

Re-orientalisation and the Pursuit of Ecstasy: Remembering Homeland in *Prisoner of Tehran*

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Abstract

The Western literary market is saturated with the Middle Eastern women memoirs since 9/11. What caused this saturation lies in the curiosity of the West to know about the Middle Easterners after 9/11 and the following President Bush's 'Axis of Evil' speech addressed to Iran, North Korea and Iraq, followed by launching his 'war on terror' project. This was the time when an influx of memoirs by and about Iranian women has emerged. This paper examines Marina Nemat's memories of her birthland in her memoir, *Prisoner of Tehran*. Utilizing Dabashi's concept of 'native informer', Bhabha's concept of 'stereotypical representation' and Sardar's concept of 'postmodernism,' we argue that Nemat has adopted Western Orientalism in her discourse. Her stereotypical representations of Iran, Islam and Muslims, which bolster the hegemonic project of the West, lead to further orientalisation.

Keywords: Memoir, re-orientalisation, Iran, Islam, Muslims, women

1. Introduction

The unprecedented burgeoning canon of memoirs by and about Iranian women has preoccupied the literary market of post-9/11 West. These memoirs, mostly written in exile, are supposed to quench the curiosity of Western readers about life of women in Iran, as an Islamic country. This curiosity is partly aroused due to the fact that people in the West have always been interested in learning the cultures of the East, and partly after the President Bush's 'Axis of Evil' speech addressed to Iran, North Korea and Iraq. However, their curiosity seems to be unquenchable as the Western publishing houses continue publishing these memoirs at a rapid rate. These memoirs, which are written in the hope of unraveling the lives of women in Iran, provide Western readers with Orientalist tales of Muslim women as veiled, powerless, silent, abuse and victims of a patriarchal society. The memoirists use the Iranian psyche, culture and religious worlds to reproduce the Western bias against the 'Other' and deliver it to the West for financial gain as well. Adopting the Western Orientalism framework in their discourse, these women memoirists are involved in the re-orientalisation of their own country.

Utilizing the Western Orientalism framework, these memoirs, which have the power to transform people's ideas, represent the lives of Iranians as the 'Other' to the West. Dabashi (2011) claims that these memoirs can point to legitimate worries about the difficulties of Muslim women in the Islamic world and put this squarely at the service of the US ideological machinery, disguised under the rhetoric of the 'war on terror.' These memoirs re-legitimate Western cultural texts as harbinger of the political revolution in Iran and they convince the Western readers that it is time to attack Iran militarily. These narratives of foreign people have long been identified as integral part of US cultural imperialism. The depictions of Iranian women as oppressed under the brutal Islamic regime, indeed, bolster the neo-conservative thinking that there is a need for imperialistic intervention in the Middle East. This manufacturing of an idea and consent for the military intervention is a trait of a 'native informer' (Dabashi 2011).

These native informer authors often have a dreamland wherein they pursue a life of happiness. Life in their own country, as an Islamic society, is rendered and portrayed as 'evil.' This portrayal "captures many different facets of current Orientalist thought regarding Islam and Muslim societies" (Saljoughi 2008: 33). Their life narratives are saturated in examples which denigrate Islam and Iran. The West is a dreamland for these authors and it is always glorified in these texts. These memoirs, which emerged after the commencement of 'war on terror,' are recruited to develop hegemony; they can be seen as forgeries to achieve political aims. These memoirs and their authors must not be understood just in terms of the politics of reception in the West but also they must be comprehended in terms of the West's imperialistic project that is informed by the historical Euro-American colonial discourses of civilization. According to Akhavan, Bashi, Kia, Shakhsari (2007), at a time when the neo-colonial and imperialistic projects desire to build a case for a military attack against Iran, these memoirists are guilty of complicity in the imperialistic projects as they create alibi for the imperialism to pursue its hegemonic projects. They further the West's imperialist agenda and confirm Western derogatory perception of Islam and

Muslim women (Akhavan, Bashi, Kia, Shakhsari, 2007). This paper explores Marina Nemat's *Prisoner of Tehran* (2007). We examine how Iran, Islam, Muslim women and West are portrayed in her text. We also unravel how Nemat panders and caters to the West in her discourse.

