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STATE VIOLENCE ENCOUNTERS SARAT'S RESILIENCE IN OMAR EL AKKAD'S *AMERICAN WAR*

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Abstract:
The multiple forms of intersecting violence shape the identity of Sarat Chestnut and intensify marginalization in the novel American War. Sarat has been marginalized four times, i.e., first because of her non-girlish 'tomboyish' look; second, due to her dark skin color; third, because she is poor as a refugee; and fourth, due to a lack of educational resources and being the victim of Albert Gaines. Moreover, the environmental crisis destroys livelihoods as coastal areas are flooded and the U.S. government bans fossil fuels, which Southern states resist. The novel's story centers on Sarat's survival, transformation, and resistance. When examined through the lens of Kimberlé Crenshaw's Intersectionality, American War reveals the intricate ways in which gendered, racial, and geopolitical power structures intersect to subjugate Sarat in a conflict-ridden world. Sarat's overall well-being, mental health, economic status, and education are all negatively impacted by the tyranny of power structures (Patriarchy, Racism, Educational Institutions, and Politics). Some instances show that Sarat is homosexual, and at some points, she has an ambiguous sexual orientation. Her conflicted self interacts with broader sociopolitical forces that shape her agency. Sarat plays different roles in the novel, i.e., as a refugee, a fighter, an assassin, a prisoner, and a martyr. Through this multiplicity of identity, she challenges traditional ideological roles in a society driven by political violence and sexual oppression. American War critiques the constraints on women's autonomy and examines the possibilities of subversion and transformation in a dystopian world.
Key Words: *Intersectionality, Racial Discrimination, Sexual Oppression, Power Dynamics, Resistance.*

Introduction:

American War portrays a ruinous future for America in 2074 if its government does not find a conflict-free way to rectify the political differences. Omar has pictured a Second American Civil War over a ban on fossil fuels, leading to severe climatic and political upheaval. This leaves people terrified in a world where war has suspended human progress, where scientific advancements are mishandled, and where ineffective and rigid ideological state apparatuses lead Sarat to become an extremist. The novel explores the themes of trauma followed by war, racial injustice, gendered subjugation, massacres, displacement, poverty, undue tortures, the cost of human life amidst conflict, the cycle of revenge, resistance, and power dynamics. The primary source *American War* has been referred to as 'AW' in all subsequent textual references.

The researcher has applied Crenshaw's concept of intersecting identity (from the essay *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*) to examine Sarat's experiences and the totality of her transformed identity, instead of one singular aspect. Gendered, Racial, Class, and State politics all intersect to create discrimination, which cannot be understood by looking at each one of them separately. This approach makes us understand that multiple marginalizing forces actually empower the protagonist to take revenge for her personal and the nation's loss.

The opening and concluding lines of the narrator tell the reader how systemic violence has taken away the innocence of a young girl who loved to explore nature, play around fearlessly, and immensely loved her family. Sarat was a child who was very optimistic about the safety of her home, her neighbors, and her land, and she believed the floods and war in the nearby areas would never affect any of her belongings or people. The narrator, her nephew Benjamin, wished to know her *when she was still unbroken* (AW 9). After her death, Benjamin went through Sarat's dairy

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and one of the pages pronounces: *I was happy when* I used to live with my family along the Mississippi river (AW 333).

In the novel, patriarchal oppression, systemic racism, and political violence disturb and alter the identity of Sarat Chestnut from an innocuous child to one seeking revenge through violence. Sarat, a young girl of mixed race, grows up in South America, where political turmoil exacerbates existing racial and gendered hierarchies. In times of crisis, women of color are disproportionately affected, bearing the brunt of systemic neglect, economic deprivation, and sexual violence. Sarat's racial identity plays a crucial role in shaping her experiences of exclusion and hardship. The neighbors in Mississippi and at Camp Patience address Dana, her sister, as beautiful and girlish and ignore Sarat. She is remembered as stubborn, undaunted, and someone lacking feminine qualities. Sarat is rebellious, physically strong, and fearless, which are considered traditional masculine qualities. As a dark-skinned woman navigating a war-torn nation, she is not only subjected to gender-based discrimination but also treated as an outsider within her home. Her mother often uses the word tomboy to describe her (AW 12), which indicates social discomfort with the prescribed gender roles or identity, and her sister calls her ugly (AW 13). This dual oppression reflects real-world struggles faced by women of color in both historical and contemporary contexts, where racial biases compound the difficulties of gender-based discrimination.

