

The Economic Shock in Arab and African American Female Fiction: A Socio-Economic Reading of the Mother-Daughter Relationship

Jumana Al-Rifae

Department of English Language and Literature, University of Jordan, Jordan

Eman Mukattash

Department of English Language and Literature, University of Jordan, Jordan

Abstract—The study explores the economic difficulties encountered by Arab American and African American mothers, as well as the adverse conditions they endure due to their economic and social circumstances, which are manifested in four selected novels. This study seeks to clarify the reasons behind these difficulties and their impacts on family relations, particularly between mothers and daughters. The introduction of new economic regulations, unfamiliar to the mothers, constitutes a significant shock, profoundly affecting their understanding of their daughters' attitudes and choices. This shift in perception often results in conflicts that strain and, in some cases, sever the bonds between mothers and daughters, as well as between daughters and their broader family networks. To achieve the research purpose, the study uses Mark Fisher's concept of "capitalist realism" to analyze Suzan Darraj's *The Inheritance of Exile* (2007), Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* (2008), Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* (2008), and Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992). The concept elucidates how the new economic regulations, which mothers have not previously encountered in their homelands, impact their exploitation by landlords and the patriarchal system. In conclusion, the study reveals that harsh economic conditions break connections between African American mothers and their daughters, while changes in economic institutions lead to misunderstandings between Arab American mothers and their daughters, resulting in family crises that negatively affect and lead to the breakdown of the mother-daughter relationship.

Index Terms—economic challenges, capitalist realism, mother-daughter relationship, identity crisis

I. INTRODUCTION

The present study examines the economic challenges faced by Arab-American and African-American mothers and their daughters, which are manifested in four selected novels, focusing on the profound impact these challenges have on their relationships. The economic environment creates an atmosphere filled with tension, which influences individuals as they work hard to improve their lives amidst social, traditional, and political adversities. This study, accordingly, highlights how economic pressures significantly contribute to the emergence of socio-economic difficulties, particularly within family dynamics, by examining the mother-daughter relationship.

As the economic circumstances present distinct challenges for both mothers and daughters, the study offers a comparative analysis of the struggles mothers face within their societies and the subsequent effects on their daughters. It argues that economic challenges often lead to misunderstandings between mothers and daughters, with Arab-American and African-American mothers encountering similar difficulties shaped by their own experiences and contexts. These challenges give rise to internal conflicts and external tensions between the two generations. As the study emphasizes, economic factors play a pivotal role in shaping family relations, particularly the dynamics between mothers and daughters, as daughters tend to respond differently to these economic conditions and challenge the socio-economic power, specifically of their mothers.

The study investigates the multifaceted challenges confronted by Arab-American and African-American mothers, identifying economic difficulties as the predominant challenge. The findings suggest that these economic adversities stem primarily from involuntary migration from their countries of origin to the United States. Furthermore, the study illustrates that, based on those previous experiences, these mothers have been accustomed to a relatively modest economic lifestyle in their native countries, which contrasts with the complexities they encounter outside their homeland. Such discrepancies exacerbate their challenges, culminating in a significant disconnection from their daughters. This disconnection is particularly evident in the mothers' unfamiliarity with the roles of working mothers and their hesitance to endorse employment as a viable alternative to education for their daughters. Based on Mark Fisher's concept of *Capitalist Realism*, the study elucidates how the new capitalist framework reshapes their economic perceptions and, by extension, their cultural identity. As these mothers grapple with understanding the altered economic landscape and cultural norms, the study concludes that economic systems have a profound impact, as they can transform cultural paradigms, thereby intensifying the cultural and generational rifts between these mothers and their daughters. The study examines two novels

by Arab-American writers: *The Inheritance of Exile* by Suzan Darraj (2007) and *A Map of Home* by Randa Jarrar (2008), as well as two novels by African-American writers: *A Mercy* (2008) by Toni Morrison and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) by Alice Walker.

Numerous critical studies have explored the concept of *Capitalist Realism*, yet only a limited number have applied this concept within a literary framework focusing on diasporic studies. This study, therefore, employs Fisher's concept of *Capitalist Realism* to uncover the hegemonic powers that contribute to familial conflicts in multi-ethnic societies, with a particular focus on the dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship. The study focuses exclusively on literary analyses that have examined Fisher's concept of *Capitalist Realism* within literary texts. In other words, the study will offer a literary interpretation of Fisher's concept through the lens of African-American literature and Arab-American literature. By analyzing the economic challenges in the selected novels in light of Fisher's concept of *Capitalist Realism*, the study will uncover shared characteristics between African-American mothers and Arab-American mothers. In an interview entitled *Capitalist Realism and Neoliberal Hegemony: A Dialogue*, Fisher states that:

The dominance of capitalism, the inability to imagine an alternative to it, now constitute a sort of invisible horizon. Few explicitly think about 'capitalism' as such – the disappearance of alternatives, even if only imaginary alternatives, make it much harder to apprehend capitalism as a specific, contingent system. Capitalist realism as I have understood it entails this deep embedding in a world – or set of worlds – in which capitalism is massively naturalized. (2013, p. 90)

According to Fisher, individuals within these communities find themselves subjected to the dominance of a new economic system, which embodies an ideology that disproportionately affects marginalized groups in society. African-Americans and Arab immigrants, particularly women, are often categorized as subordinate classes when contrasted with the dominant groups in the developed world. Many of these marginalized groups originate from economically modest backgrounds and are unfamiliar with the individualistic lifestyles in these societies. As a result, they inevitably face exploitation, leading to a range of challenges as they struggle to adapt to their new socio-economic realities.

