INTERSECTIONAL BONDS: A FEMINIST JOURNEY IN FATIMAH ASGHAR'S *WHEN WE WERE SISTERS*

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Abstract

The term "marginalization" describes the social process that pushes people or groups to the periphery of society, frequently leading to their exclusion from meaningful engagement in political, economic, or cultural affairs. It entails deliberately denying opportunities, resources, and rights, making society more vulnerable and unequal. bell hooks focuses on the ways that entrenched systems of oppression sustain these marginalized positions, sustaining cycles of inequity and disenfranchisement. hooks offers a revised definition of feminism that goes beyond the simple struggle for class equality between men and women. The research deals with the issue of marginalization in the novel When We Were Sisters (2022) by Fatimah Asghar. The analysis aims to reveal the issue of marginalization towards Muslim women and the struggle against structural oppression in the novel. This analysis uses the concept of marginalization from the feminism study proposed by bell hooks. Fatimah Asghar's poignant and poetic debut novel explores the close relationship between three abandoned siblings who are left to care for one another when their parents pass away. Aisha, the middle sister, spars with her whiny younger sibling as she tries desperately to hold on to her sense of family in an impossible situation; Noreen, the eldest, does her best in the role of sister-mother while also trying to create a life for herself, on her terms; Kausar, the youngest, struggles with the unfathomable loss of her parents while also charting her understanding of gender.

Keywords: oppression, gender, racism, culture, marginalization, economic

Introduction

The marginalization of women in the current era is crucial for several reasons. First, such research helps uncover the extent and nature of the challenges faced by women in various aspects of their lives, including education, employment, healthcare, and political representation (Azhar,2018). According to bell hooks in *Ain't I a Woman*: *Black Women and Feminism (1981)*, examining the systemic barriers and discriminatory practices that contribute to the marginalization of women, researchers can provide evidence-based insights into the specific areas where interventions and policy changes are needed.

Research on women's marginalization helps raise awareness and challenge societal norms and stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequality. By studying the underlying causes and consequences of women's marginalization, researchers can debunk misconceptions, dispel biases, and promote a more nuanced understanding of gender dynamics (Stewart,2021). This research can contribute to fostering a supportive environment for women, breaking down gender-based stereotypes, and empowering women to participate fully in all spheres of life.

The idea of "otherness" is explored by bell hooks in her work, Black Looks: Race and Representation (1992). This idea is one of the major elements leading to marginalization. When a certain group or identity is characterized as "different" or "deviant," it is simpler to excuse exclusion, prejudice, and injustice. This "othering" process frequently has its roots in deeply rooted preconceptions, stereotypes, and biases that have persisted for many generations.

Furthermore, marginalization is made worse by the intersectionality of different identities. People who are members of numerous marginalized groups, such as Black women or transgender people from low-income families, for instance, frequently experience several types of discrimination and oppression.

Playing in the Night: Toni Morrison's "Whiteness and the Literary Imagination" (1992) does address marginalization. In her critical work, Morrison investigates how the marginalization of African American experiences, voices, and perspectives has been exacerbated by whiteness's role as the cultural norm in American literature. Morrison contends that while other racial identities, particularly Blackness, are depicted as deviations or contrasts in literature, whiteness is frequently portrayed as the unmarked norm. This course of "othering" builds up racial-ordered progressions and propagates the minimization of African Americans and other non-white gatherings. She shows how Black characters, culture, and history are frequently used as literary devices to serve white narratives without providing a genuine understanding of the Black experience by examining the idea of the "Africanist presence" in literature.

It is crucial to understand that marginalization is a social construct that has been developed and perpetuated through time rather than a phenomenon that occurs naturally or inescapably. The intricate network of privilege, power, and institutional prejudices that underlies marginalization may be shown by understanding its causes. We may try to build a more inclusive and equitable society where everyone is respected, and their views are heard by questioning the status quo and exploring these beginnings. Similarly, the unfair treatment of their uncle, their peers, and society is highlighted in Fatimah Asghar's book *When We Were Sisters (2022)*. They moved from Pakistan when their parents passed away, and they now confront several issues in their house and society. This book investigates crossing worlds by utilizing bell hooks' marginalization theory.