Benjamin, Sarat's father, has a hand-to-mouth income, with which the Chestnuts live happily in peace. Martina, Sarat's mother, is a careful mother and spent cautiously. When Sarat was busy pouring honey into wood knots to check if it changes its taste, Martina scolded her not to waste something *that is not yours and for which have not worked to buy* (AW 9). This seemingly minor reprimand symbolizes how women are conditioned to be submissive and self-sacrificing. The gruesome geopolitical conditions led the Chestnut family to leave their homeland, the South. The only savings of three hundred dollars were given to the bus driver, who took them to a refugee camp (AW 52), where sources were scarce. This economic deprivation deepens the gendered oppression and marginalization. In such a setting, Sarat suffered the most as financial instability limited her access to education, safety, and personal autonomy. Sarat meets Gaines (AW 112), who recruited her to do paid confidential errands. Earlier, Ethan made her pick a watch from a wastewater ditch for fifty bucks, and she agreed (AW 101). Then, a mischievous boy named Michael made a bet of another fifty bucks to go in the wastewater ditch and humiliate her (AW 103), to which Sarat acquiesced. People called her 'Payday' to mock her (AW 135). This shows how economic disproportionality affects Sarat's ability to break free from oppressive structures, forcing her into vulnerable positions where she is more susceptible to exploitation and violence. She becomes a mere survivor in the system.

Another distressing aspect of the protagonist's journey is sexual abuse. For seven years, she has been tortured by the male guards at Sugarloaf Detention Facility. The mouths of captives were kept closed; each part of the body was chained; made to stand in a small cage with blinding hot lights, and as Sarat was tall, she had to crouch the whole time that one of her ribs broke (AW 246). Bud Baker, one of the guards, would slap her, choke her, and hit her while she was chained to a metal chair. This inflamed her knees and back. She wanted to die and escape from this (AW 247). The sexual abuse reshapes her psychologically and turns her into a traumatized and vengeful adult. These episodes of sufferings fuels the tragic ending of the novel.

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Sarat became a rebellious adult at Camp Patience. She used to question and challenge the social constructs. She was taught by Albert Gaines, who sowed the seeds of revenge and resistance in her. He told her that being a refugee had taken away her Southern identity, which is a shameful thing: *as one's history is one's identity* (AW 122). He taught her about cities, countries, secret ways to escape, geography, land, rivers, empires, and the surroundings of Camp Patience to make her a perpetrator (AW 117). He shared examples of war leaders who fought multiple times for several years to achieve their goals. This convinced Sarat that consistency would lead her to what she had desired (AW 118). Gaines worsened her brainwashing by relating to his father's saying that *only a stable profession is bloodwork – that of the surgeon, the soldier, the butcher*. Other professions have a rise and fall, but as long as a human is alive, the bloodwork goes on: spilling someone's blood is a normal thing (AW 120).

The young Sarat was so unaware and mesmerized by her tutor that she believed every word uttered by him. She told Marcus that Gaines is a dignified teacher who has the guts to tell the reality, history, and cultural values of Southerners. He can tell what is good for the Southerners for their coming years, i.e., how to deal with and tackle the enemy and protect their land. Sarat started worshipping her land and her identity so much so that even the thought of safety at Northern land does not charm her. In her mind, expecting safety from the Northerners was an act of cowardice, submission, and silence. Sarat's transformation stems from the awareness of oppressive systems around her, given by Albert Gaines. The realization of losing her father, her home, and her identity made her defy the imposed gender roles and come out of traumatic situations.

Through Sarat's character and her environment, the novel showcases the effects of intersectionality on the lived experiences of black, poor, socially backward women. Sarat's challenges are influenced not only by her gender but also by her race, class, and the political climate surrounding her. In the novel, the depiction of the power dynamics of the sociopolitical structures illuminates how systems of power aggravate the troubles of the disadvantaged and less privileged communities in a war-stricken land. Sarat's place within these layered systems of oppression shapes her choices; compels her to confront her intersecting identity; and find the ways of survival that men and white women may not encounter. As Crenshaw argues, a single-axis framework is not the right way to examine the multidimensional identity of an individual (seeking autonomy and agency) standing at the crossroads of oppressive power structures.

Research Objectives:

- To explore how the patriarchal, racial, and political power structures impact, control, and limit Sarat's life.
- To investigate how different power systems intersect in shaping Sarat's identity and influencing her societal roles and struggles.
- To analyze how Sarat challenges and reinforces traditional notions of femininity.