Building upon the previous discussion, African-American and Arab-American mothers present a distinct case, grappling with the challenges imposed by the new economic system. African-American mothers bear the historical burden of enslavement, while Arab-American mothers are immigrants who have come to the United States in pursuit of safety, security, or economic advancement. Women within these two groups face particular difficulties as they navigate the complexities of managing both their families and their personal lives under economic pressures.

Mark Fisher's Capitalist Realism

An essential part of the process of categorizing people and establishing hierarchical structures is played by the economic system. Fisher is widely recognized as one of the most influential thinkers in the field of economics, and he has made significant contributions to literary criticism. His concept of capitalist realism is "used to describe the contemporary condition in which all social and political possibility is seemingly bound up in the economic status quo" (Shonkwiler & La Berge, 2014, p. 2). Drawing upon the above-mentioned literary works, this study contends that capitalism is posited as the quintessential mechanism within economic systems to ensure labor stability and guarantee robust economic performance. In *Reading Capitalist Realism* (2014), Shonkwiler and La Berge explain: "Realism, as described by Fisher, is not a representational mode or aesthetic. It is instead a general ideological formation in which capitalism is the most real of our horizons" (Shonkwiler & La Berge, 2014, p. 2). The belief that capitalism is the fundamental, workable political and economic system has been deeply embedded in our societal frameworks and cognitive processes, to the extent that seeing alternatives is becoming increasingly difficult. The extreme practice of the capitalist system, along with the misunderstanding of the concept of the individual and the focus on the individual, as shown in the selected novels, creates this shift in beliefs toward an understanding of capitalism. The clashes between mothers and daughters serve as crucial evidence of a change in perceptions of capitalism as a taken-for-granted economic system.

Literary texts can explore this issue by portraying individuals, situations, and narratives that either support or question the unavoidable nature of capitalist structures. An analysis could center on how the literary work either reinforces the existing social order by implying no alternative to capitalist systems or challenges it by envisioning other futures. This can be seen in the works of both African-American and Arab-American writers whose works are under study.

The significance of analyzing the selected novels in light of Fisher's concept of capitalist realism lies in its ability to clarify critical issues regarding how contemporary ethnic American fiction reflects the socio-economic conditions of its time. Specifically, the pervasive spread of capitalism and its emphasis on individualism have led to the marginalization of traditional ideas, such as the notion of 'class struggle.' This ideological shift has resulted in the absorption of capitalism as an indisputable reality, making it increasingly difficult to discern class struggle in contemporary literary texts. The naturalization of capitalism extends its influence beyond the economic aspect, permeating the cultural and social dimensions of life (Fisher & Gilbert, 2013). Consequently, contemporary studies frequently engage with questions related to identity, driven by the absorption of new notions that depart from traditional frameworks. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the reasons behind the economic shockwaves that trigger corresponding cultural and social upheavals, particularly as depicted in the lives of the ethnic mothers in the selected novels, who grapple with these challenges, leading to conflicts within the family unit.

Few critical studies utilize Fisher's capitalist realism as a theoretical framework. In a study entitled *Capitalist Realism, Finance and Don DeLillo* (2019), Stipe Grgas offers "a reading of Don DeLillo's short story 'Hammer and Sickle' in which

Grgas shows how the text deals with finance, how DeLillo thematizes the difficulty of understanding finance, and how this has a bearing on the lack of an alternative to capitalism announced in Fisher's explanation of capitalist realism" (p. 197). Consequently, economics constitutes a significant thematic element in life that is consistently mirrored in literary works. However, most literary analyses tend to prioritize traditional subjects, often relegating economic themes to a lesser status. To this end, the current study emphasizes the economic dimension as depicted in the fiction written by African-American and Arab-American authors, highlighting its pivotal role in analyzing literary texts and shaping dynamic family relations, such as the mother-daughter relationship.