Statement of the problem

This research delves into the pervasive issue of women's marginalization based on gender, drawing insights from Fatimah Asghar's novel *When We Were Sisters (2022)*. The study explores the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of gender-based marginalization, emphasizing an intersectional approach that considers the interlocking nature of oppression with race, class, and other identities. Through an analysis of education, work, politics, family dynamics, and media representation, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex power structures that perpetuate the subordination of women. Furthermore, the study advocates for transformative and intersectional approaches to achieve gender equality and social justice, inspired by the narratives and experiences of *When We Were Sisters (2022)*.

Research Questions:

1. How does the novel *When We Were Sisters* depict the challenges faced by women from marginalized backgrounds?
2. How do the characters demonstrate the impact of societal norms and expectations in the lives of women?

Research Objectives:

1. To evaluate the struggles encountered by women from marginalized backgrounds
2. To explore the impact of societal expectations and conventions on women's lives

Significance of the study

The significance of researching the marginalization of women in Fatimah Asghar's novel *When We Were Sisters (2022)* lies in its ability to amplify underrepresented voices, explore intersectionality and identity, shed light on power dynamics and agency, cultivate empathy and understanding, and inspire social change. By delving into these themes, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by marginalized women, challenges societal norms, promotes inclusivity, and encourages action toward a more equitable and just society.

Literature Review

The context of bell hooks' foundational work "Black Feminist Thought" resonates strongly with the overlapping themes of sisterhood, cultural identity, and perseverance in Fatimah Asghar's "*When We Were Sisters (2022)."* Three orphaned Pakistani American sisters are shown in Asghar's story, all of them are struggling with the pressures of society expectations and the intricacies of their identities. By examining the sisters' experiences through the prism of Black feminism and women's liberation, Hooks helps us understand how the sisters deal with not only the loss of their parents but also the constraints of patriarchal institutions and cultural norms. As they pursue autonomy and self-actualization within the constraints of their traditional upbringing, Kausar, Aisha, and Noreen must deal with the intersections of race, gender, and class. Like hooks' theory, Asghar's story explores the complexities of power relations while highlighting the agency and resiliency of marginalized women in the face of hardship. We learn more about the ways that literature may be used to subvert hegemonic narratives and give marginalized voices more visibility by employing this juxtaposition.

In "The Scarlet Letter," by Nathaniel Hawthorne, a timeless story is told against the backdrop of puritanical New England, showcasing sin and passion. Through an in-depth examination of the intricate web of postmodern feminist critique, Jayasimha P.'s research reveals the emotional entanglements that ensnare the main female character of the book. Hester Prynne, who struggles with the burden of her perceived sins and longs for freedom from repressive patriarchal forces, emerges as a symbol of resistance within the confining boundaries of religious moral codes and societal expectations. The study examines the complex dance of human desires and moral judgment through a postmodern lens, revealing the subtle ways in which men used religious dogma as a weapon to stifle women's autonomy and uniqueness. Hester's predicament comes to represent the larger fight for female agency in a society where moral dogma and male supremacy rule. The reader is forced to confront the harsh truths of gendered discrimination as well as the human spirit's persistent tenacity in the face of systematic injustice as the story progresses.

Black American families endure great suffering because of systematic white tyranny, as Toni Morrison explores in her novel "The Bluest Eye." Those in the Black community who

experience marginalization suffer grave consequences to their mental, emotional, and physical health. Morrison explores the dual marginalization of Black female characters by looking at it from the perspectives of feminism and racism. The book's main character, Pecola, is perpetually called "ugly" because of her dark complexion and demeanor. She is raised in a poor, dysfunctional Black household. She develops a severe inferiority complex because of this social rejection, which fuels her intense yearning for blue eyes, which she identifies with the approval and beauty bestowed upon white people. Pecola's early identity and self-esteem loss, made worse by ongoing public ridicule, serves as a stark reminder of the harmful impact that marginalization has on Black women. (Morrison, T. (2016).