Statement of the Problem:

The study explores how the intersecting violence of gender, race, and political power shapes Sarat's psychological development and influences her social positioning in the novel. The research shows how patriarchal inequality, racial standards, and defective political and educational power structures transform Sarat from a war victim into a participant in violence.

Literature Review:

Omar's first novel (2017) got significant recognition from its readers due to its portrayal of the best plausible picture of individuals under the terrible societal and governmental conditions of

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2074 America. Sarat's transformation from a victim to a victimizer has been a disputed topic among the critics. Some of them justify, while others have completely disagreed about the unusual and odd behavior of Sarat amidst the war and violence. The factors of the protagonist's tallness, non-girlish interests, and homosexuality are often questioned by the readers. Reviewers believe that Omar has failed to draw a traditional feminine character of his female protagonist.

With all the valuable comments and reviews, it is also necessary to know the author's intention in designing the structure of this tragedy, not only as a general war narrative but also as an exclusively personal one. In his interview with *The Rumpus* (2017), an online literary magazine, El Akkad talks about his protagonist and her transformation. He discloses that his authorial purpose was to demonstrate the effects of gruesome war and anguish on the individuals, through Sarat's character. The inquisitive and trustful girl goes through a lot: suffering, torture, sexual abuse, hostility, pain, fear, anxiety, loss of family, isolation, etc., and becomes a war instrument. El Akkad writes, "If it had been you, you'd have done no different" (AW 184)

Laura Miller (2017) admires the artistic skills of Omar in stirring the feelings of the American people and making them realize the situation of displaced people of the world. The political climate has forced Sarat and her family to emigrate north, but after the death of Benjamin, the family ends up at Camp Patience. Further, Laura highlights the cultural significance and values of South America. The imitation from Charlottesville pronounced the truth of Faulkner's maxim: in the South, "the past is never dead. It's not even past." El Akkad has selected a single geographical location (South America) to address the whole of the American states. There is so much weight of cultural resentment and racism in the Southern culture. Laura believes that after 75 years in the future, the Republican and Democratic parties will still be there; however, racism won't remain a matter of conversation anymore. Sarat's 'fuzzy' hair and her father's 'caramel' shade allude to the above-mentioned claims of Laura. The Chestnut family does not avow any ethnicity at all. In El Akkad's imagination, there is an America where the ancient races intermingle in a way that they cannot be distinguished now.

Rincey (2017), in her visual review, slightly touches on Sarat's trauma, the heartbreaking situation of war-torn countries, and the condition of displaced people. She argues that the protagonist is an extremely complex yet interesting character whose actions exhibit extremism. However, she says that it is a different world after so many years from now, and the people and the world must be seen from the perspective of the people in 2074. Rincey's emphasis is more upon the fashioning of the structure and the division of the novel into four parts. Rincey says that it seems like every chapter is an excerpt from a history book, or like an interview, or a news article, that gives the reader a broader context to understand what he is reading in the specific given situation. Typically, war novelists discuss soldiers, rebels, leaders, and political figures, but *American War* differs in that its central focus is the life of a common man enduring the torments of war.

Diane S (2017) reads the novel from a geographical perspective. She relates the unresolved conflict between North America and South America to the current situation in Syria. The chemical attacks and staggering death tolls in Syria present the reality of today's world and what an individual can expect in the coming years.

Holly (2017) calls the novel a 'Pastiche'. She reveals how the author has replicated most of the incidents of the American Civil War (1861-1865) for the setting of the novel. Moreover, she thinks the novelist omits the Southern institution of slavery and revises all tired clichés of the South. Omar has shown the after-effects and the consequences of the civil war, but not the reasons

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responsible for the war. Holly wants the author to give a justification for the ongoing catastrophic geographical and political circumstances.

Scott (2017) accuses the conflict between the Reds and Blues of being the reason for tearing Sarat's family and movement into a refugee camp. The actions of the hated Blues recruit Sarat to the Southern cause. Her imprisonment and the undue tortures driver her crazy. The pain that Sarat suffers arouses hatred in both a person and a nation. Her actions change the concept of war as well as peace. The reviewer further discusses the climatic and political conditions of America, devastating its landscape.