In *Capitalist Realism and the Psychoanalytic Critique*, Tyler Jorn discusses the relationship between capitalist realism and psychoanalysis, explaining that "psychoanalysis takes up the problem of capitalist realism, then, it is with the much different aim of accounting for capitalism's staying power in virtue of its deep resonance with the basic structure and dynamics of unconscious mental life" (Jorn, 2024, p. 17). Psychoanalysis explores how capitalism has not only become an external reality, but has also embedded itself within individuals, shaping their identities and perspectives. This framework helps explain why the daughters of the second generation, such as Hanan in *The Inheritance of Exile*, often prioritize personal autonomy and self-identity, distancing themselves from their mothers as they struggle to establish independent lives. In this context, capitalist realism derives its power from its pervasive presence as an accepted and internalized reality.

In *Capitalism in the Family*, Ojajärvi uses "two literary texts that share the motif of capitalism in the family. The motif focuses on the dialectic of the societal and the subjective, thus clearly keeping together the sometimes-differentiated strands of realistic involvement" (Ojajärvi, 2012, p. 168). The article examines capitalism as a concept transmitted across generations within the family, emphasizing its influence on the formation of familial relationships and dynamics in "Finnish literature" (Ojajärvi, 2012, p. 168). It shows how capitalism "is strongly related to child characters, not just the adults in the families. Thus these 'capitalism in the family' novels posit a question about the constant expansion of capitalist and market practices: is the market colonizing, more deeply than before, the 'personal' and 'intimate' aspects of life?" (Ojajärvi, 2012, pp. 168-169). The article explores the underlying economic forces that are manifested in children's unusual behaviors, revealing how these economic pressures impact families and significantly influence familial relationships.

The economic challenges result from living hidden ideologies that control not only markets but also cultural life, social relations, family constructions, and identity formation. Therefore, the present study argues that the mother-daughter relationship is complicated by the different economic and social circumstances and experiences that mothers and daughters face. As a result, the divide between mothers and their daughters is exacerbated by the misperception of their reality and the manner in which the daughters are affected by maternal emotions. Mothers and daughters share maternal emotions—a faculty that makes their relationship different from other familial relations. Such an innate faculty may be reflected in the mother's tendency to control her daughter, and because daughters also possess this same faculty, they resist their mother's dominance. Therefore, socio-economic factors shape and modify daughters as they grow up in Western communities, preparing them to challenge their mothers' more traditional perspectives.

Consequently, capitalist realism exerts its power by being perceived as an unquestioned and pervasive reality, so deeply embedded that individuals rarely recognize its influence. Jorn argues that "[t]here is a deep homology between the logic of desire, such that capitalism almost seems 'custom-fitted,' as it were, to the inner structure and dynamics of desiring subjectivity" (Jorn, 2024, p. 20). This argument underlines the connection between desire and capitalism, suggesting that capitalism becomes a reality through the fulfillment of human desire. The inherent human drive for power is closely linked to this process. As depicted in the selected novels, the mothers are deeply concerned with their economic circumstances, which are portrayed as one of the main sources of their challenges. The reference to psychoanalysis in this study is significant, as it allows for a deeper exploration of the psychological implications of capitalist realism.

Through this lens, the study reveals how the economic conditions deeply impact both mothers and daughters, shaping their relationships and the ways they are influenced by broader economic and social forces. In this context, the study also draws on Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978) and Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1986) to illustrate how capitalist realism affects the internal psychological dynamics of daughters, while also providing insight into the mothers' behaviors as depicted in the novels.

Financial challenges arise from underlying beliefs that regulate not only markets but also cultural relationships, family structures, and identity formation. In the selected novels, the mother-daughter relationship becomes particularly complex due to the divergent economic and social circumstances experienced by mothers and their daughters.

II. DISCUSSION

The Impact of Economy on the Relationship between African-American Mothers and their Daughters

The extreme reactions exhibited by African mothers can be seen as responses to the harsh conditions of enslavement. The context of slavery, particularly through familial conflicts, influences those women's psychological aspects. Their treatment as 'others', not only as marginalized women but also as slaves, continues to haunt African mothers and their daughters. The study posits that the fear of being inferior and/or othered is transferred from mothers to daughters, widening the disparity between them and triggering additional psychological insights, leading African daughters to reject

their mothers. In “Theoretical Perspectives on Understanding Slavery: Past and Present Challenges” (2010), Lorena Arocha states: “The character of the enslaved as an ‘outsider’, as an ‘other’, is necessary in the process of constructing a social hierarchy that would allow for the presence of slavery” (pp. 31-32). The hierarchical system enhances the mothers’ feelings of being ‘the other’, which in turn influences their relationships with their daughters. This hierarchy also provides an economic framework that promotes the mothers’ sense of the ‘other’. Furthermore, the economic system emphasizes individual labor as a way to improve the economy and enhance economic productivity. In this context, Morrison and Walker craft their novels to depict African American mothers and daughters grappling with multifaceted conflicts that impact their socio-economic lives, as the discussion below will show.