The main context of Nemat's *Prisoner of Tehran* (2007) revolves around the period briefly before, during, and after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Marina Nemat, a Christian, was sixteen years old in 1982 when she was apprehended, tormented, and sentenced to death for political crimes. Before her imprisonment, her life in Tehran had centered on school, summer parties at the lake, and her crush on Andre, the young man she had once seen at the church. Nemat was arrested on the charge of leading a student strike in her high school. She protested when math and history were subordinated and became of secondary importance to the study of the Holy Quran and political propaganda. She complained why her teachers would preach about the religion of Islam instead of teaching their own subjects. Once her teacher replied and told her to leave if she did not like it, and she did, and much to her surprise, the other students followed her. Soon she was arrested with a great number of other youths who were intrepid enough to speak out, and later they were imprisoned in the notorious prison, Evin, in Tehran. Two guards in Evin interrogated her. One abused her, leaving her bruised and unconscious; with the other guard, Ali, a relationship was formed. Ali saved her from execution and asked her to marry him and abandon her Christian faith in order to convert to Islam in return for her life. The traumatic event of this conversion was a keystone in Nemat's memoir. Things changed when Ali was killed in a drive-by shooting. She was forced back to prison until Ali's father used his influence with the top authorities to release her. Nemat explains that after Ali's death she tries hard to reconstruct her life and finally marries Andre, the love of her life, and immigrates to Canada.

2. Peritexts: The Covers of *Prisoner of Tehran*

Nemat uses some commonplace images on the cover of her *Prisoner of Tehran*. She comes up with several different images and captions for her text under different publishing houses. The images and their captions are appealing for the Western readers in different ways. In her Free Press Publication text (2007), she depicts a wall and a woman inside looking behind and beyond the wall. Some Persian words are written on the cover randomly and a perished rose flower is chained to a barbed wire. To begin with, she uses a thriller-like title, *Prisoner of Tehran*. This title and the drawings on the cover are captivating to a Western reader as they invoke curiosity for them and they also get the sense to liberate this woman. The wall stands for prison in the Islamic Republic; the woman is Marina herself and Iranian women longing for freedom; and the perished rose flower chained to the barbed wire stands for her peaceful and livelihood childhood which is ending and being shattered after the imprisonment. In another instance of the cover under the same publication, Nemat uses the same drawings but the woman and the scattered Persian words are excluded. Instead, she puts her own unveiled photo on the cover having glooming eyes brooding over her past life. However, this cover shows an intriguing caption 'One woman's story of survival inside an Iranian Prison.' 'Iran, Prison, and women' are all eye-catching words for a Western audience after the incident of 9/11 and after President George W. Bush's notorious speech of 'Axis of Evil' which was addressed to Iran, Iraq and North Korea.

In her 2008 text published by John Murray, the cover exhibits a burka-clad Middle Eastern woman. Her Eastern eyes, thick eyebrows, and upper part of her nose are showing. The caption reads 'one woman's story of survival inside a torture jail.' This image perfectly tallies with what was noted by Whitlock (2007): once sees an array of veiled women on covers of books, a Western audience gets the feeling to 'disentangle', 'liberate', and 'unveil' this Eastern woman. This image on the cover is the stereotypical and very cliché image which is used by Orientalists to show an Eastern woman. It also arouses Westerner's curiosity as to see who and what is behind the veil or the burka. In another cover of the text published by Penguin Group (Canada), she portrays a woman wearing *chador* showing only part of her face; less than half of her eyebrow, her cheek, and her eye are depicted. This image, probably, presumes that her other half is disappeared once she was jailed. All these images and captions are recruited only to pander and cater to the Western market and convince the Westerners that Middle Eastern women need to be liberated from the savagery of patriarchal rules. The following images are the four different covers of Nemat's *Prisoner of Tehran*.



