PSYCHOANALYTIC FEMINIST TRAJECTORIES IN NADIFA MOHAMED'S *BLACK MAMBA BOY*

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Abstract

This paper examines the pervasive influence of patriarchy and its impact on female voices in Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy* through the theoretical framework of psychoanalytic feminism. The problem addressed is the persistent marginalization and silencing of women in patriarchal societies, which is vividly depicted in Mohamed's narrative. The study seeks to uncover the unconscious psychological mechanisms and societal structures that contribute to gender oppression, as well as to explore the ways in which the novel critiques these dynamics. Specifically, it investigates how the female characters navigate their silenced positions within familial and societal contexts and examines the broader implications of this silencing on their identity and agency. Using the psychoanalytic feminist theories of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Nancy Chodorow, the research identifies the intersections of trauma, gender, and identity in the novel. The findings reveal that the silencing of women in the text reflects entrenched patriarchal norms that marginalize feminine voices, while also exposing the psychological toll of these dynamics on both men and women. Furthermore, the study highlights moments of resistance and subversion, where female characters assert their agency despite systemic oppression. By foregrounding these themes, the paper contributes to an understanding of how literature can serve as a critique of patriarchal systems and a platform for amplifying marginalized voices. This analysis underscores the enduring

relevance of feminist discourse in examining the complexities of gender and power in contemporary African literature.

Key Words: Patriarchy, Women Marginalization, Feminist Trajectories, Resistance

Introduction

Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy* is a poignant exploration of displacement, survival, and the human cost of systemic oppression. The novel, set against the backdrop of colonial and pre-independence East Africa, tells the story of Jama, a young boy navigating the challenges of migration and identity. However, beyond its historical and socio-political commentary, the text offers a critical examination of the silenced female voices that underpin its narrative. This study focuses on the intersection of patriarchy and gender dynamics, foregrounding the ways in which Mohamed portrays women's struggles for agency and self-expression within a deeply patriarchal context.

At the heart of the novel is the figure of Ambaro, Jama's mother, whose resilience and sacrifices underscore the invisible labour and emotional burden borne by women in patriarchal societies. Ambaro's character serves as a lens through which the psychological and societal mechanisms of silencing are explored. Her marginalization is reflective of broader patterns of gendered oppression, where women's voices are subsumed under the weight of male-dominated narratives. The study engages with psychoanalytic feminist theories to uncover the unconscious forces at play in these dynamics, drawing on the works of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Nancy Chodorow to illuminate the interplay between trauma, identity, and power.

This paper argues that Mohamed's depiction of silenced women in *Black Mamba Boy* is not merely a reflection of historical realities but a critique of the enduring legacies of patriarchy. Through moments of resistance and subversion, the novel challenges readers to confront the

systemic forces that marginalize feminine voices and to reimagine the possibilities of agency and empowerment. By situating the analysis within the framework of psychoanalytic feminism, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychological and cultural dimensions of gendered oppression in literature.

Statement of the Problem

Several scholars and critics have engaged with Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy*, exploring its historical, postcolonial, diasporic, and autobiographical dimensions. Critics such as Sissy Helff and Anna Bernard have analysed the novel's engagement with displacement, colonial violence, and narrative memory, particularly in relation to Somali identity and British imperialism. Their works often foreground trauma, migration, and the politics of representation, recognizing *Black Mamba Boy* as a powerful account of a marginalized voice in colonial history.

However, while these studies contribute meaningfully to the understanding of Mohamed's literary and historical project, they often fail to address the psychoanalytic feminist trajectories embedded in the novel. The absence of such analysis overlooks how female characters—though marginal in the protagonist's journey—serve as silent yet potent symbols of resilience, loss, and suppressed desire. A psychoanalytic feminist reading would illuminate the unconscious forces shaping gendered identity, maternal figures, and the emotional economy of survival in colonial and patriarchal contexts. By neglecting this perspective, current criticism misses an opportunity to interrogate the novel's nuanced engagement with the feminine psyche and gendered structures of oppression.