To comprehend why some groups are marginalized in a community, one must grasp the idea of social exclusion. Within this framework, the article "Gender Discrimination and Marginalization of Women in North-East India" explores the state of women in the northeastern Indian states, concentrating on Assam and Manipur. In comparison to their counterparts in other regions of India, women in this region are seen as having greater mobility, life options, and personal space. This perception is reinforced by several social indicators that point to a relatively advantageous position for women. The study emphasizes that, despite these benefits, cultural and customary practices nevertheless significantly contribute to gender discrimination. Women continue to experience significant marginalization and exclusion in the patriarchal societies of Assam and Manipur, indicating that the greater status that women in these areas enjoy is not without its restrictions. The manuscript highlights the intricate nature of gender relations in North-East India, where customs and societal norms still stand in the way of complete gender parity. (Choudhury, S., & Kumar, S. (2022).

"Gender, Black Feminism, and Black Political Economy" by Patricia Hill Collins explores the complex interrelationships between gender, race, and economic systems while highlighting the significance of Black feminist theory in comprehending and resolving the difficulties Black women confront. Collins places her research in the larger framework of Black feminist thinking, which emphasizes Black women's experiences and viewpoints. She contends that conventional economic theories and feminist studies frequently overlook the unique circumstances faced by Black women, who must negotiate a convoluted system of oppression that encompasses racism, sexism, and classism. Collins relies on the groundwork laid by earlier Black feminists who recognized the necessity for an inclusive feminist praxis that tackles various, overlapping systems of oppression. By identifying these interconnections. The idea of intersectionality, which offers a crucial lens through which to view how diverse types of social stratification interact to influence people's lived experiences, lies at the heart of Collins' research. Collins expands on this idea by examining how Black women are disproportionately affected by economic laws and practices, which results kinds of economic marginalization and exploitation. The work of Collins has significant ramifications for feminist theory and activity. It advocates for a reconceptualization of feminist politics that gives voice and importance to the experiences of marginalized groups, especially Black women. To address the unique requirements of these communities—such as fair labor practices, access to healthcare, and education—policy and strategy development is required. Collins defends intersectionality's need to develop successful and equitable feminist praxis despite certain criticisms that it could split apart feminist

movements. Her observations remain enlightening and motivating for feminist researchers and advocates working towards a more fair and just society. (Collins, P. H. (2000).

The article "Understanding Women in Scotland" provides a critical analysis of the difficulties in comprehending women's experiences in Scotland's past and present as well as the growth of feminist studies in the area. It argues that blaming Scottish male chauvinism and misogyny alone for the marginalization of Scottish women ignores larger systemic issues. The article contends that, on the contrary, English cultural and political hegemony within the broader United Kingdom framework also plays a role in shaping the marginalization of women in Scotland, in addition to male dominance inside Scottish culture. This article demonstrates how the confusion of the terms "Britishness" and "Scottishness" obscures the distinct experiences of Scottish women by examining the relationship between these identities. Furthermore, the paper emphasizes how Scotland's membership in the British state has supported institutional frameworks and political systems that disadvantage women and contribute to their dual marginalization. This double marginalization has political ramifications and could drive Scottish women away from English feminism, in addition to providing difficulties for feminist study. To forge feminist alliances across the UK's various regions and advance solutions for tackling the unique difficulties encountered by women in Scotland, these disparities must be acknowledged while encouraging conversation, as the essay concludes. (Breitenbach, E., Brown, A., & Myers, F. (1998).

In "From invisible to incorrigible: The demonization of marginalized women and girls," Eda Chesney-Lind and Michele Eliason examine two concerning developments in the way that female violence is viewed by the public and portrayed in the media. The first trend emphasizes how females from marginalized areas are disproportionately arrested and imprisoned due to the media's focus on their anger and violence. The second trend perpetuates negative gender stereotypes about masculinity and femininity by portraying lesbians as dangerous criminals. These representations interact with broader power relations and societal movements that support women's emancipation and greater visibility. The writers also question the role played by certain academics in perpetuating these prejudices and assisting in the punishment and incarceration of marginalized women. Even if there has been a decline in violent crime, marginalized women especially those who don't conform to established gender norms continue to endure discrimination and higher rates of arrest and jail. This article highlights the systematic demonization of marginalized women and girls and urges a critical analysis of gender norms and cultural beliefs that support these detrimental tendencies. (Chesney-Lind, M., & Eliason, M. (2006).