Bryan (2018), in his review, calls Sarat a 'sniper' of the emerging South. He thinks that Omar not only presents the outcomes of the foreign policy of the U.S.A, but also the cunning psychology of terrorism. The careful selection of Southern cultural values in indirectly hitting the rigid ideological factors is marvelous. He adds that the omission of the descriptions of racism and slavery does not make the novel less praiseworthy.

Hasanul Rizqa (2019) discusses the novel as a dystopian, post-modern trauma text using Schönfelder's theory of postmodern trauma. The novel accentuates the feelings, responses, emotions, and desires of a trauma-stricken individual. The novel is also political, i.e., focusing on the oppressed, marginalized, silenced, and forgotten people. The critic aims to identify the channel to transmit the recollections of the war victims from the earliest to the coming generations and the development of dialogue regarding the future of the states of America and the world as a whole by the narrator. Rizqa discusses war-trauma associated with 'internally displaced persons (IDPs)' and refers to Sarat's change from a civilian to a genocide perpetrator. He mentions that according to Schönfelder's theory, namely, a traumatic event may leave a permanent impact on the identity of an individual. The narrator regards Sarat's act of genocide as 'her last act of cowardice' because she is scared to live as a victim-survivor. Sarat finds the wrongdoers as 'the others'. This concept of 'us vs. them' raises trauma and prompts Sarat to infiltrate the Reunification ceremony with the deadly virus.

Omar delves into the dystopian aftermath of contentious rhetoric and bold governmental policies, employing an intimate and expansive narrative. The novel portrays a world where there is a bitter struggle because public opinion has become so divided that reconciliation seems unattainable. The novel weaves together the themes of a close relationship between ecology and gender. Sarat's narrative serves as a metaphor for how the environmental disaster and the conflict are not just national problems but also intensely personal and gendered experiences. Huber (2021) also mentions that Benjamin's act of burning Sarat's diaries is a symbolic move to distance himself from his aunt's complicated inheritance and painful past. It also emphasizes the subjectivity of history and the elusiveness of truth.

According to Siddiqui and Atta-e-Elahi (2023), Sarat's psychological and societal battles led her to develop neurosis. Neurosis has been shown as a medical illness, not a mental disorder. Sarat exhibits two different kinds of neurosis: anxiety hysteria and compulsion neurosis. These types are characterized by symptoms such as traumatic fixation, obsessive-compulsive disorder, ambivalence, disabled sublimation, agoraphobia, etc. Her neurotic conduct can be attributed to sexual abuse, unsatisfied sexual desires, loneliness, repressed fears and hatred, sibling rivalry, a disturbed family unit, and societal pressures. The researchers applied the theory of seduction to understand a single but important and earliest experience of Sarat's sexual abuse in her childhood

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as the origin of neurosis in her. Sarat is not welcomed due to her 'non-girlish' looks and interests, because they do not accord with the traditional gender performativity.

Research Gap

The multitude have read the novel from geographical, ecofeminist, political, psychological, postcolonial, narrative, and many other perspectives. However, there is a literary gap to investigate the impact of intersecting crises caused by gender, race, class, and politics on Sarat Chestnut. The current research study aims to fill this gap.

Theoretical Framework:

In her seminal essay (1989), Kimberlé Crenshaw argues that feminist and anti-racist theories have failed to include the experiences of 'women of color' in their frameworks. She introduces the concept of intersectionality that informs how power structures like patriarchy, racism, classicism, and sexism intersect to shape and marginalize a woman who is black and poor. The experience and identity of a fourfold marginalized woman cannot be analyzed through a single lens that is either race or sex. The failure to recognize the multiple forms of discrimination faced by Black women makes them invisible in social and legal discourse. She uses the analogy of a traffic intersection to illustrate this point: a person (black woman) standing at the crossroads may get hit by the vehicles coming from any direction, and the impact would be the same. Each road represents a distinct form of oppression. The accident can be caused by a vehicle from one direction or traffic from all directions simultaneously. Likewise, the inequity faced by black women may come from sexism, classism, racism, or their combined effect. This analogy suggests that intersectionality offers a standpoint for understanding how various oppressive power structures combine to marginalize a black woman (Crenshaw 139).