In Morrison’s *A Mercy* (2008), the pervasive influence of capitalism proves to be a fatal truth for Florens and her mother, profoundly shaping the unfolding events. The strenuous working circumstances endured by workers are a direct consequence of the economic system. In “Remembering *Beloved* and Discovering *A Mercy*: The Roles of Patriarchy, Capitalism, and Race During Slavery” (2010), Kimberly Love states: “Toni Morrison illustrates genuine and non-genuine acts of mercy not only to explore the effects of slavery, but to explore three main facets of the institution of slavery that still lie at the underbelly of America’s foundation: patriarchy, capitalism, and the construction of race” (p. 55). In *A Mercy*, the repercussions of employing an excessive display of capitalist economic techniques ultimately lead to a reliance on recruiting additional workers, a situation which Florens describes as follows:

Upon entering this privately owned country, his feelings fought one another to a draw. Unlike colonies up and down the coast-disputed, fought over and regularly renamed; their limited to whatever nation was victor- the province of Maryland allowed trade to foreign markers. Good for planters, better for merchants, best for brokers. (Morrison, 2008, p. 15)

The efforts that workers exert to improve economic conditions in these countries have significant consequences that disproportionately affect their families, particularly their daughters. They are required to work under challenging conditions and are sometimes forced to sacrifice their children because they are unable to ensure their safety. Moreover, they must endure criticism for not being nurturing mothers. Florens blames her mother for sending her instead of her brother, saying: “A minha mae begs no. Her baby boy is still at her breast. Take the girl, she says, my daughter, she says” (Morrison, 2008, p. 8). Florens’s mother intends to protect both children, but her decision is not welcomed by Florens, who believes that her mother cares more about her brother than about her. Eventually, Florens’s mother suffers from the economic methods that force workers to give up their children to eliminate the farmer’s debts. One negative impact is the division of people into various classes, placing women at the bottom of the hierarchy. Hence, women are forced to choose any alternative to avoid seeing their children as slaves. As Ryan (2012) explains, “[o]wners and investors possess accumulated wealth or capital that allows them to control the production of goods, while workers, because they have no accumulated capital, must give over their lives to labor in order to survive” (Ryan, 2012, p. 59). Mothers in such situations are unable to make a choice, which is why Florens’s mother’s, and Tahsi’s mother’s, reactions are elucidated. As a result of her subjugation, Florens’s mother is confronted with profound internal conflicts, navigating the excruciating burden of making agonizing decisions as a mother. She is also besieged by relentless economic pressures, compelling her to endure the harrowing sacrifice of both herself and her children. Florens’s mother instills in her daughter the sense of being ‘the other.’ The economic context further intensifies Florens’s sense of marginalization, as she continues to perceive her mother as the initial source of her marginalization.

Reading Morrison’s novel in light of Fisher’s concept of capitalist realism helps explain why African-American mothers employ aggressive strategies, such as abandoning their daughters, as a means of safeguarding them in response to their challenging financial conditions. Furthermore, it helps explain why African mothers remain silent, as seen in Morrison’s *A Mercy* and Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. This silence reflects their restricted status as a submissive group in a white patriarchal society, unable to challenge their economic positions or the patriarchal structure. Therefore, being a slave is a direct outcome of being part of a capitalist economic system, which African mothers subconsciously accept as their inevitable fate. They are unable to resist it, and this leads to various tensions within their families.

In *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1986), Rich explores the shared experiences of African-American women who, during the time of slavery, have chosen to have an abortion rather than raise a child under oppressive conditions (see Rich, 1987). Rich investigates how economics plays a pivotal role in driving African-American women to choose aggressive ways to protect their children from the conditions of slavery. She studies the connection between slavery and abortion in light of economics and concludes that abortion is perceived by African-American mothers as a merciful alternative to slavery: “Abortion can be an act of economic desperation under an economic exploitation which, though less total and overtly violent than slavery, offers women minimal options both in the workplace and the home” (1978, p. xix). In this case, women must take care of only themselves; they will not take on the burden of raising a child under the harsh conditions of slavery or of exposing the child to an economically difficult life.

In “Murderous Mothers: Adrienne Rich’s *Of Woman Born* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*” (2012), Emily Jeremiah states: “[t]he notion of mothering as an ambivalent, even hostile undertaking has been a significant focus of recent feminist thinking about maternity” (p. 59). Examining the mothers’ ambivalent attitudes is crucial to understanding why females, particularly mothers, exhibit ambivalent behaviors that deviate from their norms. Indeed, psychological, social, economic, and political factors contribute to the formation of such irrational attitudes. Rich delves into the institution of motherhood in African-American culture, describing it as “violent behavior on the part of mothers” (Jeremiah, 2012, p. 60). Rich

elucidates facets of the institution of motherhood that shape mothers. In African-American communities, the economic situation plays a crucial role in shaping the institution of motherhood, and since African-American mothers play a significant role in the economy, this explains why they choose to give up their children, as Florens's mother does in the novel.

