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"Manichaeanism and Decolonial Praxis: The Dismantling of Western Gaze in Shazaf Fatima Haider's How It Happened"

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Abstract

This research takes a decolonial tenet, Manichaeanism, addressed by Frantz Fanon's in The Wretched of the Earth (1963) and employs to Shazaf Fatima Haider's novel How It Happened (2012). According to Fanon's Manichaean concept, colonial system establishes a forceful binary framework between colonial power versus colonial subjects, which vitalizes systems of dominance founded on race and cultural traits. The study also uses a postcolonial framework by integrating decolonial lens to analyze that how Haider depicts and manifests colonial dualities that work across class systems, gender roles, and Western cultural invasion. In this regard, the analytical part explores the novelist's challenge of traditional colonial margins within a detailed text analysis that illustrates decolonial practices through reformed definitions of identity, narrative control, and personal capabilities. Further, Fanon's theory is used in this study to address how postcolonial spaces still keep Manichaean structures in the indigenous settings and how important South Asian contemporary literature is in grappling these hierarchies. Hence, this study adds to

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decolonial scholarship by demonstrating that Haider's novel creates spaces that challenge and remodel ideologies.

Keywords: Decolonization, Manichaeanism, Western gaze, postcolonial literature, Shazaf Fatima Haider, South Asian fiction

Introduction

Gandhi (2018) says that throughout colonial history, societies faced discrimination through a strict distinction between civilized peoples and primitive populations as well as colonizers dominating colonized groups. In his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon describes the racial and cultural clan as *Manichaeanism*, which forms the underlying ideological basis of colonial domination. In this way, the colonized people to a process of othering, colonizer designating them as inferior, and minimizing their ability to make choices (Fanon, 1963). Under this ideological system the colonial oppression continues beyond formal decolonization to allow the subjugation of colonized peoples to persist. This research uses Fanon's analysis of decolonization theory to identify the nature of Manichaean patterns in present-day postcolonial literary works (Abedin, 2022).

By taking this idea, this paper investigates the manifestation in which author Shazaf Fatima Haider challenges colonial perspective through her novel *How It Happened* as she confronts entrenched cultural systems and social ruling mechanisms. Further, the paper examines how the novel breaks down dichotomous power structures that uphold Western dominant discourses. By exploring arranged marriages and gender roles and social class arrangements the novel delivers a nuanced critique about the continuing heritage of colonial Manichaean principles (Batool, Ali, & Javed, 2022); (Qamar & Shaheen, 2024); (Zahid, Mujahid, & Hussain, 2023). Hence, the novelist develops a narrative system that

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grapples against Western perspectives while creating an alternative framework for agency that excludes the imposed colonial dualities.

Furthermore, this paper concentrates on examining how narrative techniques in the novel create a destruction of Western gaze dynamics while also recognizing postcolonial resistance and identity exploration as secondary thematic elements. Through its focus on How It Happened the theoretical contribution of literature toward decolonial practice by showing how narratives alter identity definitions and dismantles colonial power structures. Thus, the analytical approach seeks to show that decolonization represents an active continuous intellectual conflict which requires the elimination of dominant colonial thought systems. This valuable analysis of the novel contributes its role in contemporary literary criticism showing contemporary South Asian literature advancing decolonial practice in current times.

Literature Review

In his study, MacLeod (2022) examines Fanon's deconstructed rhetorical framework to highlight both emotional intensity and practical experience among colonized subjects. According to this theoretical framework, the emotional impact of historical colonial oppression needs comprehensive treatment in actual decolonial practice. Through a feminist perspective, Ahmad and Anas (2024) explore *How It Happened* to identify patriarchal systems and gender role dynamics in the text. According to these scholars, Haider exposes the patriarchal structures underlying oppression through his assessment of societal and cultural expectations about womanhood. Javed (2022) examines code-switching in the novel to show how characters develop their identities by selecting their language expressions. Through this study, researchers demonstrate language acts as both a tool to display and confront established social rankings. Zahid et al. (2023) offer a postmodern interpretation in which Haider breaks down major

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cultural narratives about marriage, religion, and gender to specific local cultural expectations.

Theoretical Foundation

According to Fanon, colonial systems organize themselves into a *Manichaean* framework that creates an extreme racial dualism between colonizers and colonized subjects. The political-economic debate comes from a dualism that includes cultural and epistemological aspects, which shapes how colonized people see and understand the world. The binary system it sustains presents colonizers as rational civil citizens who occupy superior status compared to the irrational, primitive, and subjugated colonized (Fanon 1963); (Maher, 2017); (Mehrvand, 2016). By employing this decolonial concept, this analysis demonstrates how Haider uses a decolonial practice to dismantle rigid dichotomies in Pakistani society and builds new postcolonial identity structures that go beyond inherited dualistic frameworks.