Crenshaw reinforces her argument through three examples of legal cases where the claims of discrimination faced by black women were traversed because the court treated gender discrimination and race discrimination separately. In the first case, the court dismissed the complaint of five black women laborers seeking seniority rights because the company had not hired anyone after 1970. The company did hire white women for secretarial jobs and black men for factory labor, who eventually received promotions based on seniority. Therefore, the company is not liable to promote them as a 'special case.' The second case was rejected because the court did not find it 'all-inclusive'. After all, it only mentioned the black women, and it left white women and black men 'disadvantaged'. The court suggested that the standard sex discrimination claim is the one against white women, and any other claim becomes a 'hybrid' one. Therefore, the plaintiff could neither use all-encompassing statistics on sex disparity nor on race at the employer. The third plaintiff received a partial victory when the court ordered the defendant to grant class representative certification to black women rather than black men. This was because the court held that black women could not adequately represent black men due to presumed class conflicts (Crenshaw 141)

The essay further focuses on Sojourner's declaration in 1851 *Ain't I a woman?* which raises intersectional consciousness. It challenges both sexism in the abolitionist movement and racism within the feminist movement. Truth rejects the 19th-century ideology of womanhood, which portrays women as weak, delicate, and dependent on male partners for protection. She describes her labor under slavery as *I have ploughed and planted… and no man could head me*. Her experience contradicts the feminine ideal used by white feminists. She reared thirteen children, and all of them were sent to labor reveals maternal suffering. The exclusion of black women's

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challenges radicalized the gender norms. Despite all the hard labor, they were denied the privileges of femininity. Being non-white excludes her from white femininity, and being a woman marginalizes her in a male-dominated society. This speech exposes that 'woman' is a socially constructed category that marginalizes black women as it revolves around white women's experiences (Crenshaw 152).

Crenshaw relates to Cooper's argument, which acknowledges that Black women occupy a unique social position at the crossroads of patriarchy and racism. Cooper addresses the failure of black spokespersons or leaders in publicly recognizing the racial discrimination faced by black women. Martin Delaney claimed that the whole race follows him wherever he goes. This claim was countered by Cooper's: the whole Negro race follows her when and where she goes. This proposes that black women's approach is all-inclusive; however, other so-called anti-racist movements often go blind to address black women. Crenshaw related her personal experience of going to a prestigious club with a friend for a drink party, where she was asked to come from the back door because 'she was a female'. This incident shows the neglect of the black community to include black women in their narratives and seriously address the issues of intersectionality. This story also reflects the lack of emotional and political vigilance toward the gendered barriers to black women's privileges of enjoyment, which were once won based on race but are now being denied based on sex. This discrimination makes black women ambivalent as their race is getting privileges, but not their gender (Crenshaw 161).

In her TED Talk, Crenshaw addresses that "If we can't see a problem, we can't fix a problem". Through her words, she expressed that theories and strategies working to reflect the needs of the black community must include the issues of patriarchy and sexism and embrace their intersecting complexities. She concludes her speech by saying that instead of mourning, it is time to act and transform what has been lost and damaged. She urges the power structures to address the problems of those who are most disadvantaged (black women). This approach would ultimately benefit those who are singularly disadvantaged (black men) (Crenshaw 00:10-18:49).

Intersectionality expands the goals of feminism by encouraging diversity and representation. It urges feminists to consider all women's experiences, particularly those of historically marginalized women. Recognizing the diversity of women, intersectionality fosters solidarity among many groups and enables a more coordinated approach to activism. Additionally, intersectionality highlights how important it is to give marginalized women a voice. Feminism becomes more effective when it takes into account the perspectives of women who are often disregarded. For example, how a woman is impacted by issues like domestic abuse and reproductive rights might vary depending on her sexual orientation, ethnicity, and class.

Key elements of an intersectional approach to these issues include hearing about the experiences of women from various backgrounds and developing solutions that are tailored to their needs. Despite its significant achievements, intersectionality has been criticized. Some scholars contend that the concept might become overly complex, leading to a fragmented understanding of social issues. They contend that placing too much emphasis on individual identities may undermine collective efforts and make it more challenging for the feminist movements to unite behind common goals. Advocates of intersectionality respond that rather than taking the place of traditional feminist analysis, intersectionality seeks to enhance it by providing a more nuanced understanding of the multiplicity and complexities of oppression.

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Furthermore, intersectionality applies to a range of social justice movements. Globalization has also put a great emphasis on an intersectional approach in feminist discourse across cultural contexts. Women's experiences around the world are influenced by a variety of factors, including colonial history, economic systems, and cultural standards. The challenges faced by indigenous women in Canada, for instance, differ greatly from those faced by women in the Global South. It is essential to comprehend these differences to develop advocacy and support strategies that are effective for a range of demographics.