Despite the scholarly attention received by Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy*, the persistent marginalization and silencing of women in patriarchal societies, which is vividly depicted in Mohamed's narrative remains underexplored. Patriarchy, as a deeply entrenched social

system, continues to shape, and dictate the roles, opportunities, and voices of women in various cultural and historical contexts. In literature, this system is often reflected through the marginalization and silencing of female characters, which are relegated to secondary roles or confined by societal norms that prioritize male authority. Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy* offers a vivid portrayal of this phenomenon, highlighting the struggles of women like Ambaro, whose resilience and sacrifices are overshadowed by a male-dominated narrative. Despite their integral roles in family and society, these women are systematically silenced, their voices excluded from positions of power and decision-making.

The problem lies not only in the visible manifestations of patriarchy but also in the unconscious psychological mechanisms that sustain it. The societal rejection of the feminine, as theorized by Julia Kristeva, and the reinforcement of phallocentric discourse, as critiqued by Luce Irigaray, perpetuate the silencing of women's voices and experiences. This silencing is further compounded by the intergenerational transmission of patriarchal values, as explored by Nancy Chodorow, which confines women to traditional roles and limits their agency.

In the context of *Black Mamba Boy*, the silencing of female characters is emblematic of broader societal patterns, raising critical questions about the psychological and cultural dimensions of gendered oppression. How do these mechanisms operate within the text? What are the implications for the identities and agency of the silenced women? And how does the narrative critique or subvert these dynamics? This paper seeks to address these questions, shedding light on the enduring problem of patriarchy and its impact on women's voices in literature.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on Kristeva Julia's model of Psychoanalytic Feminism. Psychoanalytic feminism is a theory that explains women's oppression as rooted within psychic structures and reinforced by the continual repetition or reiteration of relational psychic dynamics formed in infancy and childhood. The foundation of the theory is traced to the theoretical postulations of the Austrian neurologist and psychologist, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and the writings of the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan (1901-1981). Major feminist contributors to the theory are theorists, scholars and critics like Nancy Chodorow, Luce Irigaray, Julia, Elaine Showalter, Toril Moi, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Jane Gallop, among many others.

Julia's model of Psychoanalytic feminism is pivotal in dissecting the intricate dynamics of patriarchy and the silencing of women in Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy*. This theoretical framework delves into the human forces that shape societal norms and gendered power relations, offering profound insights into how patriarchal ideologies perpetuate the marginalisation of women. By incorporating the psychoanalytic theories of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Nancy Chodorow, the paper reveals the psychological underpinnings of gender oppression and their manifestations in the novel.

Kristeva's concept of abjection is particularly relevant, as it sheds light on how patriarchal societies position women as the "other," relegating them to spaces of invisibility and silence. In *Black Mamba Boy*, female characters such as Ambaro embody this abjection, their contributions and struggles dismissed within a male-centric narrative. This framework enables a deeper understanding of how women are excluded from spheres of power and their voices systematically muted.

Irigaray's critique of phallocentric discourse further underscores the structural reinforcement of patriarchy through language and cultural practices. In the novel, these dynamics manifest in the

exclusion of women's perspectives, highlighting how societal norms maintain male dominance. Chodorow's theories on the reproduction of mothering also illuminate how patriarchal values are transmitted intergenerationally, constraining women's roles and perpetuating systemic oppression.

By utilising psychoanalytic feminism, the analysis transcends surface-level critiques of patriarchy, uncovering the unconscious and psychological mechanisms that sustain gendered inequalities. This theoretical lens not only highlights the silencing of women in Mohamed's narrative but also amplifies the moments of resistance and resilience that challenge patriarchal norms, making it an indispensable tool in exploring the complexities of gender and power in *Black Mamba Boy*.

Synopsis of Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy*

Nadifa Mohamed's novel, *Black Mamba Boy*, narrates the story of Guure, Ambaro and Jama. Guure, a lazy and irresponsible Somali man, abandons his young wife, Ambaro, and an infant child, Jama, for an unknown destination to fulfil a long-held, larger than life dream of becoming a driver for city rich men – a dream his wife, Ambaro, finds absurd and unrealistic. Left alone in their hometown, Hargeisa – Somalia that is plagued with a prolonged drought and attendant famine, Ambaro relocates to Aden, the capital city of Yemen, with her son in a desperate bid to find a job and a means of survival.