Fig. 1 The different covers of *Prisoner of Tehran*

Nemat's text is authenticated on the back cover. It is endorsed by Quill & Quire, a Canadian magazine about books and publishing industry. It reads "Prisoner of Tehran is a harrowing journey, an account of growth under the darkest of circumstances and a trial of faith in the face of overwhelming horror. It is skillfully constructed, with a keen sense of suspense". These sentences are of great importance in creating a big circle of readership and it has a significantly important role in making the readers trust the author. The depictions, the titles, and subtitles of these two narratives are all devised to capture Western eye with a glance of absolute difference, of the exotic. Whitlock (2007) believes that this is a stratagem for positioning them in cosmopolitan market. Life narrative is particularly valuable good in the market economy, and its distribution in the public sphere is always cautiously managed. From this, it can be understood that why these life narratives from the Middle East are all inundated with peritexts. She argues that many of them feature maps; the political geography of the Middle East, Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan with a particular stress on their location in relation to the United States of America. Whitlock (2007) opines that one cannot speak of the 'authors' of these life narratives as "they are stories told to and shepherded by advocates" (2007: 57).

3. The Islamization of Wickedness

Islam in *Prisoner of Tehran* is depicted as the mythical monster, the religion of rules, control, brutality, misery and conformity. Muslims in these texts are rendered as exotic and they are 'Othered.' All the incidents of Nemat's imprisonment, torture, interrogations are brought upon her by men with Islamic background. Islam in Nemat's texts is aggressive and abusive of women; therefore, imperialist's intervention is justified to fight Islamic terrorism saving Muslim women from their own men "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 1988: 297). This kind of Muslim portrayal can be viewed in the light of Sardar's argument (1998: 13-14):

Postmodernism preserves- indeed enhances- all the classical and modern structures of oppression and domination. Hence, Other cultures are becoming prisoners in the world that postmodernism is creating... The indigenous knowledge of the Others, along with their history, is now being appropriated on an unprecedented scale to become consumer fodder for the West, to be recycled and exported back to non-Western cultures... the global media nowadays largely recycle the images of Orientalism and 'demon Others' or 'poverty-stricken Others' or 'blood-thirsty warring Others' ...

To display that Islam is an oppressive regime, she uses her conversations with Ali. Marina disagrees with Ali when Ali thinks oppression and brutality are essential to live. Ali opines that most of the prisoners who are killed in prison "brought it upon themselves" (2007: 245) and some of them were tortured or killed by Ali. In response to this, Marina says a human being should not and cannot decide about life and death and it is only God who judges life and death. Later, Ali claims that it is his job to "protect Islam, God's law and God's people from the evil forces that are at work against them" (2007: 211). Then, a question is raised: whose God is the right one? To justify his action, Ali further explains by asking "if someone holds a gun to your head and you get the chance to shoot and defend yourself, will you do it or will you die without fighting back?" (2007: 245) and Nemat responds, no matter what "I will not kill another human being" (2007: 245). This excerpt provides the notion that

Islam is fundamentally different from Christianity. It also shows the absurdity of religious bigotry. Hence, Islam is portrayed as “blood-thirsty warring Others” (Sardar 1998: 14).

Islam is strange to the West. The ‘Other’ Muslim is known for their religious intolerance in the Western countries. Thus, by representing a depiction of a Muslim man who is a fanatic religious person, the stereotype of the fundamentalist and intolerant ‘Other’ is, indeed, enhanced. Here, Islam is associated with killing of innocent people and the Western audiences feel that their values, as a Christian, are at odds with Islamic values. This promotes the idea that Islam is the religion of oppression and violence whereas Christianity is the religion of peace. Nemat herself implies that the Iran of the past was tolerant of different religions and people could practice their religion with no hitch and keeps condemning the present situation of Iran. However, she misses the irony that she herself is not tolerant of Islam as she is constantly criticizing it by portraying it in a negative fashion (Saljoughi 2008).

Nemat portrays Christianity as a saving force; a true faith that is always of support and help in times of need. She is a devoted practicing Christian contrary to those Muslims depicted by her who waiver and even question their faith and religion (Saljoughi 2008). On numerous occasions, she speaks of her devotion to Christianity: when she was taken to prison, she asks the guards to let her have her rosary for praying (2007: 11), under torture, she prays to Mary (2007: 21), and she sees beauty only in Christian’s rituals and she claims that the only place she feels safe and at home is the Roman Catholic Church (2007: 144). While praying with Arash on her Prayer Rock and before reciting a part of the Bible, she asserts that praying and reading the Bible is “like opening a window to heaven” (2007: 83). With these instances, she suggests that Christianity is a worthy religion where God would come to your help. Her forced conversion to Islam and choosing an Islamic name serve as a way to show the evil of Islam which captures a great number of various aspects of the present Orientalist through considering Islam and Muslim nations. On Nemat’s Christianity, Saljoughi (2008: 34) believes that:

Nemat’s Christianity becomes a prime site through which her book can be marketed and positioned in the Orientalist landscape and its war on terror. By using the premise of a Christian woman imprisoned in an Islamic country who is then forced to convert to Islam and be sexually intimate with one of her captors, Nemat’s work touches on the fear underlying the popular ‘clash of civilizations’ discourse. The widespread belief of the ‘clash of civilizations’ discourse in the West is what leads to accounts of Europe being ‘overrun’ by Muslims and fears of violent Muslim men becoming hegemonic manufactured ‘truths’.

Islam and Islamic laws are portrayed as weird. In an instance describing Mr. Moosavi, Ali’s father, she asserts that though in Islam “men are allowed to have more than one wife... Ali’s father, Hossein-eh Moosavi, had devoted himself to his only wife and two children” (2007: 179-180). We agree that this is allowed in Islam, but Nemat fails in mentioning that this is not common in the Iranian society. The way Nemat explains this causes the Western readers to feel that this is of popularity in Iran and Iran is a polygamous society. Here, Nemat simply wishes to provide the exotica for her neo-conservative masters. To present a more savage picture of Islam, in a depiction of Evin, the prison in Iran, an Islamic country, Nemat describes Evin as “people never talked about Evin; it was shrouded with fearful silence” (2007: 8), and it is a place where she hears a lot of prisoners are guilty with no trials and are tortured to death most often. She herself is one of them; and was nearly executed. The notorious Evin has been so from the time of its construction but Nemat misses the irony that American prisons under Christian laws are no better than Evin. The treatment of prisoners at Abu Gharib and Muslim detainees at Guantanamo Bay are instances of American imperialism’s brutality. The horrendous crimes committed by the authorities at these two places are as horrific as the ones that Nemat describes. All the brutal acts at these two sites including humiliation of prisoners, torturing and sexually abusing them, and making the prisoners witnessing their holy book, Quran, being flushed down a toilet are no different than being tortured and being coerced to convert to Islam and marry your prison interrogator (Saljoughi 2008).

Nemat’s *Prisoner of Tehran* is replete with Muslim women character negatively portrayed. In depicting Muslim women, she relies on the Orientalist generalization. Muslim women are shy, quiet and submissive in *Prisoner of Tehran*. She, on the contrary, as a Christian, is a brave and bold girl. On numerous occasions, she speaks of her bravery. In a scene explaining about the interrogation at Evin, Nemat makes general remarks about her captor who has been constantly asking her about her religion, Christianity, (2007: 14):

It seemed like I had truly amused him. Maybe I was the only Christian he had ever seen in Evin. He probably had expected me to be like the most Muslim girls from traditional families-quiet, shy, and submissive- but I didn’t have any of these qualities.

To boast of her Christian bravery, in the same interrogation scene at Evin, Nemat shows herself as different from other Iranian women as she is a Christian one. Her interrogator is captivated by her bravery as he asserts: “You

were very brave out there. Bravery is a rare quality in Evin. I've seen many strong men fall apart here" (2007: 13). This makes Nemat a super hero as even her captor, who is a villain, noticed her bravery. In the same scene again, her captor states: "A brave Christian girl...I can see that you're a brave girl, and I respect this ..." (2007: 14-16). When her interrogator asks her to give her friends' names, she decides not to name anyone and "put up a fight" (2007: 17) with them. According to Saljoughi (2008), it is not happenstance that she is not shy or quiet; it is her non-Muslim identity that makes her intrinsically candid and brave. Marina is oftentimes characterized exactly in opposite of Muslim women. She is depicted as a very strong girl in Evin; her character is far more different from her Husband and captor's, Ali, mother and sister. They are just like what Nemat describes of Muslim women: quiet and submissive. They do not disobey Mr. Moosavi, listening instead very quietly to him, and submitting to his decision easily. Nemat generalizes about Iranian Muslim women's submission and this, in fact, is a trope to kindle Western feminist sympathy towards women residing in the Third world countries. This promotes the idea that women in Iran are in dire need of assistance to liberate themselves from Muslim men.