Global issues that disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups, such as migration and climate change, make intersectionality particularly relevant. As social justice movements increasingly address these issues, intersectionality offers a critical framework for understanding how environmental degradation and displacement interact with gender, race, and class. For example, women in developing countries often face the worst consequences of climate change, such as scarcity, insecurity, and compromised quality of food (as Sarat had to eat rubbery meat and canned food, and sometimes she had to starve), displacement, and limited access to basic resources. We are reminded by intersectionality that there is no one-size-fits-all method for addressing social justice.

Therefore, the framework of intersectionality, which forms the basis of feminist theory, offers a comprehensive understanding of how different aspects of identity interact to produce experiences of privilege and oppression. By challenging reductionist ideas of identity, intersectionality enhances inclusivity and representation in feminist organizations, highlights the importance of marginalized viewpoints, and offers insightful information for advocacy and policymaking. Despite concerns, it is impossible to overstate the significance of intersectionality in comprehending complex social processes and fostering harmony among diverse groups.

Textual Analysis:

The applied theory of Intersectionality allows a nuanced exploration of different oppressive power structures that intersect to shape Sarat's life. Born into a family of Black Southerners in the late 21st century, Sarat's story unfolds within an increasingly defective socio-political climate, geological disfiguration, forced displacement, economic decline, and the Second American Civil War. Her gendered identity intersects with family dynamics, cultural expectations, and war conditions. This compounded subjugation places her outside the social constructs of femininity, making her socially isolated and physically vulnerable.

Sarat burst out at Joe when he mentioned how Sarat had taken revenge on Bud Baker, the cruel guard at Sugarloaf Detention Facility, *"Revenge, revenge… I hurt one man. Do you think it was just one man who hurt me?"* (AW 305). Sarat has been traumatized and weaponized by not just one factor or incident. Multiple intersecting acts of injustice led her to take her revenge. It began with the killing of her father, then her mother, then her sister; her brother was left in a sorry state (having bullet in his head); the forced displacement from her home to a refugee camp (leaving her identity and belongings); the massacres of her people (Southerners); the seven years of imprisonment, mental and sexual abuse. This was not a matter of a day but several years of torture, right from when she was a six-year-old to a grown woman. The torture was so horrifying and intense that after getting released from Sugarloaf Detention Facility, *she felt not an ounce to live* (AW 316). However, after spending several months with her family, she reconfigures her identity gradually and plans revenge. Instead of breaking her, the torture fuels her rage, pushing her into the cycle of violence to give meaning to her life (AW 331).

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Sarat lived in unstable conditions in the South. Her home was a salvaged container house. She and her family are displaced to a refugee camp due to the ongoing war and environmental collapse. The camp becomes a symbol of Southern suffering and Northern control, and is meant to strip the dignity of refugees. Instead of succumbing to despair, she explores and asserts her presence in ways that challenge the authorities. She calls it a cowardly submission to let Northerners assert their authority to seek safety at their place (AW 134).

Furthermore, she refuses to compromise her non-girlish interests and adventures. She accepted a bet and jumped into a wastewater ditch, which annoyed her mother *you think we do not have enough problems*, and she hit her. Martina expressed her frustration with how she has to deal with so much danger and scarcity, and how they are living in hell, which is surrounded by Northerners ready to kill them. She considered Sarat's act an embarrassment for her family. This feels like a slap to Sarat's innocent feelings (AW 106). Marcus asked her to seek an apology from her mother, but she disagreed and said that she was not sorry. Her hair got itchy due to the remnants of wastewater, and she shaved her head without giving a second thought (AW 110). For Sarat, these childish adventures were an escape from the grim reality that their lives are at stake because the Northerners can come anytime and kill each one of them (AW 107).

In her essay, Crenshaw relates her story of a visit to a club where she felt humiliated to come from the back door. She suggests that such experiences faced by black women leave them 'ambivalent.' This is because her black friend got the privilege to enter from the main door, and making a scene over the partial favor given to the black community (privilege given to black men of class) is futile. This ambivalence can be traced in Sarat's behavior, where at one point, she was fascinated by the history, sacrifices, and cultural values of Southerners (AW 142) to *fuck the South and everything it stands for* (AW 313). This is because it was Gaines who made her love her land, her home, and her people; however, it was the same Gaines who told the investigation team about Sarat's evil plans, which were actually planned by Gaines (AW 249). The betrayal by Gaines made Sarat take her personal revenge, not for the whole nation. In the prologue to the novel, the narrator says that *her back lined with ashen scars, each one a testimony to the torture she was made to endure, the secret crimes committed against her… this isn't a story about the war, it's about ruin* (AW 6). This tells that it was not the war but other social or political factors that actually left Sarat bereft and vengeful.