In Aden, Ambaro and Jama are accommodated by the Islaweyne who are Ambaro's relatives from Hargeisa. They are given a precarious room on the roof of the house. Ambaro finds a very poorly paid work in a coffee factory, sieving and winnowing chaff off coffee seeds. Tensions and rivalry erupt between Ambaro and Islaweyne's wife over food and cooking space in the Kitchen. In one of the many incidents of verbal abuse exchanges and fights between the two women, Jama, a young lad currently, intervenes unfairly in support of his mother and

incurs the wrought of the Islaweyne woman and her children who turn their hostilities on him as well. He runs away from the house, takes up residence among destitutes on the streets of Aden and is not seen by his mother for a long time.

Ambaro, during the narrative, develops a chronic lung disease due to the hazardous nature of her work in the grain milling factory and dies shortly afterwards. Jama, a teenager is left to take care of himself because he has no immediate relative to depend on. Thus, he embarks on a desperate search for his father whom he had not seen since he was an infant – a search that takes him across many villages and cities where he meets with many vulnerable and helpless women like his late mother – women who contend with all odds in their quest to survive as human beings in a male dominated and controlled world.

Psychoanalytic Feminist Trajectories in Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy*

Post-structuralist psychoanalytic theory championed by the French psychologist, Lacan, has provided feminist criticism with an ideological framework that enables a theorisation of the socio-cultural constitution of femininity and sexual identity by shifting the theoretical emphasis away from the more literal anatomical approach initiated by the German psychologist, Freud, to a more figurative or psychic domain (Tyson, 26-34). While this may be so, an outright rejection of Freud's work in psychoanalysis is fatal for feminist literary enquiry since Freud's psychoanalysis is not a recommendation for a patriarchal society, but an analysis of anomalies of such a society. Juliet Mitchell in, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, argues that to understand and challenge the oppression of women justified by Fraud's arguments, it is quintessential to comprehend the reasoning that justifies such oppression (10).

On this note, a psychoanalytic feminist study of Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy* here is deliberately eclectic and incorporates Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic tenets and ideas to enable a better

understanding of the writer's narrative. While Mohamed aestheticises with varied challenges bedevilling Somali, her homeland in the novel, all of these are x-rayed with a view to determine how they impact her female characters' psychological wellbeing in keeping with the focus of the research. Therefore, effort is made to critically explore different gender representations within the texts; question whose voices are heard or ignored, who enjoys privilege and whose attitudes and values are assumed within the text.

Set mainly in colonial Somali's Hargeisa; Yamen's Aden and the surrounding villages and cities, Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy* takes a critical look at the unfavourable socio-cultural conditions that subjugate and undergird the physical and psychological suffering of the female characters that populate her narrative. The situation of these women is contrasted against the unfair advantage enjoyed by their male counterparts who are portrayed as less deserving of the privileges they enjoy on account of their biological sex. The depiction of these multi-faceted challenges of women in the society by women writers such as Mohamed is read, in the context of psychoanalytic feminism, as a form of "protest against various socio-cultural and traditional obstacles that hinder the growth and self-actualization of women" (Shodipe, 174).

Nadifa Mohamed in, *Black mamba Boy*, while narrating the travails of her child protagonist, Jama, presents a startling portrait of Somali women who are burdened by psychological limitations that are ingrained by a lifetime of abuse and endure very difficult situations in a quest to survive in a society that is dominated and made very unsafe for women and children by patriarchy. The first instance of these disadvantaged female characters in *Black Mamba Boy* is observable in the Character of Ubah, Ambaro's mother. The narrator discloses that:

Ubah died of smallpox. Izra'il, the angel of death, had barged through Ubah's door fourteen times to spirit away her legion of children with diarrhoea, petty accidents, coughs that wracked tiny rib

cages. Ubah had left one live child, a heartbroken, sickly little girl [Ambaro] who haunted her grave.... Smallpox had laid its hand on her body, but she had survived, wearing her scars as proof of her mother's ghostly protection. (*Black Mamba Boy*, 17)

