

“This System of Subdued Agony” Reflection Statement

“This System of Subdued Agony” is a combination of speeches, exploring the female Muslim identity constructed within Islam. Cultural misrepresentations of this identity have resulted in restrictive, patriarchal households within Middle Eastern culture which distort Islamic teaching to justify restrictive gendered identity. In a 21st century multicultural Australian society, education can unveil these corrupted teachings, initiating a necessary cultural renaissance that reveals the authentic gender equity which is already evident in Islam.

Initially, my concept arose through the analysis of Christina Rossetti’s poetry in Advanced English, Critical study of a Text. Through the lens of feminist theory, *“blind fools of fate”*¹ Rossetti simultaneously depicts and challenges *“separate spheres, only coming together at breakfast, and again at dinner”*². The ideology of the ‘separate spheres’ rested on the notion that women were considered inferior, meaning that they were best suited to the domestic sphere, only. This Victorian value interrogated by Rossetti, is also evident in modern Islamic societies. My Major Work critiques this picture of a fractured society that masks the suffering and oppression encountered by Muslim women through misunderstanding and unfair application of Islam. It challenges this construct through the Islamic feminist perspective, evident in

¹ Rossetti, C. (2001). The Complete Poems. Great Britain: Penguin Books

² Hughes, K. (n.d.). Gender roles in the 19th century. Retrieved March 03, 2016, from <http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century#>

theories of 21st century scholars, Asghar Ali Engineer and Riffat Hassan “*the Quran favors equality between men and women; it advocates gender equity*”³.

The Extension One, Module C: Elective Two: Language and Gender, explores various representations of gender and feminist tropes. My investigation considered that, “*feminism can be difficult in a patriarchal household and would not fit well with a Middle Eastern family, as it could prove rather difficult for them to find meaning of such concepts through their surroundings*”⁴. However, the Quran makes it clear that “*men and women are equal*”⁵. The apparent conflict between these ideas furthered my investigation into intersectional feminism⁶ and its impact in a 21st century Australian society. This is revealed in intersectional feminism, a discourse dominated by the western perspective⁷. Transnational feminism, provided a stronger link to my interpretation “*The relationship between women is a cultural and ideological composite, constricted through diverse representational discourses*”⁸. Transnational feminism ensured a clarification in the unveiling of the ‘separate spheres’ construct, through the Islamic feminist perspective, “*but is... expressively and culturally varied*”⁹. My speeches represent two subsections of the misinterpretation of Islam through

³ Engineer, A. A. (2001). “Islam Women and Gender Justice. the University of Michigan: Gyan Publishing House.

⁴ 28121970 (2016) “This System of Subdued Agony” Journal

⁵ Yusuf, A. A. (1938). The meaning of the Glorious Qur'an. Islamic Publications.

⁶ Mitchell, E. (2013, September 12). I am a woman and a human: A Marxist feminist critique of intersectionality theory. Retrieved March 01, 2016, from <https://libcom.org/library/i-am-woman-human-marxist-feminist-critique-intersectionality-theory-eve-mitchell>

⁷ Marshall, Gul Aldikacti. 2005. Ideology, progress, and dialogue: A comparison of feminist and Islamist women's approaches to the issues of head covering and work in Turkey. Gender & Society 19(1): 104-120.

⁸ Eagleton, M. (Ed.). (2011). Feminist Literary Theory (3rd ed.). United Kingdom: Blackwell.

⁹ Barlas, A. (2002). "Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an. Texas Press.

two different perspectives: a female refugee in Australia who was empowered through education and, a young woman who highlights the reinterpretation of gender through Islam.

Investigation into various examples of speeches and oration, helped to develop my style of speech writing. Texts such as “Yours Truly”¹⁰ an amalgamation of letters, and “Writing Great Speeches” by Alan. M Perlin¹¹, assisted in creating the narrative interplay in Fatimah’s speech, *“beautiful pearls of wisdom slip from each other’s mouth”*¹². The use of narrative within the speech form is significant in creating the balance of logos, pathos and ethos. “Women’s Right” and “Gender Discrimination and Inequality” by Justin Healey¹³ also provided an in-depth look at power and knowledge. Healey discusses the ‘logos’ through the lens of feminism, facts and statistics over a period of years. This validated my arguments with current statistics *“....involves 72 million children worldwide, of primary school age, not attending school”*¹⁴ which is a reflection of this theory of logos in my major work.