Not only the external forces, but the internal, dictated and traditional gender roles shape Sarat's roles and struggles. Patriarchy, as a tangible force, contributes to her eventual radicalization. She resists gendered expectations: *the lipstick did not interest her* as it promises no charm or adventure. Martina always wanted her to behave like a female, but Sarat was undeterred. Martina used to say that God had given her two children at once (twin girls), but only one (Dana) acts like a *girl enough* (AW 12). Dana liked her mother's dress, dolls, and makeup, but Sarat preferred her father's company and his tools, solar panels, splintered wood, gasoline, and chicken coops (AW 10). Instead of helping her out to understand or support her in learning new things for protection or safety in the unexpected future, Dana ridiculed Sarat as *Albert Gaines's* pet. Moreover, she keeps reminding Sarat that she and her plans to secure the south are futile and would not be able to fight for the right. She keeps disinclining that no one in the Camp Patience would help her out in fighting against the enemy, and the *only thing we got in common is that we are all on the losing side of the same war* (AW 151). Sarat's family does not favor or like her adventures. Moreover, she is rattled by her family whenever she shares her feelings. This internally marginalizing force becomes the

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reason for Sarat's emotional distancing. Sarat's only brother, Smith Chestnut, allies with the North, 'the rebels' (AW 151); *Sarat had never hated anyone more than she hated her brother* (AW 129). She hates every person living behind the Tennessee line. Simon's caretaker, Karina, is also from the North, the rebels who killed her parents and humiliated her people (AW 240). Sarat is disgusted by her presence at her home. Simon and Karina got married when Sarat was in prison. After getting released and coming back home, Sarat asked Karina *how much of him* (Simon) *is left?* (AW 269). People from the North and who stand by the North (her brother) remind her of her blighted past.

Sarat gains her education from this scholarly tutor, Albert Gaines, who wishes no good for her. Sarat is used for the sake of fighting for the South. Sarat finds a surrogate family in him, who is feeding, educating, training, and nurturing her. He provides her with delicious foods such as grilled bread and honey (AW 118) and gives gifts and books. Sarat yearns for tenderness, love, and companionship, which she finds in this person, but she is unaware of his evil purpose. The author has portrayed the unbroken and guiltless twelve-year-old girl listening to her tutor about her land, as *how much of it was real and how much pleasant fantasy didn't matter*, before the war. She is transformed from a girl who was unable to use a combat knife (AW 143) to an adult who needs *ocular pieces of evidence* and *works with the surgeon's hands* when she kills the General and treads lightly (AW 195). The woman from the investigation team tells Sarat that Albert confessed to us that you are an insurgent (AW 249). Sarat has been exploited because of the ineffective familial roles, lack of proper education, religion, society, court, politics, etc. There was none to guide her to the right path; she was misdirected by Gaines and became a relentless defender of her rights.

Sarat is jaded by the old manner of living at Camp Patience. She is tired of hearing the recurring stories of the senior refugees at the Camp. However, she is fascinated by the thrilling and adventurous stories of Albert Gaines. She admits that *At least your stories happened someplace far away* (AW 141). He introduces Sarat to her history, the geography of surrounding places, the kinds of people around her, the conflicts between Reds and Blues, gun, knife, stress, resistance, and so many other negative things that tickle her fancy and arouse a sense of newness in her. She feels that she is at least gaining something different. She did not use to feel anything for the killers of her father, but now she loathes the *purple nation of cowards and traitors* (AW 154) because Gaines introduces her to the idea of bloodwork, resistance, and how it is a shameful act of not reacting to what she has lost. He has an immense, unnerving impact on her psyche. *You pick up a gun and fight for something; ... Right or wrong, you own your cause and you never, ever change your mind* (AW 142). He gave her books to read and learn different strategies of fighting, the wonders of the natural world, the terrible devastation of the world by climate change, how social life altogether alters, and the real and fantastic mythology of the South (AW 143). The only matter of attention in Sarat's life becomes 'revenge, the unsettled score'.