A close look at the conditions under which Ubah lives and dies allude to the precarious and traumatic lives lived by most women in Hargeisa. She goes through the draining experience of carrying her fourteen children for nine months in her womb only to have them snatched from her in their infancy. Worthy of note is the fact that the children die of smallpox, coughs, minor accidents, and such trivial causes of death which speaks volumes of the abject situation she endured before she dies herself. Also crucial to this study is fact that in the face of Ubah's suffering, her husband is conspicuously not mentioned as a source of material or psychological support to her. This, thus, centralises the disadvantaged position of the female subject in Somalia's socio-cultural organisation and accentuates the unfair privilege of the male in the patriarchal settings. Unlike her non-existent husband, the reader learns that Ubah is a self-sufficient woman. By this analogy, Mohamed in his novel is seen to present a shining and exemplary female character in the person of Ambaro's mother, Ubah, whom according to the narrator, "traveled on her own as far as the Ogaden desert to trade skins, incense, and other luxuries to sustain her family: "What a woman. Ubah was a queen" (*Black Mamba Boy* 54), the narrator concludes.

After Ubah's death from smallpox, Ambaro, her only surviving child, suffers a similar fate while her 'worthless and irresponsible husband' roams the ends of the earth in pursuit of fantastic dreams. The reader is, thus, left with the impression that the suffering of Ubah and Ambaro as painted by Mohamed in *Black Mamba Boy* is not coincidental, but a trend engendered by the patriarchal set-up in Somalia that puts the woman at a disadvantage. In Ambaro's case, even

fate and chance appear to conspire against her as the sordid and tragic circumstances surrounding her birth and childhood foretell her bleak existence as a woman destined to live and die miserably. The reader learns that Ambaro had grown up in the care of her aunt after the death of her mother. As she grows older, and having suffered so many misfortunes at such an early age:

Ambaro became a lean, silent young woman.... She wandered far away with the family goats and sheep. Grief for her mother and lost brothers and sisters kept her detached from the other members of the family who feared her and worried that misfortune might lead her to perform some evil witchcraft on them. Ambaro's eyes were too deep, too full of misery to be trustworthy (*Black Mamba Boy*, 17).

Viewed from a psychoanalytic perspective, the writer alludes to the age-long stereotype against women who were accused of being witches and harbingers of evil spirits because they displayed hysteria and all kinds of emotional instability due to socially induced trauma.

Although Mohamed's Ambaro in Black Mamba Boy does not suffer death by burning because she is considered a witch by her extended family, she suffers extreme psychological trauma due to isolation and loneliness since no one would associate with her. The only ray of light in Ambaro's life comes when Guure proposes marriage to her. The narrator says she "had always felt as thorny and barren as the dessert that surround her, with snakes and cacti in her heart, but Guure brought rains that made the cacti flower" (18). It is here argued that Ambaro's loneliness, ultimately, leads to the source of her ultimate misfortune as she becomes vulnerable to the love advances of the loafer, Guure, who puts her in a family way and abandons her. Throughout the period of their brief marriage, Guure is very lazy and does nothing to provide for his family. His wife is always sad and miserable as she has to work alone in order to support the family. Ambaro's disappointment is captured in the following extract from the text:

When Jama arrived a year later in Ambaro's eighteenth year, she hoped it would make Guure to start providing but instead he carried on endlessly combing his hair and playing his lute, singing his favourite song to Ambaro, "Ha I gabin oo I gooyn. Don't forsake me or cut me off." He occasionally dangled the baby from his tin fingers before Ambaro snatched Jama away. Ambaro carried both a knife and a stick from the magic wagar tree to protect her son from dangers seen and unseen – she was a fierce, militant mother, her sweet mellow core completely melted away. (Black Mamba Boy 19)

The reader thus is presented with two sharply contrasting images: the image of an inept and effeminate man who is incapable of providing for his family and who pre-occupies himself with the vanity of constantly combing his hair and playing music; and the image of strong, capable, and fearless woman who supports the family materially and also looks after their child. This reading becomes very persuasive when the reader considers the part of the narrative where the narrator describes Guure as "a hardened dreamer, always stuck in his head…the boy everyone loved but would not trust with their camels" (19), the people's main occupation being animal rearing.

The role of the unconscious as theorised by Freud, Lacan and modified to suit the course of the woman by psychoanalytic feminists is very crucial in this discussion. Ambaro's unconscious motives drive most of her actions in her conscious waking life. While she hides her disappointment with her dead relations who have done nothing to help her; and her husband Guure, for abandoning her; she lashes out at Jama at every given opportunity in fear that he might turn out like his weakling father.

