

## I. Research Problem

One of the fundamental challenges of the writer in confrontation with dilemmatic situation is how to define it. The literary works that come out of the traumatic situations are mainly about how the notion of the ordinary life has been disrupted. This idea has been upheld by well known literary theorist Homi Bhabha and Reza Aslan in their panel discussion, (Jaipur Literary Festival, Jan 2013). Homi Bhabha also points that “literary criticism seeks to portray the great power of the idea of nation in the disclosures of its everyday life; in the telling details that emerge as metaphors for national life” (The Location of Culture, 204). In order to expand this idea Bakhtin acknowledges that “the origin of the nation’s visual *presence* is the effect of a narrative struggle” (205). The implication is that Iranian writers who write in traumatic situations are looking for the essence of routine daily life in their narratives.

This thesis will analyze the selected works of six major writers – Abbas Milani, Azar Nafisi, Mahmoud Dowlatabadi, Gina B. Nahai, Shahrnush Parsipur, and Shirin Ebadi. These writers have been chosen for this research paper because their works not only are set against the disruption of everyday life, but also they portray daily life as the national identity. Secondly, these novels can be divided into fiction and non-fiction with different narrative techniques which struggle with time and space” to see future in the past” (224). Furthermore these novels have been banned in their homeland, so they carry the all characteristic of the writing in troubled times.

Therefore, the main goal of this research is to answer the following questions: What is the role of the artist who writes in troubled times? How do narrative techniques serve as an effective alternative way? How do these techniques relate to the contemporary literary theories? How do these theories help the authors to define the society? Is it true that going beyond the borders of time and space in narratives initiate new signs of identity? Why authors who write in traumatic situations emphasize on the microscopic elements of everyday life?

At first glance most of the Iranian writing in exile may be marked by the pointing the elements of everyday life under the cover of more important issues. On the other hand, the American literature of 9/11 may be considered as a domestic issue, but the cultural projects of the West and non-West are now shared (Kukum Sangari, 147). In other words, disruption of daily life is a global issue which reflects in different narratives. Furthermore, everyday life can be considered in wider view as the metaphor of the national identity or life. Therefore, this project hypothesizes that beyond the important issues the vision of everyday life reveals the national culture.

In testing its hypothesis, this research paper will analyze selected novels by evaluating each for finding the notion of everyday life in them. It means that every day life will be considered through the more than three decades of oppression. This project will include autobiographies, memoirs, and other novels from different categories in order to support its ideas. The works in the native language (Farsi) will be mentioned as well. The novels which have been chosen as primary

resources reflect different narrative techniques and different categories that their writers belong to. Magical Realism and memoir are two categories of narrative techniques which are mentioned here. In this project the unpredictable moves and turns of time and space will be explored to show that writers are not only longing for their homeland, but more so, they are looking for their everyday life which has been disrupted. The anticipated conclusion is that each author in his/her own way define the society and culture when he/she confronts the big events. The fundamental challenge is that they are looking for the notion of everyday life and how it impacts the writings of literary artists.

## II. Background

The role of the artist is not just to reflect but to define society and culture. Therefore, one of the fundamental challenges for the writer who writes in troubled times is how does he/she take such big events and write about them (Reza Aslan, Literary Festival, Jaipur, 2013)? The author who wants to talk not only about individuals but also about groups, the movements in society, and communities has to respond to the traumatic situations (Homi Bhabha, Literary Festival, Jaipur, 2013). But each writer has his/her own way to write about social, political, and cultural situations. Robert Scholes in, *The Nature of Narrative*, shows “narrative as a purposive act of communication” (269). In addition, he explains about the inter connection between literature and society (292).

In this respect, narrative techniques are the best instruments to attract the audiences and develop the author’s point of view by relating art to social reality. Breaking the frames of time and space in magic

realism and memoirs not only show that the past has become more unpredictable than the future, but also challenges the idea of absolute foundation of community. Both of them, first of all, are the branch of serious fictions which help their own readers to name the world and see their place in it. It also helps them explore the truth by looking at the world through other eyes. Moreover, narrative techniques help writers to revisit, move and evocate time, space and events which are the parameters of real life. This project, however, will look at the narrative techniques, the responsibility of authors, and will depend on new theories which are related to contemporary literary theories. By drawing upon Homi Bhabha's ideas of-"worlding of literature" (The Location of Culture, 17), the responsibility of critic, who must "attempt to fully realize, and take responsibility for the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present" (18), the role of narratives, and the everyday life as the" metaphor for national life "(204)-this project is trying to show that authors transfer the cultural identity and difference in their own ways.