Discussion and Analysis

The subsequent analysis of the novel, *How It Happened (2012),* employs a qualitative methodology, wherein textual evidence is extracted to substantiate the *Manichaean* framework articulated by Fanon. Through a meticulous examination of the novel, the analytical section references evidence in the form of quotations, encompassing specific words, phrases, and narrative elements. Subsequently, examine the referenced evidence through the lens of *Manichaean* dichotomy and present a comprehensive elaboration of the analysis.

"Zainab Phuppo Proudly boasting five sons and no daughter. Her sons are all short and fat and Canadian citizens, like her husband Kareem" (Haider, 2012, p. 13).

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Through a delicate observation, Saleha examines how Zainab proudly brags about her sons holding Canadian citizenship. The way in which Zainab boasts about her sons, described as "short and fat," emphasizes their Canadian citizenship as a form of social capital. However, the phrase "proudly boasting" implies that Zainab's pride in this status may be superficial, reflecting the influence of the colonial legacy. The term "Canadian citizen" in this context symbolizes a type of “civilized” status associated with the West, a marker of success and modernity that continues to perpetuate the colonial binary that Fanon critiques. Through subtle mockery, the text exposes the hierarchy between Canadian citizens and Western ethnicity while criticizing the assigned nature of acquiring citizenship qualities. This reflects the "*Manichaean* order" that Fanon addresses— that the colonized aspire to the status of the colonizer, adopting the ideals and values of Western civilization without questioning the colonial structures that produce these ideals.

The term "Western Gaze" refers to the perception and judgment imposed by colonial powers upon the colonized (Sondarjee, 2023). The colonized use this gaze for classification purposes, which also guides them in creating their own self-perception. Through her show of pride, Zainab demonstrates her bid to achieve Western success, but this behavior maintains oppressive colonial systems within modern independent nations. Through her Canadian citizenship, Zainab embodies the way postcolonial power systems maintain their control over shaping individual identities in contemporary societies. Through mocking, the narrator asserts resistance against the surrender of indigenous identity to colonial principles. By looking at how Western identity and citizenship keep colonial power structures in place by putting value on achievements as the only way to measure worth, the work becomes a place where decolonization can happen.

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"What if he gets married to a gori? My handsome young grandson married to a huge cow with hair like a broomstick who eats McDonalds-Shuck Donnels and all manners of haram meat all the time? No Baba, no! I won't let that happen! Bahu, how can you allow this!" (p. 22)

Dadi's worry about Haroon marrying a "gori" appears to be a critique of this *Manichaean* binary: colonizer-colonized. Her description of a "gori" as a "huge cow with hair like a broomstick" and her disdain for the "McDonald's-Shuck Donnels" diet, as well as the "haram" meat she imagines the English woman consumes, illustrates her resistance to Westernization, which she associates with moral corruption and a loss of cultural identity. Inside, Dadi refuses to accept the Western (colonial) position of superiority over colonized people because she amplifies her concern about Haroon entering Western culture.

Edward Said's (1978) concept of Orientalism can be applied here to understand how Dadi views the West: The cultural apparatus possesses the power to depersonalize, market, and manipulate partial views of non-Western racial authenticity. By rejecting the idea of Haroon marrying a "gori," Dadi refuses to succumb to the external pressures of Western culture that she views as invasive and degrading. Towards Walter Mignolo's (2007) Coloniality of Power theory stands Dadi's view on a "gori" marriage as a manifestation of Western modernity's colonial power through cultural and epistemological means. When Dadi mocks her son's Westernization attempt, she practices a decolonial method that allows colonized people to take back their power solely through refusing the totality of imposed values. Thus, Dadi's objection to Haroon marrying a "gori" reflects her rejection of the Western gaze and her desire to protect her cultural identity from the colonial legacy that continues to structure postcolonial societies. In opposition to Fanon's *Manichaean* perspective, Dadi views her reaction as resistance against the Western conquest of

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modernity through its assertion of cultural superiority. Adding the views of Fanon, Said, Mignolo, Quijano, and Spivak to this analysis makes it more complete. They help us understand how the section criticizes Western normative control while fighting for indigenous cultural authenticity and cultural dignity.