Northerners invaded Camp Patience and were killing, burning, and chopping all the people around. Sarat stood frozen at the sight of corpses, bloodshed, scattered body parts, and smoke coming from the burnt bodies. Those were her people with whom she lived through her childhood. The dusty grounds were flooded with blood. She felt the heat of her people's bodies against her skin, *the heat of life extinguished and leaving*. The terror of the killing of her family paralyzed her. She heard some approaching invaders and wriggled into the mass of corpses and desperately prayed to be safe: *Please God, don't let them see me. Don't let them kill me* (AW 165). Soon, the invaders left. Sarat rose and ran in the direction of a tent from where a Northern soldier came after killing a

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female refugee. Sarat ghostly approached the man and slashed open his throat with her knife. She kept stabbing his neck until *the heat of life left him,* but this time Sarat *did not feel it* (AW 167). This courageous act of rebellion for her own safety and revenge on behalf of her people eventually strengthens Sarat, who becomes someone *not afraid to die* (AW 235).

Sarat was subjected to extreme physical torture by Bud Baker at Sugarloaf, who slapped her face while being chained to a metal chair (AW 250). She was taken to a small cage where flooding and hot lights blinded her. When Sarat did not follow their instructions to confess to a crime which she never committed, Bud Baker would grab the fuzz of residual hair on her skull and order the guards to take her to the deafening sound room of the prison (AW 251). Sarat's imprisonment by the Northerners serves as a symbol of institutionalized subjugation and state violence. She was subjected to brutal physical and mental abuse by the male guards. From Crenshaw's perspective, this abuse was not just a wartime punishment. Instead, it is an intersection of gendered subjugation of female prisoners, class oppression of poor displaced Southerners, and political marginalization of Southern refugees displaced by geological destruction. Sarat's lack of political power makes her a target of state brutality. However, she emerges from captivity with a focused rage, using her suffering as a fuel to her final act of defiance, as the narrator says, *still she resisted* (AW 252). In the end, the only thing war taught her was that those who survived it did so by becoming like the thing they hated. Sarat's actions show that resistance is both necessary and tragic, and those who fight oppression become entangled in the very violence they oppose. Even once, Bud was softened toward Sarat as he felt it was his past sin, which is why he ended up here at Sugarloaf, but Sarat spat in his direction as she considers its better to die than to seek shelter from the rebels. In her imagination, Sarat wanted to attack him and tear away his skin (AW 255).

Sarat has seen suicide bombing, violent climatic conditions, plague, drone killing, betrayal by her dignified tutor, imprisonment, physical and mental tortures, leading her to take extreme revenge killing millions. Her trauma is a systematic process that deprives her of consciousness and selfhood. These intersecting crises have taken away Sarat's empathy, identity, and rationality. She preferred her brother, who sided with the North for safety, to die in the South rather than get treatment at any Northern hospital (AW 263). The objective of the story is to understand that multiple forms of oppression shaped Sarat's identity and radicalized her.

Even in her final days, Sarat refuses to regret her choices. She tells her nephew, *I was made for a war. And you, you will be made for another* (AW 313). This statement reinforces her enduring defiance; she accepts her role as a product of war and ensures that her resistance will live on in future generations. Sarat's story ultimately serves as a critique of the dehumanizing effects of war and how the institutional subjugation and subjectivity actually empower her. Through her experiences, El Akkad illustrates how gender, race, class, and politics combine to define and shape Sarat's identity and resistance. Her transformation from a displaced girl to a fighter of vengeance underscores the central message of the novel: oppression breeds radicalization, and the cycle of violence is inescapable.

Conclusion:

Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality reinforces the idea that the experiences of Black women, like Sarat, cannot be fully understood without acknowledging how violence caused by patriarchy, racial prejudice, politics, and other power structures intersect. Sarat's identity as a black woman in the free southern state shapes not only her traumatic experiences of oppression but also her ability to resist it. While patriarchy limits her options as a woman, her racial identity

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complicates these restrictions further; her displacement deprives her of her necessities for survival in a refugee camp; moreover, the lack of educational resources led her to become a war weapon, positioning her as fourfold marginalized.

This applied critical framework explains that Sarat's transformed identity as a perpetrator is not simply a personal revenge but a product of multiple and oppressive power structures. Furthermore, Sarat is not a passive victim of the intersecting gendered, racial, and political oppressions. Her defiance of these constraints helps her to carve out her path to radicalization. Her eventual transformation of identity and ideology demonstrates how these multiple marginalizing oppressive forces can be resisted, reshaped, and even transcended through individual acts of agency.

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