaking in the national and international forums. Women in the world are like Homeira, who suffer from oppression but still have rights and duties to stand up for nature and the land and for women themselves. As Dalton and Fatzinger argue, many women use silence to claim their voice and self-assertion under structural instruments of power. The marginalized people then establish a unique power within the dominant patriarchal system (qtd. in Liao et al.).

From the data above, Homeira struggles for freedom by achieving gender equality in her country. Homeira believes that a woman should have the courage to resist the patriarchal system. Women in Afghanistan have been oppressed because of male domination related to gender norms and the religious system. Homeira lives in a family that stereotypes women as good mothers and wives. Homeira is also locked inside her house because of the Taliban rule that forbids a woman to have any activity in the public sphere. Homeira always dreams that women can get freedom in any aspect of life in Afghanistan regardless of their gender. To portray Homeira's struggle for achieving gender equality in her own country, the memoir uses symbols of nature, such as wings, phoenix, and spiders, representing Homeira's struggles to achieve gender equality in her country. She fights for freedom where women can have the same rights as men.

CONCLUSION

Homeira Qaderi's *Dancing in the Mosque: An Afghan Mother's Letter to Her Son* is a memoir, which tells people about the representation of Afghanistan Muslim woman's life under the patriarchal system. The memoir offers an interest in portraying the patriarchal oppression which is related to the relation between Homeira and nature because of their biological role

in reproduction. In contrast, men are related to culture and masculinity, emphasizing exploitation and oppression. With a postcolonial setting of time, the memoir also portrayed the male hegemony that is linked with patriarchy. Male domination oppresses Homeira for decades of her life. As an Afghanistan woman, Homeira realizes that she should fight against people who oppress her, from her family to the Taliban group. To resist the patriarchal oppression, the memoir uses many symbols to show the Homeira struggle to get a higher education and achieve gender equality. The symbol of books becomes a tool of Homeira's resistance to improving her knowledge until she gets a doctoral degree. The symbol of stories also becomes proof of her life for publishing her written works and receiving several awards. Homeira is fighting to tell people around the world about the struggle of the women of Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the symbol of nature, such as the phoenix, wings, and spiders, also engage the necessity of women's freedom for achieving gender equality in Afghanistan. Thus, Qaderi's memoir reveals how an Afghan woman never gives up on creating better conditions for women in Afghanistan because women and men have the same rights and positions regardless of gender.

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