Theoretical Framework

To conduct research as a theoretical foundation for discussing the issues surrounding marginalization and potential remedies are analyzed to get insight of the issue. The goal of feminism is to eradicate oppression, exploitation, and sexism. hooks highlights an inclusive and intersectional approach to feminism in her writings, particularly in works like *"Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism,"(1981)* which examines the interconnectedness of race, gender, and class "I am a Black woman. I attended all-Black public schools. I grew up in the south where

all around me was the fact of racial discrimination, hatred, and forced segregation" (p.125). She criticizes mainstream feminism for frequently being controlled by middle-class, white viewpoints, which might obscure the difficulties encountered by working-class and women of color. "Feminism as a political ideology advocating social equality for all women was and is acceptable to many Black women" (p.150).

 In *Ain't I a Woman* (1981), bell hooks claims that sexism is a system that oppresses women and perpetuates gender inequality "By supporting Black male suffrage and denouncing white women's rights advocates, white men revealed the depths of their sexism" (p.17). Classism is the socioeconomic status-based hierarchy in which the upper classes have power and advantages while the lower ones are marginalized.

Another key concept in marginalization theory is intersectionality. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality recognizes that individuals experience multiple intersecting forms of oppression and privilege based on their various social identities, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability. Intersectionality emphasizes the interconnectedness of these social categories and how they intersect to shape individuals' experiences of marginalization and privilege. For example, a Black woman may experience discrimination differently from a white woman or a Black man, as she is marginalized along multiple axes of identity.

> White male religious teachers taught that woman was an inherently sinful creature of the flesh whose wickedness could only be purged by the intercession of a more powerful being. Appointing themselves as the personal agents of God, they became the judges and overseers of woman's virtue. (pp.41-42).

hooks criticizes the historical beliefs of some white male religious leaders who claimed that women were morally deficient and innately immoral, requiring men's leadership and control to attain virtue. These religious instructors rationalized their status as the moral authorities and watchdogs of women's behavior by framing women as creatures of the flesh, susceptible to moral corruption. They justified their authority to evaluate and regulate women's deeds and virtues by claiming to be God's representatives. This viewpoint perpetuated a system of male dominance based on patriarchal readings of religious scriptures, reinforcing gender inequality, and offering a religious rationale for the enslavement and control of women.

> Black women were placed in a double bind; to support women's suffrage would imply that they were allying themselves with white women activists who had publicly revealed their racism, but to support only black male suffrage was to endorse a patriarchal social order that would grant them no political voice. (p.18)

Black women in the suffrage movement confronted a difficult and complex predicament. Aligning oneself with white female activists many of whom were overtly racist and excluded Black women from their advocacy was necessary to support women's suffrage. This association can indicate cooperation with a discriminatory agenda that undervalued Black women's humanity and rights. On the other hand, supporting Black male suffrage alone meant supporting a patriarchal socioeconomic structure that would provide Black men political rights while

depriving Black women of any political representation or voice. This put Black women in a tricky situation where they had to decide whether to support a patriarchal society that continued to marginalize them or a racist women's movement. This situation highlighted the intersectional obstacles Black women encountered in their quest for equality, as they had to deal with prejudice based on both race and gender. Structural violence is another important concept in marginalization theory. Coined by Johan Galtung, structural violence refers to the systematic ways in which social structures and institutions harm individuals by depriving them of basic needs and rights.

> Since the black woman has been stereotyped by both white and black men as the "bad" woman, she has not been able to ally herself with men from either group to get protection from the other. (p.114).

Unlike direct violence, which is overt and intentional, structural violence operates through neutral mechanisms such as laws, policies, and economic systems. For example, structural violence can be seen in the disproportionate impact of austerity measures on marginalized communities or in the systemic racism embedded in the criminal justice system "Black women are one of the most devalued female groups in American society, and thus they have been the recipients of a male abuse and cruelty that has known no bounds or limits" (p.114).

The theory of marginalization by bell hooks offers a useful framework for examining the book *When We Were Sisters (2022)* and comprehending the experiences of marginalized women depicted in its pages. The core tenet of this theoretical framework is the importance of intersectionality, which acknowledges that people have several intersecting social identities that influence how they experience marginalization. By viewing the book through this lens, we may explore how the intersecting identities of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation contribute to the marginalization of female characters. By looking at these intersections, we may learn more about the difficulties marginalized women confront and the multiple ways in which oppression affects them.