Juliet Mitchell in, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, explains that unconscious wishes pushed down (repressed) into the unconscious where they are transformed and where they remain until re-evoked, or until they break out (as a symptom) but they are always there, speaking to us, in their way (6). Habib similarly notes that "even when we think

we are acting from a given motive, we may be deluding ourselves" and much of our thought and action are not freely determined by us but driven by unconscious forces which we can barely fathom (234). In Ambaro's case, her repressed problems and fears as a woman manifest in many ways throughout the narrative but mostly in her relationship with her son and other people she meets.

For instance, her emotions towards her son fluctuate constantly between affectionate love and loathing. For instance, she never allows her son to sleep into the early hours of the morning as most children of his age may be allowed to do. It does not matter to her that Jama has no task to wake up early in the morning and accomplish since he is still a child. Usually, she wakes him up with a string of abuses that reflect her subconscious bitterness over his father's behaviour. The reader learns that Ambaro begins and ends her drudgery filled days in a manner reminiscent of her anguish filled spirit. The excerpt from the text indicates this:

Ambaro stood by the roof's edge, softly singing a song in her deep and melodious voice. She sang before and after work, not because she was happy but because the song escaped from her mouth, her young soul roaming outside her body to take the air before it was pulled back into drudgery.... [She] shook the ghosts from her hair before beginning her morning soliloquy. "Some people don't know how much work goes into feeding their ungrateful guts, think they are Suldaan who can idle about without a care in the world, head full of trash.... Well, over my dead body, I don't grind my backbone to dust to sit and watch filthy-bottom boys roll around on their backs." [...] "Get up, stupid boy, you think this is your father's house? Get up, you fool! I need to get to work. (4)

It is imperative to point out that Jama, given his age as a mere boy, does not partake in any morning chores and therefore, has no contribution to his mother's preparation to get to work. Ambaro's reaction towards him in the torrents of abuses may best be explained as

an unconscious transfer of the aggression she feels towards Guure, her husband, who is lazy and could not support his family as hardworking husbands do in Hargeisa. Ambaro's songs, in the light of psychoanalytic criticism, may be seen as a form of repression which is "the expunging from consciousness... unhappy psychological events" (Tyson 14). Similarly, her foul language may be seen as an unconscious outlet for the emotions of frustration and despair that threaten to drive her mad as she toils daily in the capitalist dungeons of colonial Aden to feed her child.

The fatigue from the long hours of work she undergoes daily and the lack of affectionate love in her life since childhood are potent sources of trauma that Ambaro tries to suppress, but which erupt in her fits of hysteria observable in the text. Ultimately, Ambaro is presented as a hardworking woman who defies all the odds put in her path for survival by a patriarchal society in contrast to Ambaro's lazy and good for nothing husband. In her new job in Aden's coffee factory, Ambaro and other women work from dusk to dawn under very hazardous conditions and are poorly paid by the capitalist organisation. The reader sees this when Jama visits his mother at work at the coffee factory:

After standing outside Al-Madina Coffee Stores for a moment, Jama walked through the stone entrance and peered into the darkness. Sunlight splintered through the roof, illuminating the dust rising from the coffee beans as they were tossed to loosen the husks. A field of underpaid women in bright, flowery Somali robes were bent over baskets full of beans, spreading them on a cloth and removing stunted ones before the coffee was exported. Jama weaved through them, looking for a woman with smallpox scars, copper eyes, canines dipped in gold, and inky black hair. He found her in a corner, working on her own.... (9)

It is worthy to note that this ignoble work is exclusively reserved for women as there is no man in sight except for the young boy Jama who visits accidentally.

The hazardous nature of the work that Ambaro does at the factory without proper protective gear, consequently, causes her to develop a lung disease that the wage paid to her is insufficient to treat. The reader sees this when Jama checks on her after a prolonged interval of absence and finds her critically ill. When Jama enters the airless room where his mother is kept by her Islaweyne relatives:

A strange odour hit him as he got closer to her; he saw a basin brimming with najas; phlegm, blood clots, vomit all curdling together. Ambaro's hand was thrown over her mouth. He could hear a terrible gurgling sound with every intake of breath. Jama crept closer to his mother, his eyes darted from her knees to her ankles, swollen with the same liquid that was drowning her lungs. (Black Mamba Boy 42)

Worthy of mention is the fact that Ambaro is fired from the job at the factory where she develops the lung disease due to her incapacitation. When Ambaro is about to die, Jama wishes that his umbilical cord was never severed from his mother at birth but was extended endlessly like a spider's silk between them" (Black Mamba Boy 45).