The decision to write in the form of a speech was inspired by the rich oral tradition of Middle Eastern culture. This form best suited my conceptual argument, that Islam contains an ethos of gender equity which must be better communicated in Middle Eastern culture. The speech form also allows for the inclusion of the narrative perspective, which is the vehicle for initiating this change. My speeches, however, are

¹⁰ Yours Truly: Marieke Hardy and Michaela McGuire, (date edition)

¹¹ Perlman, A. M. (1998). writing great speeches. Needham Heights : A Viacom company.

¹² “Ibid”

¹³ Healey, Justin. (2009). In Trove. Retrieved July 4, 2016, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.party-1304226>

¹⁴ “Ibid”

not traditional in form, but rather a hybridity of oral narratives and speech format that reflects the Middle Eastern society and its narrative. To capture the raw sensibility of humanity and to unify the two speeches, I used pathos and developed empathy *“wounds of the ocean, slamming on the backs”*. Employing female personas from different age groups, further allowed me to interlace their accounts with the tribulations undergone by some female Muslims and the creation of their identity *“the lack of nuance in our understandings of Islam reflects this overly simplistic rhetoric of our cultural sources”*¹⁵. This consideration was necessary when addressing the conference’s audience, as most (if not all) are Muslims. By creating a hybrid text, using narrative to drive the speeches, sets the foundation for connection between the audience and the speaker.

Logos emphasized the significance of female cultural identity and its ordeals, through current statistics and facts, *“91% of the coverage is deemed negative”*. The balance of logos and pathos allowed each character to have specific motifs and extended metaphors that drove each speech, such as *“a jigsaw puzzle”*, the water metaphor *“lullaby of the ocean”* and the *“recipe”*¹⁶ which elevated the significance of the cultural misunderstandings.

I studied and explored different styles of writing used in speeches such as William Safire “Lend me your ears”¹⁷ (1992), “More than words” by Mario Cuomo”

¹⁵ 28121970 (2016) “This System of Subdued Agony” page 10

¹⁶ 28121970 (2016) “This System of Subdued Agony” page 9

¹⁷ Safire, W. (1992). Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History (1st ed., Vol. 1, Ser. 1). Washington, D.C: Norton.

¹⁸ (1993) and “Great speeches” by Franklin D. Roosevelt¹⁹, these assisted me in eliminating clichéd and overly descriptive language, to ensure that my imagery was poignant *“this lullaby is an ocean breeze”*. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s “We Should All Be Feminists” and “The Danger Of A Single Story”²⁰, also aided me in the development of a credible voice, as the characters employed different tonal modulations and, utilized current statistics for emphasis. The strategic use of another voice, to introduce my speakers, also created verbal variety and colour, maintaining the formality and, the organisation and structure of my composition. This has also been constructed, through the authenticating of voice through sound effects and, the strong sense of audience, purpose and context.

Other influences came from a workshop with the Australian Muslim author of “The Tribe”, Michael Mohammed Ahmad, who provided me with feedback to strengthen my speeches *“write, with real scenarios and what you know best”*. This was extremely important to developing my confidence as I was unsure about the validity of my Major Work and whether it would be suitable to the event, in which it would take place.

The importance of rhetorical devices *“why such a nurturing position?”* and, emotive language *“thick with love”*²¹ emphasize the desperation of Fatimah’s situation. Ideas of fleeing *“morning and night in a small boat in the China Sea”*, fulfilment *“I knew that it was meant to be”* and the journey of gaining freedom, became central in the imagery of my piece. Whilst the contrast of recipe and Ms

¹⁸ Cuomo, M. M. (1993). More than words (1st ed.). St. Martins.

¹⁹ Roosevelt, F. D. (1933). Great speeches. Washington, D.C.

²⁰ Adichie, C. N. (2013). Americanah.

²¹ “Ibid”

Dawud’s experiences also display how “*stereotypes of Islam have many cunning passages and contrived corridors*”.

“This System of Subdued Agony” is intended for young Muslim women and men, who are passionate about their faith and driven to become agents of change within their community. This challenges the normative behaviour of our society and portrays Muslims in Australia in a positive light. Thus my speeches would best suit the Lebanese Muslim Association²² (LMA) Islamic perspective that drives modern 21st century Australian belief, in the Muslim society. Hence, I was able to submit a work that fulfilled my intentions and enlightened my audience and, at times, myself to the misconceptions of Islam.

1473 words

²² Issa, R. (2015, December 03). SMC2: Divine rights in the modern world. Retrieved March 29, 2016, from <http://www.amust.com.au/2015/12/divine-rights-in-the-modern-world/>