At the heart of marginalization theory lies the notion of power dynamics and social hierarchies. It posits that societal structures are inherently unequal, with certain groups holding power and privilege over others. This unequal distribution of power manifests in various forms, including economic disparities, institutional discrimination, and cultural hegemony. Marginalization theory seeks to uncover the mechanisms through which these power imbalances are perpetuated and reproduced. One of the central concepts in marginalization theory is social exclusion. Social exclusion refers to the process by which individuals or groups are systematically denied access to resources, opportunities, and rights available to the wider society. This exclusion can take many forms, such as poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and lack of access to education or healthcare. Marginalized groups often face multiple forms of exclusion simultaneously, exacerbating their marginalization and reinforcing their subordinate position within society.The process of marginalization is not static but dynamic, shaped by historical, political, and economic forces. Historical marginalization refers to the long-term patterns of exclusion and discrimination faced by certain groups, often rooted in colonialism, slavery, or other forms of oppression

Analysis

Gender marginalization

To value diversity and equity, policies, practices, and social norms that promote inclusivity and challenge systemic gender-based inequalities must be promoted. Gender marginalization is the social, economic, and political exclusion of individuals or groups based on their gender identity, expression, or norms. This affects people who don't conform to traditional gender norms, such as women, non-binary, gender non-conforming, transgender, and intersex people. It manifests in forms of discrimination, violence, erasure, stereotyping, and restricted access to opportunities in healthcare, education, and the workforce.

> All alone now, the girls__ Who will take them? Such a terrible thing, to
> happen to sisters. If there was a boy if one of them had been a son,
> maybe— No one wants girls— (Asghar, 2022, p. 28).

The paragraph highlights the devaluation of girls in society and the preference for male progeny, so encapsulating gender-based marginalization. The speaker's regret over the girls' fate following the loss of their father highlights the pervasive prejudice against female children. "Such a terrible thing, to happen to sisters" suggests that the girls' circumstances are especially bad because of their gender. Additionally, by speculatively considering a male child, the speaker is promoting a systematic preference for sons over females, which upholds patriarchal standards and gender inequity. The claim that "No one wants girls" exposes the systemic devaluation of girls in society, depriving them of possibilities and worth that are comparable to those enjoyed by guys. The girls' access to opportunities is hampered by this gender-based marginalization, which not only impacts their immediate situations but also upholds larger structural injustices.

The following lines explain the gender inequality in the novel where Kausar and her sisters are being marginalized by their uncle. "The itchy dresses we're forced to wear." (p. 29). The passage draws attention to a type of gender marginalization that has to do with clothes and expectations from society or culture. "The itchy dresses we're forced to wear" implies that people don't have much agency or choice in what they wear and may feel pressured to follow certain norms or dress requirements. The word "forced" suggests compulsion or pressure, suggesting that people may not have complete control over what they choose to wear. This represents a type of marginalization in which people feel confined or limited by standards or expectations from outside sources, which may impair their sense of identity, comfort, or self-expression.

Do what I say.

 Stay in the room.

Don't talk unless you are spoken to.

 You can only do after-school programs if they are free.

Clean up after the hallway zoo.

 Don't let the birds out of the house.

Don't wear anything that shows your arms or your legs.

Don't go to the masjid.

Pray at home.

Don't go to my sons' house.

Don't fight your sisters.

Don't talk to boys.

Get good grades.

Go to school.

Noreen is responsible when I'm not here (pp.44-45)

The girls' environment is severely constrained by the uncle's regulations, which also limit their freedom of choice and ability to connect with others. By denying people agency and the capacity to make choices for themselves, marginalizes them. The paragraph describes several rules and regulations that are placed on people, which represent various kinds of marginalization. These rules and regulations are mostly concerned with control and limiting liberty. A feeling of limitation and marginalization is exacerbated by these instructions, which limit the freedom of speech and access to extracurricular activities. Furthermore, religious practice restrictions that prevent people from freely practicing their faith in public places, like praying at home rather than at the masjid, marginalize people's civic freedom.