The Muslim men are not left out from the colorful descriptions of religious bigotry. Fiore (2010) opines that Muslim men, in *Prisoner of Tehran*, are depicted in a negative fashion as violent, a fanatic religious, and controlling women's lives. When Nemat finds out that her name is on the list to be taken to prison, she says she cannot run away as "the revolutionary guards were merciless" (2007: 8) and take her parents in her stead. Hamehd, one of the captors of Marina, is a typical radical evil Muslim with a mean and scary personalities and having no space for compromise which exactly tallies with the West's interpretation of a Muslim man. Nemat speaks of Hamehd on a regular basis and shows that this hard-liner is a nemesis of her as he takes pleasure to torture her and take her life. He is seen killing prisoners while interrogating (2007: 225). Describing Revolutionary Guards, she states: "they were especially violent towards women who didn't wear the *hijab* properly" (2007: 136). Mr. Moosavi, Marina's father-in-law, is presented as a good Muslim man but Nemat implies that he is a good Muslim because people around him are doing what is right in his idea. This again shows that Muslim men are in control of women of their lives and women are submissive to their ideas and decisions. Ali, Marina's husband, despite all he does for Nemat, is portrayed as conflicted and torn. He is hesitant and he is the one that makes Nemat marry her. Marina marries her because if not, Ali would harm her family. He is both a tyrannical person and savior of Marina. Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic revolution, is shown having a stern face, always frowning; issuing orders to kill people who are infidel to Islam (2007: 40). Even his pictures which cover most walls are accompanied by venomous slogans like "Death to America", "Death to Israel", and "Death to Communist and All the Enemies of Islam" (2007: 6). Here, the readers get the image of the "blood-thirsty warring Others" that Sardar (1998: 14) asserts in postmodernist fiction.

The text's delegitimization of Islam simply suggests that Islam is a retarded religion. The stereotypical generalization about Islam and Muslims reflects Sardar's fourth principle of postmodernism, "meaninglessness" (Sardar 1998:10). Meaning abandons us in a world where there is no "truth and reason" because "reality has been drowned in an ocean of images; there is no possibility of meaning" (Sardar 1998: 10). The memoir possesses portrayals that are questionable and repeatedly represent their culture, country and people according to the previous Orientalist discourses.

The power of political Islam is belittled in this text. Kincheloe (2004: 60) reminds us that for the 1979 Revolution to happen, a great number of people were "obsessed with American geopolitical interests and Western modes of analysis... [to see] the important story emerging right before their eyes: the rise of political Islam". However, the author repudiates to validate the fact that political Islam is the very fundamental core in many Islamic states and Iran is no exception. Rather, the memoirist establishes a clear cut differentiation between those who back the regime who are the revolutionary guards and the extremist Muslims and rest of the people. According to Skalli (2004), many Middle Easterners thought they would lose their religion if concede to modernity brought up by the colonial projects. Fiore (2010: 93-94) asserts that:

Perhaps modernity brought about by US-backed dictators was not sustainable in a country that was still fiercely religious. Perhaps a country will seek modernity in a process that sees the country gradually made secular over generations of people becoming dissatisfied with their religious rulers, as was the case in much of the Western world. Perhaps this kind of forced modernity, while welcomed by some, those educated and rich enough to travel to other countries and be educated there, was destined to have some kind of backlash by those who felt their religion was being stolen from them and vilified unjustly.

Unfortunately, Nemat's treatment of Iran, as an Islamic regime, in her narrative never leaves any space for the audience to come to this sort of conclusions. Nemat, a Christian devotee, never questions her faith even under the threat of death; this leads to further censuring of Islam as a religion. Readers are left with many questions: Why did Nemat survive? Why was she a strong girl? Why do Nemat's friends give up in prison while she does

not? (Fiore 2010). We never wish to critique Nemat's devotion to Christianity as we believe that it is a common courtesy to respect all the religions, people and their views on religion, but we are concerned with the fact that the way Nemat portrays Islam can lead the readers to leap to the conclusion that Christianity is a better religion and Christians are more loyal to their religion as it is the religion of hope, all of which contribute to the Islamophobic perspectives of Orientalists. The treatment of Islam by Nemat is in alignment with Western's treatment of Islam and Muslims in their societies. Imam (2009) explains that in the West, especially in North America, Muslim-American children are expected to decorate a x-mas tree, sing the Christmas song, be costumed in Halloween, and give Valentine's Day cards. However, when some Muslim parents volunteered to explain about Eid celebration, the Muslim feast that celebrates the end of Ramadan, in their children school, they were told:

“We” cannot cover religion because “we” observe separation of church and state and therefore “we” won't be needing any holiday things for the Eid holiday; no guest speaker, no treats, no candy, and sometimes not even an Eid holiday greeting. (Imam 2009: 46 quoted in Fiore 2010)

Treatment of Muslims men in *Prisoner of Tehran* is usually depictions of revolutionary guards and very religious people suggesting that there is no diversity amongst Muslims. It shows as if there is no moderate Muslim or a secular Muslim person in Iran. They are all either naïve or mean and vulnerable to propaganda. They are portrayed as violent, irate, perilous, and out of touch with reality. This again contributes to the Islamophobic portrayal of Muslims by the Orientalist. The memoir shows women under an Islamic regime as victims and this implication is quite risky as 'women's freedom' provides a good alibi for a war against the regime. By doing so, the author presents the standard picture of the 'Other' to the West which was already obvious in their Orientalist writings. It is admitted that women are subordinated to enact the male Islamist patriarchal rules but we feel alienated that Nemat generalizes and reduces the whole Muslims as radical Muslims; we also feel that Nemat's text is recruited less to reveal the iniquitous behaviors of the Islamic regime than to promote them in a way that best serves the empire. This stereotypical representation conjures up Bhabha's argument of stereotypical representation.

Bhabha (1990) is of the idea that the present writings are, in one way or other, under the influence of works of the past either they are canonical texts of the West or discourses of the native. He believes that writings are neither completely true nor original since elements from the past will intervene with the process of current writing. To create the nation-space, people are involved in a double narrative and are taught in double time (Bhabha 1990: 296). This takes place as the writers have to use the past in creating today or the future. Therefore, one can assume that national life is built on repetition and reproduction of the past. This memoir is “double narrative” written in “double time”; though written in 2000s, it reproduces and repeats the past, and in this sense Orientalist ideas of the past. Nemat appropriates the image of the nation that was already structured by Western discourse. Bhabha (1994) believes that stereotypical representation is never used to show an accurate depiction of colonial subjects, but rather to simply ensure their inferiority.

4. The Westernization of Goodness

The West is depicted as good and glorified in *Prisoner of Tehran*. There cannot be found a single assertion suggesting that the West is accountable for the direct or indirect engagement of doing anything wrong. The West is associated with everything positive. The portrayed interpretation of the West which is presented to the reader is “misinformed, ill-intentioned, misplaced, and exaggerated” and can be considered as a major disloyalty of the Western audience, “one typical of the New Orientalist narrative” (Keshavarz 2007:127).

Nemat associates good things with the West and Western stuff. She likes Western novel, Western music and Western dance. When going to her father dance studio, she “imagines the music, usually a waltz, because that was my favorite, and spun and danced around the room” (2007: 27-28). Waltz, European dance music, is her favorite. Speaking of her father's dance studio and the Western culture popularity in Iran, she asserts that “Since many American and British soldiers passed through Iran during the war, Western culture became popular among the higher class, so my father found many faithful students who wished to learn to dance like Westerners” (2007: 27). Once in a party, she along with her friends dances to a song of the Bee Gees, Western singers (2007: 75). To prove that she and her family had a Western life style and cared for Western things, she states that her mother went to Germany to take a hairdressing course. When she comes back, she opens a beauty salon (2007: 28). This also indicates that her mother's customers like Western hair-style as that is why she has left for Germany to learn hairdressing.