Ambaro's problem seems to be compounded by her marriage to Guure and the fact that she must care for her child alone when her husband is free to wander around the world doing practically nothing. Marriage is a requirement of social life and women have generally more inclination to embrace this phenomenon than men. The requirement of being a woman is what girls learn from their mothers or other women in the society during the process of gender construction. Ultimately, it may be argued that women are made women by culture and social interactions. In her book, Feminine Mystique, Betty Friedan describes the situation of black women inside their houses as follows: "The very condition of being a housewife can create a sense of emptiness, non-

existence, nothingness in women" (264). Chodorow similarly argues that:

Personality development is not the result of conscious parental intention. The nature and quality of the social relationships that the child experiences are appropriated, internalized, and organized by her or him and come to constitute her or his personality. What is internalized from an ongoing relationship continues independent of that original relationship and is generalized and set up as a permanent feature of the personality (Chodorow 47).

She explains that a boy, in his attempt to gain an elusive masculine identification, often comes to define this masculinity largely in negative terms, as that which is not feminine or involved with women. He, therefore, tries to reject his mother and deny his attachment to her and the strong dependence upon her that he still feels. He also tries to deny the deep personal identification with her that has developed during his early years. He does this by repressing whatever he takes to be feminine inside himself, and, importantly, by denigrating and devaluing whatever he considers to be feminine in the outside world (Chodorow 52).

Conversely, the sex-role development of girls in modern society is more complex. On the one hand, they go to school to prepare for life in a technologically and socially complex society. On the other, there is a sense in which this schooling is pseudo-training. It is not meant to interfere with the much more important training to be "feminine" and a wife and mother, which is embedded in the girl's unconscious development and which her mother teaches her in a family context where she is clearly the salient parent (Chodorow 56).

Barry, Bacon, and Child, in their well-known study, demonstrate that the socialization of boys tends to be oriented toward achievement and self-reliance and that of girls toward nurturance and responsibility (Chodorow 56). Consequently, Horney describes a different indispensable component to what Freud called 'the normal

development of a woman': "she resigns herself to the role which is among other things a sexual role ... [assigned to her]" (52). Ambaro's resignation to a sexual role in the text as theorised by Irigaray may be seen in her acceptance of Guure as her sole helper and the pride she takes in her pregnancy:

When I was pregnant with you, I grew incredibly large, my stomach stock out like you wouldn't believe, people warned me that a young girl of seventeen would die giving birth to such a child, that you would tear my insides out, but I was happy, at peace, I knew I was expecting someone special.... (Black Mamba Boy 10)

The above seems to be in tandem with Freud's argument on the development of female sexuality that the girl's "Oedipus complex culminates in a desire, which is long retained, to receive a baby from her father as a gift – to bear him a child" (Freud, 179).

Most of Mohamed's female characters are strong, intelligent, and benevolent women who are married to men who are, in some ways, deficient and sometimes, not ready to work and take care of their families. The first case of this is already discussed in the foregoing in the effeminate male characters Guure who is not able to meet up with his responsibilities as a father and husband and disserts is family for a lazy life in an unknown destination.

Also worthy of mention in this regard is character named, Idea, who is married to Amina. The reader meets the couple when they find and rescue Jama when he faints on the streets of Djibouti during his long search for his father following his mother's death. It is instructive to note the contrast in the way the writer describes Idea and his wife, Amina, as they try to revive the exhausted Jama when they bring him in from the street and out of the scorching Djibouti sun:

She [Amina] put a glass of water to his [Jama's] mouth, and it burned as it slides down his throat. "I'll get him some rice." She rushed off, agile legs like springs beneath her, uncovered hair flaring around her in black and grey rivulets. The husband stood over Jama, his mouth

lopsided, Jama staring at it from the corner of his eye. When he smiled, a role of golden teeth peeked out, and a smile inched across Jama's face at the memory of Shidane and his silly tale of smugglers hiding within their gold teeth. The husband, thinking that the boy was smiling at him, released his full, droopy, maniac-looking smile.... (Black Mamba Boy 83)