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, the idea of capitalist realism is introduced through Tashi's efforts to disguise her true identity by adopting a different name and establishing a new persona. Tashi's rejection of her past transforms her into a real-life capitalist. In the novel, Tashi contemplates her situation, saying: "I did not realize for a long time that I was dead" (Walker, 1992, p. 17). Tashi is incapable of leading a conventional lifestyle because she has been subjected to intense cultural influences. Girls are subjected to exploitation in a variety of ways, including psychological, social, and primarily economic forms, and the patriarchal society is responsible for the power exerted on females to work outside their country. Walker brings attention to the potentially harmful effects, such as the employment of abused women like Tashi, who has been sent to America to work. In "An Ecofeminist Perspective on the Patriarchs in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*" (2020), Abirami Vetrivel illustrates that African-American women "had to fight a perpetual battle against victimization, injustice, and poverty encountered in their everyday life due to racism, sexism, and classism. It is understood from the annals of human history that no other group of humanity has ever endured such physical, mental, cultural, and socio-economic ordeals like the African-American women" (p. 25). Women like Tashi are struggling with tribal traditions, social challenges, and economic exploitation. Walker shows the effects of capitalism on workers, representing another burden that African women have had to bear.

The capitalist method that relies on employing more workers entails using more women, most of whom, like Tashi, are victimized because they receive lower wages than African men and are more productive as they give birth to new members. For Tashi, who is unaccustomed to labor, this represents an economic shock. It is worth noting that the patriarchal institution plays a pivotal role in exploiting women's labor because the capitalist system tends to "[institutionalize] masculine supremacy, where men not only hold positions of social power and comfort but also determine how feminist issues should be capitalized to meet the needs of capitalism, especially in terms of dealing with the periodic crises of capitalism" (Kanatli, 2024, p. 92). Therefore, women are viewed as workers, and men see women as productive tools due to their ability to be used in trade and their capacity to produce more workers.

Additionally, women, particularly African-American women, perceive capitalist realism as a persuasive force, accepting it as an absolute reality. "The psychical staying power of capitalism thus resides in the way in which its 'concept', its defining logic of production, precisely mirrors the inner structure and dynamics of the subject's libidinal economy" (Jorn, 2024, p. 24). The harsh socio-economic conditions Tashi lives under reformulate her identity by compelling her to flee her homeland and embrace her new life, with the intention of escaping her traumatized experience and focusing on her individual life. Despite facing significant economic and psychological challenges, Tashi and her husband continue to embrace their new life. However, Tashi's mother continues to haunt her, leading her to believe that she is silent in the face of tribal traditions. Consequently, Tashi challenges her mother's silence and decides to speak up against the dual challenges she and her mother have faced. The first challenge is the brutal tribal traditions that Tashi's mother has endured silently. The second challenge is the economic one, which Tashi first experiences when she leaves her tribe. She lives a life characterized by a lack of economic stability, social acceptance, and cultural cohabitation. These obstacles not only widen the gap between Tashi and her mother but also draw Tashi's attention to the new economic challenges she faces after leaving her tribe.

Rich (1986) discusses the economic and social challenges that women such as Tashi encounter in their new communities, highlighting their essential role as workers and their significant contribution to labor productivity. Rich explains:

Most of the labor in the world is done by women: that is a fact. Across the world, women bear and care for children, raise, process, and market food, work in factories and sweatshops, clean the home and the office building, engage in barter, create and invent group survival. Procreative choice is for women an equivalent of the demand for the legally limited working day which Marx saw as the great watershed for factory workers in the nineteenth century. The struggles for that "modest Magna Carta," as Marx calls it, came out of a time when the employer literally owned the lifetime of the laborer. The Factory Acts did not end capitalism, but they changed the relation of the workers to their own lives.* They also replaced the individual worker's powerlessness with a realization that collective confrontation could be effective. (p. xviii)

Undoubtedly, women carry out the majority of labor worldwide. Women's labor has thus become a cultural norm that has spread throughout the world. Women are responsible for almost every aspect of life. Being 'a mother' is the most difficult job a woman can have, according to Chodorow (1978), who also reports the many other occupations women undertake. Mothers still face numerous difficulties, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Therefore, by nature, women must take on the role of mother, along with other jobs. 'Mothering' remains the unique task assigned to women, not men, which increases women's duties. Chodorow explains:

Over the past few centuries, women of different ages, classes, and races have fluctuated considerably during this same period. Despite these changes, women have always cared for children, usually as mothers in families and occasionally as workers in child-care centers or as paid and slave domestics. Women's mothering is one of the few universal and enduring elements of the sexual division of labor. (Chodorow, 1978, p. 3)

According to Chodorow, among the many traditional responsibilities placed on women, childbearing has always been considered paramount. Biological factors and societal roles contribute to the widespread belief that this task is unavoidable for women. Due to the gender division of labor, women are expected to care for children and perform other domestic duties. Moreover, in terms of psychological and emotional aspects, women are expected to nurture children and maintain emotional attachments, in keeping with their physical nature, rather than neglecting the emotional needs of the mother. Consequently, raising children should be a shared responsibility that both mothers and fathers are required to take on to fulfill their obligations to the family.