"Look at what happened to Qurrat-ul-Aine's son? He went away and stayed away. And he married an Amreekan!" (p. 25)

Dadi's reference to Qurrat-ul-Aine's son, who went away, stayed away, and married an "Amreekan," highlights a key element of this internalized colonial mindset. Dadi shows fear through her words about Qurrat-ul-Aine's son, who chose to marry a white American woman because she believes this Westernizing marriage act represents the beginning of cultural disintegration in her family. Dadi understands marriage with a Western woman to represent a dual process where culture disappears while traditional roots crumble away. Through Fanon's theory of Colonized Psyche, it is shown how people like Qurrat-ul-Aine's son adopt colonial perspectives, becoming drawn to Western ideals. Dadi understands this cultural assimilation as represented by the American marriage as leading to a disastrous loss of indigenous power because it represents individual submission to colonial rule.

Through her reaction, Dadi rejects the antagonistic dualisms that Fanon analyzes throughout his writing. According to Fanon (1963), the colonized must proactively break free from the established dichotomy of colonizer versus colonized. Dadi's resistance to Haroon marrying a "gori" or to Qurrat-ul-Aine's son marrying an "Amreekan" can be interpreted as a refusal to accept the colonizer's standard of what constitutes a successful life or a desirable partner. Dadi refuses Western culture by refusing both intimate unions with Westerners and those structures where Westernness stands as the default standard for happiness. Through

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Qurrat-ul-Aine's son's marriage story, Dadi warns about surrendering to Western perception while esteeming its cultural standards. Through decolonial praxis, Dadi asserts that culture demands preservation against Western ideals attempting to subsume its identity.

"You listen to me Haroon: you may be in Amreeka but your roots are in Pakistan. You may meet all sorts of women there who want to trap handsome men like you into marriage, but remember... remember the promise remember the promise you made to me and keep girls at arm's length. Remember, my Beta, that while you are there, I will be here, on the prayer mat, waiting for your safe return." (p. 28)

Dadi expresses anxiety about Haroon's scholarship to study at New York University because she worries he will grow more similar to Western colonial thinking. Through her words, Dadi signals her denial of Western cultural perspectives, which establish Western culture as superior alongside its desirability. Dadi's caution against marrying a "gori" (an English woman) is a metaphorical plea for Haroon to resist the allure of Western ideals that are tied to the *Manichaean* framework of colonialism, which elevates Western values while diminishing indigenous ones. Through this perspective, she demonstrates the principles of decolonial praxis by challenging colonial constructions while defending cultural authenticity. The opinion expressed by Dadi merges with scholarship by Walter Mignolo and Aníbal Quijano to understand decolonization as recuperating indigenous knowledge and philosophical systems and cultural traditions despite Western domination. Dadi embodies decolonial thought by using her opposition to colonial mentality to push Haroon back toward his Pakistani roots, where cultural survival connects to active resistance. Perceiving the West as spiritually hazardous, a limit of colonial threat, she guides Haroon to protect his identity during Western interference. The analysis reveals how Haider criticizes colonial power through his analysis of Fanon, which examines

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the psychological effects of Western surveillance as he presents his story about cultural persistence. The advice from Dadi reveals in Haider's works the perpetual clash between Western ideal enforcement and homegrown identity protection while demonstrating practical decolonial approaches that evade colonial power structures.

"Are these the manners that Amreeka has taught him? Walking out on his grandmother while I am still talking to him" (p. 38)

By associating Haroon's changed behavior with "Amreeka," Dadi frames Western influence as corrosive, undermining traditional values of respect and family cohesion. Haroon's dismissal of his grandmother illustrates what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) terms "the colonization of the mind," wherein Western education and exposure lead the colonized to distance themselves from their native identity. Through mimicry-like behavior Homi Bhabha (1994) describes that colonial subjects incorporate colonial ways with desired assimilation yet maintain only fragmented attachment to their origin. Through his Westernized mannerisms Haroon demonstrates his unconscious mimicry toward his grandmother's words because he has outwardly moved beyond traditional values she stands for. Dadi's critique supports Aníbal Quijano's (2000) theory of Coloniality of Power by showing how Western modernity sustains global disesteem directed at non-Western systems of knowledge and cultural traditions. Wasps appear arrogant when portraying themselves as manifestors of ethical ideals despite their destructive effect on traditional values they extend to others. Through Feonomic analysis Fanon uncovers the falsity behind Western claims of superiority which actively cause damage to colonized people and subjects. Through this performance Haider exposes the underlying inconsistencies between the Western perspective and supports the value of preserving cultural control as an essential component of independence.