While the woman is described in complimentary terms as being "agile" with a spring-like gait, the man is described using derogatory terms. His row of golden teeth is made to "peek out" as though with a life of their own, accentuating his ugliness; and his smile is "droopy" and "maniac-looking." Later in the narrative, the reader finds that Idea, Amina's husband, is a stay-at-home husband that prepares the family meals while his wife goes out to work every day. Amina casually asks Jama to ignore her husband, "he is unemployed" (83). The narrator explains that "He had been a teacher in government schools until, disheartened with the uses that the colonial government made of that education, he had put down his chalk and become the only male wife in Djibouti" (84). Thus, there is conscious subversion of traditional gender roles here in according with feminist ideals: the husband becomes the domestic housekeeper while the woman goes out to work in the larger society.

Another abused female character of note in Mohamed's Black Mamba Boy whom the writer presents as a strong female, is the young girl Isir, Jinnow's niece who is maltreated and divorced by her husband who no longer wants her on the pretext that she is possessed by evil spirits. When Isir returns to Jinnow, there, it is obvious that she has been seriously abused by her husband since she is "dressed in rags" although "her beauty is still intact" (Black Mamba Boy 67). Women are: "sex objects, prostitute, indolent, pleasure seekers" (Oso 1-2). Writing on domestic violence in Nigeria, Hadiza Bazza notes that:

[A]n average of 300–350 women are killed every year by their husbands, former partners, boyfriends, or male relations. Most times

the incidences are considered family feuds, which should be treated within the family. Most police refuse to intervene and advise the victims to go back home and settle "family matters" (176).

Isir fits neatly into this category of marginalised and abused women described by Bazza in the above extract. For Isir to be whole again after her defilement, the women pronounced that they "must exorcise her tonight" using an assortment of items including "perfume, new clothes, halwa, incense, amber and silver" (63) as the women converged in Jinnow's room the room that is brightly lit with paraffin lamps and smoky with expensive incense. The narrator explains that:

Jinnow had brought more old women, mysterious crones with shinning dark skin and strong hands. [...] Isir stood in the centre of the room looking stiff and nervous. With every command, the old women chanted "Ameen" and the young women clapped. Then the old women brought out small drums, got to their feet and started drumming in earnest. Jinnow stood behind Isir, grabbed her around the waist and forced her to dance, the crowed ululated and danced with them. [...] Jinnow...was shouting and crying "Nin hun, nin hun, a bad man, a bad man, never tie yourself to a bad man, we told you he was useless, useless, while you were brave and strong. Allah loves you.... Isir's tears flowed freely down her face.... (Black mamba Boy 63-64)

It is worthy to note that the ritual cleansing carried out by Jinnow and the other women to purify Isir is in tandem with the feminist ideal of support and solidarity for all women against the excesses of patriarchy.

The reader also sees this unfair gender arrangement between men and women in the Marriage between Talyani and Zainab. Zainab, an under aged girl, is married to Talyani, a police officer who abuses her and makes her a prisoner in her house. The suffering of Zainab under Talyani, her husband, is brought to the reader through the keen observations of Jama when he seeks shelter in the couple's house on his sojourn to find his long-lost father. When he first enters the house,

Jama notices that Talyani's house is immaculately clean, and Zainab is sitting on the floor with a baby suckling at her breast. Her face is "that of a teenager, with puppy fat and pimples" (Black Mamba Boy 103). When she is preparing a place for him to sleep, Jama notices that she has a "purple-black print of a fist around her eye" (Black Mamba Boy 103) indicating that she is physically abused by her husband.