In conclusion, family conflicts arise between African-American mothers and daughters due to their differing perspectives on capitalist realism. African mothers reject the economic system because it intensifies their own experiences of slavery. They view this economic system as a primary factor that has led to the division of their families and forced them to send their children abroad. For the African daughters, capitalist realism presents both a blessing and a curse: a blessing for Tashi, as she escapes her tribal traumatic experience, and a curse for Florens, as she is emotionally and psychologically traumatized by her mother's abandonment.

The Impact of Economy on the Relationship Between Arab-American Mothers and Their Daughters

As a result of their diasporic experiences, Arab-American mothers encounter numerous challenges. Several factors contribute to the intensification of conflict among Arab Americans in their new environment. These challenges include social, political, and religious factors that influence family dynamics. In her book *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature* (2007), Layla Al-Maleh describes early Arab immigrants who moved to America as coming “from backgrounds of poverty and even illiteracy and [working] their way up to elitist circles” (p. 11). This substantial transition from poverty to elite status has affected family dynamics in ways that are more pronounced among daughters and mothers. Arab mothers residing in the US have had to face challenges in reconciling their past experiences with their present economic circumstances. Additionally, Arab daughters struggle to forge a new identity that challenges their parents' views, traditions, and instructions. They also face challenges in their new communities, where they often struggle to maintain their social and economic positions. The subsequent section will elucidate this line of thought.

In Darraj's *The Inheritance of Exile*, migration reflects a significant cultural practice among Arabs, who often seek improved living conditions. Political and economic conditions often exert a greater influence on mothers, particularly as they navigate their new lives in diaspora. They must confront not only the new culture and traditions but also the formidable economic challenges posed by a capitalist system, leading them to see this new economic system as the only solution to their financial struggles.

Darraj's work embodies the concept of capitalist realism by exploring themes of exile, displacement, nostalgia, and the longing for a sense of connection to one's homeland. She shows how these themes are embodied to unveil capitalism and class struggle. She depicts how mothers, like Layla and Huda, grapple with their financial situations as they attempt to escape their homeland, either due to war or marriage. In both cases, these women adjust their financial lives to the prevailing conditions in the United States. Like the cultural shock, the economic condition represents another shock for Arab women, such as Lamis's shock when she sees Siham's dishwasher. This machine symbolizes the opulent lifestyle of ordinary American people, who can afford to buy a dishwasher for their small families. It represents a new economic shock for Lamis, who used to do the dishes by hand without relying on machines or even other luxurious facilities. In her conventional thinking, small families and individuals should not have luxurious machines such as dishwashers; such a machine, in her view, is a necessity for big families. Therefore, Lamis believes that Siham does not deserve a dishwasher. During her conversation with Layla, Lamis expresses her feelings towards this:

It all started when Nader, God rest his soul, brought his wife Siham a dish washer. The other women in our circle were not pleased, but they kept quiet. I was unable to do that it has always been one of my bad qualities.

“She only has one child,” I told Layla “and I have four.”

Could she possibly have more dishes to clean than I do?”

Layla shrugged, making no commitment. “I only have one child too, Imm Nabeel.”

I could have smacked myself, because of course she only had one- her daughter, Hanan, who strutted around the neighborhood like a boy. (Darraj, 2007, p. 56)

One may argue that the traditional view of a woman's primary role as giving birth to children and taking care of the household appears to inspire Lamis's description of her feelings and her comparison of Hanan to “a boy” (Darraj, 2007, p. 56). This comparison highlights the gender differences between girls and boys, as they have different needs. For example, Layla, Hanan's mother, needs such a machine because her daughter is “like a boy” (Darraj, 2007, p. 56), which indicates that their daughters, belonging to the Arab-American second generation, differ in their lifestyles. The mothers belonging to the first generation believe that boys are not responsible for household chores like dishwashing.

Eventually, this different perspective broadens the mother-daughter conflict and perpetuates gender stereotypes, limiting, as a result, the opportunities available to women. Consequently, Lamis is a representation of the conventional method of thinking, reflecting the societal expectations imposed on women. She adamantly opposes the idea of Siham possessing a dishwasher, making the following statement: “But that dishwasher of Siham's bothered me. It bothered me so much inside” (Darraj, 2007, p. 57). Her dislike of Siham's dishwasher highlights her adherence to conventional gender norms, seeing domestic duties as the province of women and reacting negatively to any departure from the norm.