By concentrating on her identity of Russian-Iranian, Saljoughi (2008) believes that Nemat is not only bolstering her image as different from the majority of Iranians but also shows that her Western part of the identity is much better than the Eastern one. Nemat's paternal and maternal grandmothers are Russian; her paternal grandmother, who figures in the memoir as the member of a family with whom she has very affectionate relationship, is the

immediate connection to Nemat's Russian identity. Nemat's grandmother sticks to her Russian identity very obstinately at the cost of disliking all respects of Iranian society. Before the young Nemat gets the chance to learn Persian at school, her grandmother tells her: "You know very well that I don't like to speak Persian. Russian is a much better language." (2007: 26). Moreover, Nemat is taught that "we only speak Russian" (2007: 26). When meeting Arash's, her boyfriend, grandmother, the woman is described with "a big smile" as being so rejoiced in his finding a "Russian girl", "How nice! Now you have a girlfriend! Not even an ordinary girlfriend, but a nice Russian one" (2007: 78). Nemat is proud of the Russian part of her identity which links her to the Western audience (Saljoughi 2008).

The Western readers are guarded against any bitter fact. *Prisoner of Tehran* is a memoir of selective memories; erasing the historical facts and situations in favor of imperialism. In spite of copious references to the 1980 Iran-Iraq war, Nemat never mentions the courage, devotion, honor, or any other qualities like motivation among the Iranians who gave their lives to resist the aggressive Saddam Hossein. They were encouraged by the government to become martyrs as "the government announced, becoming martyrs; after all, guaranteed way to go to heaven" (Nemat 2007: 139). According to Keshavarz (2007), obviously, there are people who rush to war in response to a promise of a hero's reward. These kinds of people can arise anytime and anywhere even outside of Iran. Is there any war without propaganda? The answer is no. For example, the American soldiers fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, thousands of miles away from their home. Can anyone say there is no propaganda involved? After all, Iraqis were the aggressors; they were the one who first began to attack (Keshavarz, 2007). While she condemns both the Islamic Republic and Iraq's leader Saddam Hussein, she never criticize the U.S politics in the region, never mentioning that the United States backed Iraq during its war against Iran and omitting the CIA staged coup d'état to topple the democratically elected Prime Minister, Mohammad Mosadeq. Rather, she keeps referring to the hostage crisis of the American embassy in Tehran. Another characteristic of a native informer, as Dabashi (2011) states, is the "selective memory" of historical incidents that writers such as Nemat apply in her text.

Unsurprisingly, the memoir despises the hostage taking of the American Embassy by a group of young Iranian students in 1979. A considerable number of Iranian public also abhorred the hostage taking but it was only mentioned in passing in Nemat's text where she asserts that this act of hostage taking "sounded like absolute madness to me and to everyone I talked to" (2007: 116). Failing to mention that Iranian public also disapproved of this act, the Western readers are presented with descriptions of gathering of happy throng outside the occupied American Embassy chanting slogans 'Death to America'. A host of Iranian public reprimanded the hostage taking of the American Embassy and believed that those hostage takers did a very wrong job irrespective of America's fault in its foreign affair (Keshavarz 2007). Keshavarz (2007) believes that informing the readers of the tent filled with political "propaganda against America is not a fair representation of the material"; she is of the idea that the Western readers have every right to know that the slogans of the tent "reflected a broader global perception of what is known as America's use of might against those who disagree with its views and interests" (2007: 129).

Nemat glorifies the Western literature in her text as well. She concentrates too much on Western literature and only mentions Persian literature in passing. For Nemat, the Western novels are her "escape and solace" (2007: 143). She visits a used bookstore in Tehran, whose books are all in English and whose owner she depicts as a 'savior'. The owner of the bookstore, Albert, lends her *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to begin a friendship. "For three years, my visits to Albert's bookstore were the highlight of my life" (2007: 56). In a scene talking to her aunt Zenia, her aunt tells her that she knows what books Marina is reading and names few of them "*Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, Gone with the Wind, Little Women, Great Expectation, Doctor Zhivago, War and Peace*" (2007: 86), all Western novels. When released from prison, she searches her room to find her Western novels and books but her mother had ripped them and that is when Marina misses "*The Chronicle of Narnia*" (2007: 269) the most as it was signed by Albert. The memoirist suggests that Western literature has the ability to lift her onto the imaginary plane and saves her from the burdens of living in Iran. Her respect for Western literature links her to Western readers where she illustrates her regard and concern for Western culture and her adherence to the notion of its 'superiority' over the Orient. For Nemat, Western literature is a sort of 'salvation' or 'escape', one that presumably is the sole source of 'salvation' for a Muslim country as well (Saljoughi 2008). As a part of native informer's writing, the writer has to associate good things with the West to maintain the hegemonic power of the empire. The memoirist writes what she sees from her own position and has to deny some realities to create her own imagined realities. This brings up Sardar's second and third principles of postmodernism. The second principle that he reveals is "the denial of reality" (1998: 9). He argues that in postmodernism "we see largely what we want to see, what our position in time and place allows us to see, what our cultural and historic perceptions focus on." because there is no "ultimate reality" (Sardar 1998: 9). The third principle announces that because there is no reality the world is a "simulacrum" where "all distinction between