During Jama's stay with the Talyani's, Zainab opens up confides in Jama concerning the inhuman treatment she undergoes under her husband. Some of the details of Zainab's personal life are contained in the following excerpt:

She had been a market girl in Buro and was planning to run away to Aden when Talyani proposed marriage. [...] She told him [Jama] she had nearly forgotten what it was like to have someone to talk to and do things with. Her teenage life, with its cast of sisters, aunties, friends, and neighbors had ended abruptly when she married, a sacrifice she had made without any real knowledge of what she was leaving behind...until she realized that she was in thrall with a drunk and would only ever see the four walls around her and the celling. Talyani, on the other hand, had freedom and life on the outside world.... (Black Mamba Boy 104)

Confined by her husband within the four walls of their apartment, Zainab is physically and emotionally abused. On one fateful morning, Jama is woken up by the sound of pots and plates crashing to the floor while Talyani's vicious voice rings out an abuse at his wife: "Didn't your mother teach you anything, you idiot!" (105).

Despite the difficult situation Zainab finds herself in, she is willing to endure because of her son whom she values above everything else as the narrator puts it: "If it wasn't for the baby, Zainab would have stowed away on one of the steamboats and hotfooted it back to Burao" (Black Mamba Boy 104). When Jama is finally leaving the Talyani's to continue his search for his father, Zainab, in "her red cloths [that] made her look young and free", is subdued with sadness but holds "on tightly

to her son" and "jama couldn't imagine [her] growing old in this town" (105). Here also, one is reminded of Freud's argument that the woman's psycho-sexual development culminates in her desire to have a child.

Overall, Nadifa Mohamed in the novel, Black Mamba Boy, explores a plethora of critical problems bedeviling Somalia, her homeland, and the African continent in general – from the insidious effects of colonialism and foreign dominant to droughts, famine, abject poverty, extreme hunger and squalor. During these troubling concerns, however, the writer features prominently the struggles of the woman and how she fares against these extreme odds by paying close attention to her socio-cultural, economic and political problems which are compounded by her inferior status as a woman. Like most feminists and women writers, Mohamed's novel seems to question the unfair advantage males over females in Somalia and paints a picture of an unjust patriarchal order that subdues and relegates the woman to the fringes of society. Female characters in the novel incapacitated and defined by certain gender specific roles as housewives, child bearers, domestic servants, or prostitutes.

In the context of psychoanalytic feminist criticism, the docile acceptance by women of gender specific roles and stifling conditions of life in male ordered societies, as is observable in Mohamed's novel, is believed to be rooted in socio-cultural socialisation. The presentation of exemplary women with virtues that surpass their weak husbands as exemplified in Guure and Idea is a subversive act of gender role reversal which is designed to disrupt patriarchal structures that have held the woman down through the ages. The true liberation of women, psychoanalytic feminists argue, must begin in the psych of the woman because "a woman cannot be liberated in any meaningful way if she doesn't know that she needs to be liberated (Tyson 99-100).

Findings of the Study

Based on the analysis of text, the study finds that Black Mamba Boy vividly depicts deeply rooted patriarchal structures that marginalise women, both within familial contexts and the broader societal framework. The female characters are silenced, their voices suppressed by cultural norms prioritising male dominance. The findings also reveal that silencing of women leads to profound psychological effects, including feelings of invisibility, emotional isolation, and diminished self-worth. Ambaro, the protagonist's mother, embodies these struggles as she navigates her role within a male-dominated society.

Conclusion

Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy* is a profound exploration of the intersections between patriarchy, trauma, and the silenced voices of women. Through the lens of psychoanalytic feminism, this study has illuminated the unconscious forces and societal structures that perpetuate gendered oppression in the narrative. The psychological toll borne by the female characters—manifested as emotional isolation, suppressed self-worth, and inherited cycles of marginalization—serves as a testament to the pervasive impact of patriarchy on the individual and collective psyche. However, Mohamed does not leave her readers without hope. The novel is imbued with moments of defiance and resilience, showcasing the inner strength of women like Ambaro, who challenge societal norms through their perseverance and sacrifices. These instances of resistance underscore the capacity for change and the enduring human spirit, even within oppressive systems. By critiquing patriarchal norms and amplifying marginalized voices, *Black Mamba Boy* invites readers to confront entrenched gender inequalities and imagine possibilities for a more equitable future. This analysis reaffirms the importance of feminist discourse in literature as a means of understanding and challenging the complexities of gender and power. It emphasizes that narratives like Mohamed's not only reflect

societal realities but also serve as tools for resistance and transformation, advocating for the recognition and validation of silenced voices in all spheres of life.

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