The resistance to contemporary luxuries could also point to a deep-seated fear of change and a wish to keep things as they are. Lamis's views are a fine representation of the internalized ideas that might inhibit the advancement of gender equality and maintain society's patriarchal institutions. The fear of change emerges as a result of the patriarchal society in which Lamis used to live. In her narrative, Lamis continues to describe Siham's prestigious lifestyle in Palestine before moving to Philadelphia: "I like Siham dearly—she was sweet and ladylike. Her father was Doctor Al-Medani back home—everyone knew him" (Darraj, 2007, p. 57). Siham belongs to a prestigious family, while Lamis and other women belong to ordinary families, which explains the sense of jealousy that Lamis feels. This also highlights another consequence of capitalist realism: the erosion of class struggle. Siham's adoption of the new lifestyle strengthens the belief among the four women that Lamis and the other women encounter similar economic difficulties. Consequently, there is a prevailing belief among the women that, given Siham's economic and familial circumstances, owning a dishwasher is considered unnecessary.

From the beginning of the novel, Lamis, along with other women, including their daughters Hanan, Aliyah, and Reema, always looks at Siham as if she is a lady. Hanan (Layla's daughter) describes Siham on one occasion:

Aunti Siham stayed on the sidewalk behind us, pulling her gray coat tightly around her, the wind whipping her silky black hair around her face. I loved Nadia's mother- she was always cool and stylish, serving baklava in tin, pink plates and juice in matching pink glasses whenever I visited. She was so unlike Mama, who always seemed frantic about something, who walked around muttering to herself and embarrassed me whenever I had friends over. (Darraj, 2007, pp. 107-108)

Hanan observes that even the daughters of other women in the novel yearn for a mother as enlightened and compassionate as Siham. This, in turn, inspires her husband, Nader, to cherish his wife, who has grown up in a distinguished family in Palestine before relocating to Philadelphia. These Arab women have been accustomed to traditional ideas, such as class conflict, before immigrating to the United States.

In "Class Struggle and Women's Liberation" (1984), Toni Cliff discusses how class struggle serves as another power that restricts women, along with patriarchal institutions. He states: "The class struggle between exploiter and exploited, whether their sex, is the driving force of historical change. Women's oppression can only be understood in the context of the wider relations of class exploitation" (p. 2). Women have always been considered an inferior class; men look down on them as if they belong to a weaker class whose role is to give birth to children and support men. This context clarifies the jealousy that Lamis and other women feel toward Siham. Their feelings stem from class struggles that have historically oppressed women by confining them to domestic roles and treating them as inferior. However, for Siham, this dynamic is no longer applicable in diaspora, not due to her formerly prestigious family background, but because of her experience living independently with her husband and daughter. Siham's adaptation to the new economic system and lifestyle creates an economic and cultural shock for her close friends. Siham exemplifies how capitalist realism directs attention away from class struggle. Furthermore, this perspective leads to additional conflicts between Layla and her daughter Hanan. Layla rejects the way her daughter Hanan prefers to stay alone as a single mom, selling baskets to make money.

"How've you been?" She walked back behind the counter and started arranging some flyers and small knickknacks along its surface.

"OK. I wanted to tell you that I've been attending some craft shows, lately, selling my baskets."

"How many have you sold so far?"

"Well, I've only done three shows, but I've sold twenty baskets."

That was a lie, and I felt horrible for telling it. I'd only done two shows and sold eleven baskets, but I had made over three hundred dollars, and I had no idea for how to make more. (Darraj, 2007, p. 159)

Hanan willingly decides to live a life of self-sufficiency, intentionally establishing distance between herself and her family, even in the face of economic difficulties. She is resolute in her decision to live independently without relying on assistance from her mother, which differs from Layla's previous encounters and traditional practices, where parents continue to provide support to their daughters even after they get married and establish their own families.

In *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature* (2009), Al-Maleh describes the Arab populace migrating to the US:

The new Arab immigrants are but part of the mass population movement witnessed world-wide in the past few decades. The reasons for their emigration are legion. The Palestinians' 'Exodus' from their homeland in 1948, the 1967, and 1973 was with Israel, the Lebanese civil war and its aftermaths, the two Gulf wars and the Iraq debacle, exile, whether forced or self-imposed, flight from dictatorships – domestic (familial) or political pursuit of self-betterment through education and decent work, the expanding mobility of capital, and people's desire to seek opportunities to improve their life are some of the factors. (p. 12)

Al-Maleh provides additional insight into the motivations driving Arab people and the indignation experienced by Lamis and other Arab women as they watch their daughters strive for financial independence. Al-Maleh continues: "There were those—second-, third-, even fourth-generation hyphenated Arabs—who were born and raised on the no longer foreign soil of their immigrant forebears; and there were new immigrants working out of an experience of transculturation" (2009, p. 11). Siham, Lamis, and Layla represent the mothers' generation, which is still conservative and maintains a traditional mentality even in the diaspora. Previously, women were expected to shoulder the family's burden. In their mentality, women are not accustomed to individuals who offer assistance to the mother or daughter, nor to those who

attempt to assist them by providing support for women in need of other services. This highlights the fact that the daughters in *The Inheritance of Exile* have a challenging time understanding their mothers, which causes friction between both sets of characters as they battle their individual struggles.