Exile literature is an art of survival and emergency. In exile, pens explore the sorrows and rewards of the new life, so authors constitute the important trend in international contemporary literature. Immigration, the impossibility of return, nostalgic longing for ones homeland, surviving in a strong sense, finding the new self and defending against rootlessness are common experiences which reflect in exile writing. Displacement, whether forced or self-imposed, is a part

of human experiences through which the beliefs, thought, emotions and experiences are shown beyond the text. The main feature of exile literature is a "double exposure and conscience" (*The Future of Nostalgia* 256) of different times, spaces, and emotions which are the parameters of real and everyday life. But in a traumatic situation such as living in exile sometimes everyday life has been marginalized, disrupted, or is even absent.

For Iranian people now, exile may not be the "Black Shadow" as it was for Naderpour. It is more a state of mind and an opportunity to access education and freedom of speech (Milani). Iranian exiled literature, as a part of contemporary literature, carries common features with other ones.

This project focuses on six Iranian novelists because they belong to different categories. They themselves are practitioners of modernism. Their books are banned in Iran. This thesis, therefore, will be an opportunity to examine the responses of these writers to the disruption of everyday life, and using this element as the metaphor for cultural identity. The narrative techniques which have been used by these authors offer the "biography of nation" (255) too.

Dowlatabadi's *Colonel*, which has never appeared in its original language, moves to time and space to produce the realistic view about his society. Parsipur in *Women Without Men* tries to show women escaping the narrow conditions of their daily routine life. In another category Nahai, as a Jew, reshapes the life in two different countries. Nafisi, and Ebadi in; *Things I've Been Silent About, and Iran Awakening*

as new women write their own memoirs in which they define the society. Mliani in *tales of two cities* as his memoir” weaves together the personal and the political “(Stephen Greenblatt). Furthermore, what all of these writers have in common is living in exile, whether external or internal, their contribution to people, understanding of everyday life in such traumatic times, and their crossing beyond the borders to promise the future.

Many scholars have focused on other meanings and aspects of Iranian literature in exile. They have divided writers and their works by generations. They emphasize common aspects and features of exile as displacement, diaspora, women suffrage, third space, nostalgia, the torture of political prisoners, and secrets of families.

Manijeh Moradian writes about the children of Iranian leftists who write their own memoirs. Sanaz Raji has worked on the mystery of the family secrets. Persis M. Karim has explored the states of displacement, exile and diaspora. Amy Motlagh’s research includes modern and classical Iranian literature and Iranian diaspora. Jennifer Longer is focusing on the identity of Jews. Sharo Parker argues that exile is not limited to place; rather it can be experienced mentally and physically.

Homi Bhabha and Reza Aslan, in their discussion panel “The Literature of 9/11” at the literary festival in Jaipur, discussed about the reaction of the poets and writers to that traumatic situation. In some aspects they were not in agreement with each other. However, both were in agreement on the point that the literary works that came out of the 2011 September attack were mainly about how the routine daily life

of Americans has changed. Rita Felski, believes that “ everyday life is a key concept in cultural studies”(15)while Dubavka Ugresic explains that “exile tests the basic concepts around which everyone’s life revolves. This project will explore the above ideas in Iranian works in exile too. This idea can then be related to Iranian oppression for more than three decades and the disruption of daily life. At the end, this idea can give a new view to the problems of Iranian citizens.

By looking on the surface of these novels it is not easy to find the disruption of everyday life, but this notion is the essence of these narratives. Therefore, this project hopes to prove that these writers have invested the notion of their own everyday life and the lives of other Iranian people. This project will challenge the idea that, in the long process of oppression, people talk about very serious issues more than their routine life. However, the people whose daily life has been disrupted are looking for the notion of daily life more than anything else.

### III. Definition of Terms

#### Post-colonialism in general

Post-colonialism is an intellectual direction (sometimes also called an “era” or the “post-colonial theory”) that exists since around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It developed from and mainly refers to the time after colonialism. The post-colonial direction was created as colonial countries became independent. Nowadays, aspects of post-colonialism can be found not only in sciences concerning history, literature and politics, but also in approach to culture and identity of both the countries that were colonized and the former colonial powers.

However, post-colonialism can take the colonial time, as well as the time after colonialism, into consideration.

## Modernist Literature

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Literary Modernism has its origins in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, mainly in Europe and North America. Modernism is characterized by a self-conscious break with traditional styles of poetry and verse. Modernists experimented with literary form and expression, adhering to the modernist maxim to "make it new." The modernist literary movement was driven by a desire to overturn traditional modes of representation and express the new sensibilities of their time.

## Definition of **postmodernism**

*Noun*

*[Mass noun]*

- A late 20th-century style and concept in the arts, architecture, and criticism, which represents a departure from modernism and is characterized by the self-conscious use of earlier styles and conventions, a mixing of different artistic styles and media, and a general distrust of theories.