Social Marginalization

The process of pushing some people or groups to the margins of society and denying them equitable access to opportunities, resources, and power is known as social marginalization. Usually, racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism are deeply ingrained oppressive systems that lead to this exclusion. Marginalized individuals frequently discover that dominant social structures ignore them, discount their experiences, and silence their voices. To end cycles of disadvantage and promote a more inclusive and equitable society, these oppressive mechanisms must be addressed and taken down. Asian women also frequently face the "bamboo ceiling" in the workplace, when institutional biases and stereotypes prevent them from advancing in their careers and assuming leadership roles. These obstacles restrict their ability to take advantage of possibilities for financial growth and maintain their social exclusion. The sentence speaks of degree holders feeling stranded and unhappy in a new place after taking up menial professions; they are educated but end up feeling disappointed. These lines show social marginalization.

> Our city is full of Used-to-Bes, of people who came from somewhere else,
> whose degrees don't matter here, who check out groceries and pump gas
> and return to their single room in a rented apartment, to a framed photo of
> them in their cap and gown holding a degree above their bed. (p.139)

Tiffany focuses on immigrants to the city along these lines, providing a painful viewpoint on social marginalization. They are what she refers to as "Used-to-Bes," people who moved here from somewhere else and are now having trouble adjusting to society. Despite their credentials, their degrees are useless in their new workplace, where they are forced to work at low-wage positions like petrol pumping or grocery shopping. The story of Tiffany highlights the societal obstacles that immigrants have when trying to fit in and be accepted in their new town. The framed pictures of their academic successes stand in stark contrast to their rented residences, signifying the gap between their dreams and reality right now. The words show the widespread social marginalization that exists in the city by shedding light on the difficulties and stigmatization faced by immigrants through Tiffany's voice. "Tiffany doesn't talk to us; she just shuffles along quietly." (p.139). Kausar highlights Tiffany's tendency to keep to herself and her quiet in these sentences that describe her behavior. "She just shuffles along quietly" conveys Tiffany's reserved demeanor as she walks through her surroundings, but "Tiffany doesn't talk to us" implies a lack of conversation or connection with others. The way Tiffany is portrayed could be an example of social marginalization, in which she is shut out of or excluded from social situations.

The phrase "she just shuffles along quietly" suggests that Tiffany is marginalized in the social setting, and the word "just" may be used to suggest a devaluation or disregard of her presence. Furthermore, Kausar's explicit statement of Tiffany's actions without providing any additional context for her thoughts or feelings may suggest that Tiffany lacks agency or voice, which would further emphasize her marginalization. Overall, these lines point to Tiffany experiencing some sort of social marginalization, whether because of social anxiety or being cut out of social circles. "When we're in the kitchen together she's so still that my breath feels rude." (p139). Kausar highlights Tiffany's stillness in these words, to the extent that she makes Kausar feel as though her breath is bothersome. This portrayal hints at tension or unease that may be caused by Tiffany's restrained manner or sense of social marginalization. The implication of "she's so still" is that Tiffany isn't moving or doing anything, which could add to the unpleasant or uncomfortable mood. Kausar's comment that her breath felt "rude" implies that she was conscious of Tiffany's quiet and may have felt guilty or self-conscious about bothering her personal space.

"There are good kinds of pressing and bad kinds of pressing." (p.141). In these lines, Kausar considers the idea of "pressing," highlighting the beneficial and harmful applications of this behavior. The expression "good kinds of pressing" refers to situations in which influence or pressure can result in development or positive outcomes, like peer support or encouragement. This suggests an empowerment or agency that comes from positive contacts or direction. Conversely, the reference to "bad kinds of pressing" denotes constructive forms of coercion or pressure that have the potential to cause harm or oppression. This could include several types of social marginalization, in which people feel compelled against their will to live up to societal norms or expectations, which can leave them feeling repressed or constrained.

Kausar makes references to the intricacies of social dynamics and the effects of outside forces on people in these words. The differentiation between "good" and "bad" pushing implies a

sophisticated comprehension of power relations and highlights the significance of identifying and resolving oppressive or marginalizing phenomena. These lines may illustrate how cultural expectations and pressures may both empower and restrain women in the context of women's marginalization. While negative kinds of pressing may involve the imposition of constrictive gender roles or expectations that limit women's independence, positive forms of pressing may involve support for women's autonomy and empowerment.