In *A Map of Home*, the concept of traveling from one place to another represents many different economic challenges. Mona, Nidali's mother, is a symbol of these challenges. Following Mona and her family's move to Kuwait, Nidali explains their transition by stating: "Kuwait, in the seventies, was a heaven for Arab intellectuals and for people who wanted to live in apartments that did not resemble shelters" (Jarrar, 2008, p. 9). The transition from refugee camps to a thriving country presents economic difficulties that lead to more transitions between Palestine, Egypt, Kuwait, and the United States. Each one of these countries adopts its own new economic system, and Ammar's family struggles to coexist according to the economic system of each country. Indeed, Mona encounters dual challenges as she tries to raise her daughter in different countries, as well as her attempts to manage their economic challenges.

The Ammar family relocates from one country to another, indicating their inability to attain social and economic stability, as well as enduring security. The family has faced several social hurdles due to their exposure to different economic systems in each country they have moved to. Indeed, there is an enormous gap between Boston, where Nidali was born and spent her childhood, Palestine, where Waheed was born and raised, and Egypt, where Mona was born to a Greek mother and an Egyptian father and raised. Throughout their lives, Waheed, Mona, and Nidali have been exposed to a variety of cultures and economic systems. "When a particular group achieves economic and political dominance in a society, its ideology tends also to become dominant" (Ryan, 2012, p. 65). This explains why Waheed, Mona, and Nidali are affected by the culture in which they were raised. Furthermore, Waheed also takes advantage of his daughter's age in order to impose his rules, which are connected to his background and beliefs. It is vital to note that Nidali receives this note from her father, not her mother, which signifies that Mona's priorities and perspectives are different. As with other mothers in the aforementioned novels, Mona is silent, which highlights the negative situations of mothers who are unable to speak up but continue to haunt their daughters' subconscious.

To conclude, in the selected Arab-American novels, the concept of capitalist realism emerges as a system of economics that people take for granted. Both mothers and daughters struggle to understand their new social and economic positions, as well as their attempts to coexist under these economic conditions. Despite their previous social and economic status, Arab mothers often struggle to understand the notion of capitalist realism, which leads them to question their daughters' behavior in diaspora. In the two novels, the daughters feel that their mothers have abandoned them due to not being able to understand them. The mothers' attempts to idealize their daughters' lives or mold them into their own exacerbate the gap. The daughters accept capitalist realism as a reality, allowing them to structure their lives accordingly, whereas Arab mothers never accept it as a reality, preferring to relive their pre-diaspora lives in the diaspora.

III. CONCLUSION

The present study explores the economic challenges faced by Arab-American and African-American mothers in four selected novels. The findings suggest that these economic hardships primarily arise from involuntary migration from their countries of origin to the United States, as well as from other conventional socioeconomic conditions such as slavery. African-American mothers face two sets of problems: first, the effects of slavery on family relationships; second, the subjugation and marginalization they experience as a result of their past societies and families, especially in relation to their daughters, with whom they have strained relationships because their daughters view them as an integral part of their own struggles. Moreover, Arab-American mothers, accustomed to a relatively modest economic lifestyle in their native countries, encounter stark contrasts in the complexities they face in the United States. Conflicts between Arab-American mothers and their daughters are reflected in the different ways the two generations perceive occidental concepts such as capitalist realism. While the Arab-American daughters in the selected novels have embraced the Western economic system, their mothers have viewed it more critically as a force that threatens their cultural backgrounds.

According to the findings of the study, the severe situations and circumstances that African-American mothers are forced to face lead them to make difficult decisions that not only affect their children but also leave an indelible mark on the identities of their daughters. The resulting discrepancies exacerbate their challenges, leading to a significant disconnection with their daughters. This disconnection is particularly evident in the mothers' unfamiliarity with the roles of working mothers and working daughters. The study reveals two primary issues that exacerbate the gap between Arab mothers and daughters: their inability to coexist after leaving their homeland and their silence, which leads to an identity crisis experienced by daughters such as Florens, Tashi, Hanan, Alyiah, and Nidali. Throughout their lives, the image of their mothers haunts all of these girls.

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Jumana J. Al-Rifae is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Jordan, with research interests spanning feminist studies, postcolonial studies, cultural studies, and Arab-Anglophone literature. Al-Rifae also serves as a part-time lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature at the School of Foreign Languages, University of Jordan.

Eman K. Mukattash is an Associate Professor of English literature at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Jordan, Amman-Jordan. She obtained her PhD degree in English literature from the University of Jordan in 2013. Her research focuses on literary theory and criticism, psychoanalysis, and Arab diasporic literature. She has published a number of articles in several internationally accredited academic journals. Among these are: “The Democratic Vistas of the Body: Rereading the Body in Herman Melville's *Typee*”, “Journeying In and Out: Revisiting the Concept of the 'Journey' in the Works of Naomi Shihab Nye”, and “The Politics of Identity in Mahmoud Darwish's *Absent Presence: A Textual Act of Resistance*”.