Autobiography: An account of a person's life by him or herself. The term appears to have been first used by Southey in 1809. In Dr Johnson's opinion no man was better qualified to write his life than

himself, but his is debatable. Memory may be unreliable, (Literary Terms, P: 63)

Magic realism: Magical realism constitutes the most important trend in international contemporary fiction. Its wide spread distribution, particularly among novelists like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Salman Rushdie, and Ben Okri, Michael Valdez Moses classifies it as a nostalgic kind of primitivism: “.....an amalgamation of realism and fantasy. However, the fictional world is not separated from reality.” (B. Faris)

Definition of **memoir**

*Noun*

- A historical account or biography written from personal knowledge. (**memoirs**) an account written by a public figure of their life and experiences.

Definition of **diaspora**

*Noun*

**(The diaspora)**

- The dispersion of the Jews beyond Israel.
  - Jews living outside Israel.

- The dispersion or spread of any people from their original homeland. People who have spread or been dispersed from their homeland.

## Definition of **nostalgia**

*Noun*

*[Mass noun]*

- a sentimental longing or wistful affection for a period in the past.
  - Something done or presented in order to evoke feelings of nostalgia. Late 18th century (in the sense 'acute homesickness'): modern Latin (translating German *Heimweh* 'homesickness', from Greek *nostos* 'return home' + *algos* 'pain').

## IV. Chapter Plan

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter Two: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theories

Chapter Three: Cultural Contexts of Everyday Life

Chapter Four: Narrative Techniques

Chapter Five: Conclusion

V. Chapter Content

Chapter one will attempt to describe the situation of writing in troubled times, and the reaction of the audience to these kinds of works. It will be the historical review which includes the examination of exile and its related concepts. The notion of exile, displacement, nostalgia, the version of homeland, the sense of self, the sorrow and rewards of exile, and the hyphenated identity are the most familiar aspects of this chapter. In this chapter, the exile literature will not be limited as an art of emergency and survival, but it will look at it as an art of vibrancy. It will also involve the shifting approaches on the notion of exile for Iranian writers. Iranian literature in exile will also be studied critically.

The second chapter will be designed to show the contribution between the contemporary literary cultural theories and the literary works as well as their contribution to social changes. This chapter will discuss about the characteristic of modern and postmodern literary works and the influences of them in Iranian Literature. An attempt will also be made to challenge modernity as Eurocentric concept. In this chapter, the major aspects of Postcolonial Literature will be studied to find the same aspects in Iranian literature. As some of the authors of this project are women, the study of the feminist literary and cultural theory is inevitable. The biggest attempt will be made on Homi Bhabha's ideas about time, space, and everyday life in relation to the idea of nation.

Introducing the primary sources, and multi layered facets of the everyday life are the main traces of the third chapter. It will try to

describe the everyday life as metaphors for national life, which is a key concept in cultural studies. This chapter will discuss about the opportunities which exile literature provides for both readers and writers to make a connection beyond the text. It will show that writers reflect the beliefs and thoughts which are hard for people to understand. It will also find some elements which are ignored or exaggerated. On the other hand, this chapter will challenge the binary oppositions such as said/unsaid.

The fourth chapter will deal with the narrative techniques which have been used in the selected novels. Magic realism and memoirs are the narrative techniques which will be studied in this project. This chapter will emphasize on time and space as dynamic parameters which link to narrative techniques, as well as literary theories. Therefore, time and space are the most important elements in” destruction of the very cement of community “(*The location of Culture*, 322). These two elements: make private and public as part of each other; link past to necessary future, and help” to write the story of the nation” (204).

The concluding chapter will offer a summing-up of the previous chapters. It will show the main features of exile which are double conscience and double exposure of different time and space. It will try to conclude that beyond all these unpredictable turns and moves to time and space, Iranian writers try to link the aspect of the past to the necessary future (*The Location of Culture*, 205) and destruct the very

cement of community (322), to show the disruption of everyday life in traumatic times.

## VI. Research Limitation

The major limitation of this project is the necessity of restricting the number of works and narrative techniques in primary resources. The second limitation is the language of the novels. Some Iranian writers in exile have immigrated to non-English speaking countries therefore, they have not written in English. Some Iranian writers, especially the established ones, prefer to write in their native language. Although some of those works are translated to English they can't transfer the whole of the writer's idea and emotion. Therefore, this project will not be able to use those novels as primary resources. To avoid these restrictions, some of these novels will be mentioned as secondary resources that highlight various aspects of the primary ones.

## VII. Research Methods

The common research method in this study is analyzing the frame works of these novels. This project is interested in looking at primary sources, analyzing their narrative techniques, evocating on the parameters of time and space, seeking the version of event, and depiction of everyday life. It will also use historical, political, and social materials in order to establish the situations in which the authors have written. This project will relate all these materials with the contemporary literary theories especially Modernism, Post-modernism, and Post-colonialism to expand the ideas. By using other areas and perspectives in articles, critical essays, and interviews it will support its findings also.