> We scamper into our room and spend the rest of the night in silence. I think of the lumpy family portrait I had painted in my mind: Aalia and her chai next to my uncle and his smile, and the three of us, pushed to the background, but still there. (p.150)

In these words, Kausar discusses the dynamics in her family, especially her relationships with Uncle and Aalia, and she alludes to the social marginalization that women in the home go through. The word "scamper" conveys a rushed or nervous gait, implying that the speaker is uncomfortable or uneasy when interacting with Uncle and Aalia. The suggestion to keep quiet for the remainder of the night suggests a lack of connection or communication within the family, which may reflect underlying issues or tensions. The speaker and the other women in the home may feel more alone or marginalized because of this silence.

Additionally, the speaker's mental image of the "lumpy family portrait" raises the possibility that the family dynamic is distorted or unbalanced. There appears to be a hierarchy of authority or importance within the household, as evidenced by Uncle and Aalia being portrayed, with the speaker and other women placed in the background. Overall, these words portray a subtle kind of social marginalization that women, like Kausar, go through in the framework of families, where their presence and voices are sometimes ignored in favor of male relatives. The family portrait picture and the reference to spending the night in quiet highlight the intricacies of family dynamics and the influence of societal hierarchies on personal identity and agency.

Racial marginalization

The systemic marginalization of people or groups within society because of their race or ethnicity is known as racial marginalization. Asian women face difficulties because of intersecting racial factors, which frequently result in racial marginalization. Stereotypes, prejudice, and restricted chances in work, education, and representation in politics and the media are a few examples of this. The following lines describe the picture of racial marginalization. "It was a gamble, sure, marrying a brown man." (p.13). The phrase captures the prejudices and misconceptions that the public has about interracial partnerships in general and about marriages between people of various ethnic backgrounds in particular. It is implied in this context that marrying a guy of color in this case, a brown man is considered a dangerous or unusual decision.

This remark draws attention to a type of racial marginalization in which people from racial or ethnic backgrounds are perceived as less desirable or appropriate mates by nature. The word "gamble" conveys uncertainty and the possible unfavorable outcomes of breaking from social standards about racial homogeneity in romantic relationships. This kind of marginalization

contributes to people's experiences of discrimination and alienation by fostering negative preconceptions and institutional biases against interracial relationships.

The following lines explain the situation well. "Noreen lowers her eyes. She gets on the bus. Behind her, the white girls all wear their hair the same, in tight ponytails, not a strand out of place." (p.130). In these words, Kausar portrays a nuanced yet powerful picture of how people, like Noreen, may feel excluded or othered because of their race. Before getting on the bus, Noreen lowered her gaze, which suggests that she might have been conscious of her differences in a place where the white girls are the representatives of the dominant racial group. A cultural norm that may unintentionally marginalize people who do not comply with it is highlighted by the white girls' uniform appearance, which consists of tightly fastened ponytails. This observation raises questions about the more general problem of racial marginalization, which is the situation in which people of color face obstacles to inclusion and acceptability in settings where the majority racial group establishes norms. The white girls' uniform appearance and the description of Noreen's response gently highlight how commonplace racial marginalization is in societal interactions.

Economic marginalization

Asian women face a variety of challenges related to their economic marginalization in American society, including a sizable pay disparity, occupational segregation, restricted access to education and training, obstacles to entrepreneurship, discrimination based on language and culture, intersectional discrimination, and a lack of representation and voice in the formulation of economic policies. Asian women are overrepresented in low-paying jobs and underrepresented in leadership roles. They also face significant pay gaps relative to white males and other groups, and they have trouble gaining access to opportunities and resources. Their economic marginalization may be exacerbated by linguistic and cultural hurdles as well as intersectional discrimination based on their sexual orientation, gender, race, class, and other identities. To address these problems and advance economic inclusion and fairness, a comprehensive strategy is needed.

This novel reveals the clear economic marginalization in Fatimah Asghar's *when we were sisters*. These lines depict economic marginalization. "He started to become that too: separate. No longer the man that was part of the world, the man she fell in love with, the man she used to envy. (p.13). In the context of a romantic relationship, these sentences portray a type of emotional marginalization. The man is described in the chapter as changing from someone his partner fell in love with to someone distinct and aloof. This implies that the man's changing identity and behavior have caused him to emotionally separate himself from his girlfriend, resulting in a sense of alienation and distance within the relationship. Both parties involved experience emotions of loneliness and isolation because of this emotional marginalization, which represents a loss of closeness and connection.

It draws attention to how both internal and external factors can alter the dynamics of a relationship, which can lead to a partner feeling marginalized and cut off from the person they used to know.