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(Alam to Zeba): "You can have lots a big lawn. And in of babies, and I'll give you a house with Canada, it's fully air conditioned all the time! Not that we really need the air conditioning for most of the year. But here's heating, none of this load-shedding crap that's got us all melting like kulfis on a stove (p. 106)
(Zeba to Alam): "Alam Bhai, I don't cook. I don't like children. I don't want to get married. (p. 107)

Based on Homi Bhabha (1994), the proposal demonstrates colonial mimicry methods by which modernized elites provoke the subjected colonial people toward adopting adherence to Western ways. Alam frames Canada as a utopia, a space where technological advancements and economic stability create an idyllic life, in stark contrast to the "load-shedding crap" of Pakistan. Through his suggestion, Alam tries to guide Zeba toward accepting Western modernity as the single route to personal fulfillment. By rejecting, Alam Zeba insists upon a decolonial practice that counteracts both Western stereotyping and traditional male authority. Zeba's refusal strands Alam's Westernized fantasy even while it attacks the traditional womanly social roles enforced in modern postcolonial societies. By claiming autonomy, Zeba breaks down dualistic colonial structures and breaks free from patriarchal tradition in her culture.

By applying Gayatri Spivak's (1988) strategic essentialism framework, marginalized subjects can temporarily unify their resistance efforts against powerful governance systems. Through her rejection of both marriage and domestic work, Ziba both rejects Alam as her suitor and disavows the global imperial narrative that idealizes Western modes of progress as the final goal for decolonized people. Through these words, she demonstrates an extensive postcolonial consciousness that denies the Western world the authority to determine what constitutes modernity and life fulfillment. splits feminism from this new matrix through her active rejection of materialist Western logic alongside conventional

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gender conventions, which together create an autonomous indigenous vision that surpasses colonial compliance and patriarchal submission.

"Mrs Haq proceeded to ask Ammi about Zeba Baji. She proceeded to tell Ammi about her son, a thirty-year-old industrial engineer in Dallas named Furqan. He had done his master's from the University of Indiana and was making about $80,000 a year. My mother blushed with embarrassment at the mention of the salary but did not say anything.

… Ammi was highly offended that her daughter was on any list at all. She doesn't care that her son is highly qualified--she's a very ill- mannered woman!" (p. 141)

Mrs. Haq attempts to promote her son's Western education along with his professional position and salary income to shape his value from Western success requirements. The author uses Furqan's master's degree from the University of Indiana along with his $80,000 salary to link Western educational and economic success to social status, thus revalidating colonial narratives promoting Western validation as a status symbol. The value system primarily coming from the West meets resistance in Zeba's mother. The mother's rejection of this business-like proposition reveals both her singular determination to undermine colonial hierarchy and her refusal to accept Western credentials as criteria for suitable marriage partners. Through her resistance to Furqan's status as a Westerner, Zeba's mother activates awareness of the internalized Western success metrics that colonized the minds of many South Asian communities.

In her culturally impactful decisions, Mrs. Haq demonstrates unawares that colonial values matter more to her than Islamic cultural norms along with individual marital suitability. The postcolonial elite members exhibit their adoption of colonial thought by pursuing acknowledgment through traditional Western indications of social

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standing. Zeba's mother resists social mimicry because she doesn't believe Western achievements should determine moral or social status.

Haider demonstrates through these narratives how colonial *Manichaean* frameworks survive in Pakistan's social fabric because Western education, alongside economic advantages, remains a prevalent indicator of social ranking. Her mother shows decolonial resistance by rejecting Western status symbols because she believes dignity surpasses material achievement. The analysis of Western power along with the commodification of Native women emphasizes the necessity of decolonial thought, which restores indigenous systems for human worth to exceed outdated colonial control mechanisms.

Conclusion

Shazaf Fatima Haider reveals in her novel *How It Happened* how postcolonial South Asia remains under ongoing Western cultural and identity control. She explores colonial effects on both psychology and culture, which reveal how western aspirations challenge traditional practices of the indigenous people. Dadi's resistance to Qurrat-ul-Aine's son marrying an "Amreekan" and her rejection of a "gori" daughter-in-law illustrate the internalized struggle against Western epistemic domination. Her assertion, "You may be in Amreeka, but your roots are in Pakistan," challenges the assumption that Westernization equates to progress, embodying decolonial praxis that resists colonial binaries. Similarly, her lament, "Are these the manners that Amreeka has taught him?"—in response to Haroon's changed behavior after studying abroad—reflects Fanon's claim that colonialism colonizes both body and mind.

Thus, the novel explores how colonial power dynamics work through Alam's endorsement of Western wealth. "You can have a big lawn… fully air-conditioned all the time! None of this load-shedding crap." These meaningless interruptions in power distribution symbolize

maintained foreign cultural conditioning. Haider subverts this through Zeba's defiant rejection of patriarchal and colonial expectations: "I don't cook. I don't like children. I don't want to get married." Through its narrative, *How It Happened* works to interrogate the damaging impact Western observers have on identity formation and cultural pride. In her narrative, Haider promotes a self-determined decolonial practice that restores native power by opposing colonial and patriarchal ideals to create fresh identity fronts.

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