These lines give further insight into the situation. "We three glance at each other, trying to see what he sees, self-conscious in long-sleeved dresses and low-rise jeans underneath. Behind us, the trees turn away, their leaves hiding from his judgment." (p.65). The marginalization that women go through when they are subjected to men's scrutiny and criticism is depicted in this scene. Their attempts to follow social norms and dress modestly haven't stopped them from feeling vulnerable and uncomfortable. Women are pressured to adhere to masculine norms of behavior and appearance, and this is exemplified by the personification of nature as a way for them to hide from the judgment of a male figure and the widespread influence of patriarchal ideas.

In these lines, three women are shown looking at one another, unsure of themselves as they try to comprehend and brace themselves for a male figure's criticism. Even when they have dressed modestly in long-sleeved skirts and low-rise jeans, for example, they nevertheless feel exposed to prying eyes. The reference to the trees pulling away and covering their leaves alludes to a figurative portrayal of nature fleeing the masculine figure's overbearing stare, underscoring the uneasy and judgmental atmosphere. "We need money. For groceries." (p.85). The type of marginalization portrayed here is economic, as Noreen's incapacity to purchase groceries reflects larger systemic injustices that disproportionately impact those on the margins, particularly women. In this scenario, women are portrayed as being marginalized because Noreen, the female character, is the one who finds it difficult to express herself and meet her fundamental needs while facing financial difficulties.

 Furthermore, the fact that Noreen feels the need to be defiant to communicate a simple need—like buying groceries—highlights the expectations and constraints from society that may make it more difficult for women to advocate for themselves and obtain resources. Noreen struggles with financial uncertainty as she says she needs money to buy groceries. Noreen's attempt to project a tough demeanor by crossing her arms over her chest conveys a will to take charge despite the challenging situation. Her stumble, however, highlights the difficulties she has in expressing her demands and agency and shows a weakness or doubt in her disobedience.

Conclusion
The study of marginalization based on gender, culture, race, social class, economic status, and religion in Fatimah Asghar's book "When We Were Sisters" reveals a complex story that explores the complexities of oppression and resiliency. This literary research thesis attempts to analyze the complex experiences of marginalization portrayed in Asghar's work by using an intersectional lens that is influenced by bell hooks' theoretical framework. The characters' ability to negotiate a complicated web of prejudices, societal conventions, and power relations is revealed as the story progresses, illuminating the intertwining factors that mould their identities and realities.

The study's first research questions act as road signs, pointing the way toward a more thorough comprehension of gender-based marginalization in the book. To disentangle the subtleties of marginalization as Asghar portrays it, these questions have been examined through an analysis grounded in textual evidence and theoretical interaction. The goals outlined have offered a framework for exploring several topics, such as the difficulties encountered by marginalized

women, the influence of cultural standards, and the dynamics of female relationships in the story. Asghar's topics can be critically interpreted and examined under the prism of bell hooks' theoretical framework on marginalization. hooks' emphasis on intersectionality helps readers understand how privilege and oppression are multifaceted processes that impact people's experiences. By using this perspective, the book becomes a potent critique of the structural injustices present in society and challenges readers to examine their prejudices and presumptions.

The novel's portrayal of racial marginalization highlights the multiple types of oppression that Asian women in American culture must contend with. Characters deal with a variety of issues stemming from their racial identities, ranging from discrimination and stereotypes to structural obstacles in the workplace and schools. Asghar's story is a potent critique of the systemic injustices that support racial marginalization, highlighting the critical need for systemic change. To show how structural injustices materialize in the experiences of characters, the narrative lens is expanded to include social and economic marginalization. Asghar highlights the obstacles that impede marginalized people from moving up the social mobility ladder, ranging from the "bamboo ceiling" in the workplace to the hardships of immigrant populations. The novel asks readers to consider the systemic mechanisms that support social and economic inequality through vivid storytelling and perceptive criticism. A recurrent subject in the book is religious marginalization, which emphasizes the difficulties Asian Muslim women have in juggling many identities. The story of Asghar reveals the exclusion and prejudice experienced by people who live in unfamiliar cultural and religious contexts. Characters grapple with the difficulties of religious identification in a world plagued by Islamophobia and cultural prejudice via periods of reflection and struggle.

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