image and material reality has been lost” (Sardar 1998: 10). Therefore, Sardar argues that “All social life is... regulated not by reality but by simulations, models, pure images and representations” (1998: 10); hence, reality in this sense is what the narrator creates. This also resembles Bhabha’s theory of nation and narration in which nation comes into existence through narratives. Images in the postmodernism which are created in narratives are considered as reality and truth.

5. Dreamland vs. Birthland: Past vs. Present

Nemat’s text is particularly engineered to negate the liveliness and basic dignity of Muslims residing in the West and throughout the Islamic societies. A common element to her text, in showing Iran, is the comparison of the past to the present Iran. Most of the time she explains about a scene, an event, and a trait from the past and immediately after juxtaposes it with the reality in the present. Past always carries fond memories as it was happier and safer. Thus, it is praised much and is depicted positively contrary to the negatively depicted present by the author.

Nemat’s dreamland is Canada, an ideal place and a utopia to live, in her mind. Right at the outset of her narrative, Canadian readers, Western in this sense, get to know that they live in a much better place and they are so lucky to be Canadian. She shows this West/East dichotomy, Canada as the land of freedom and Iran as nothing, in an opening sentence: “There is an ancient Persian proverb that says: “The sky is the same color wherever you go.” But the Canadian sky was different from the one I remembered from Iran; it was a deeper shade of blue and seemed endless, as if challenging the horizon” (2007: 1). The Canadian sky is depicted but the image of the Iranian sky is left out probably to create an ‘Other’ assuming it with no traits and features. The Canadian sky is a metaphor that provides liberty, happiness and opportunity, when it is described as ‘endless’ which challenges territories represented by ‘horizon’. There is nothing negative about Canada in Nemat’s mind as she portrays Canada as a perfect place in her narrative. They arrived at the Airport in Toronto “on August 28, 1991, a beautiful sunny day” (2007:1).

Immediately, Nemat establishes a connection with Canadians in praising Canada’s geography as she asserts: “the vastness of the landscape astonished me” (2007: 2). However, she also establishes herself as a storyteller writing as an ‘ideal’ emigrant who can compare her country of birth, Iran to the new land of freedom and opportunity. By comparing the two countries, Nemat means to suggest that, of course in an Orientalist way, limits and boundaries in the West can be pushed and extended but there are only fixed identities or ways of being in the ancient East (Saljoughi 2008). She describes a Canada that gave her and family of hers a new life; “And we did build a new life. My husband found a good job, we had another son, and I learned how to drive” (2007:2). A “good job”, a new “son”, and “learning how to drive” indicate that Canada as a land of possibility is a promising land that imposes no restrictions whatsoever. Once reading this sentence, Western readers will probably think that having a good job and learning how to drive for women in Iran is next to impossible. At a later point when they bought a house in the suburbs of Toronto, she boasts of her Canadian identity and tells of her pleasant life in Canada as she says: “we...became proud middle-class Canadian, tending our backyard, driving the boys to swimming, soccer, and piano lessons, and having friends over for barbecues” (2007:2).

Canada was very much like a fairytale for Nemat when she was in Iran. In a scene describing her brother’s departure to Canada and portraying Iran after the 1979 revolution, she explains that her brother and his wife had left the county sometime after the revolution and had immigrated to Canada. Further, she says they left the country as they had understood that in the Islamic Republic, there was no future for them. To complete her negative depiction of Iran, she claims that Iran denied its citizens the right to migrate to other countries shortly after the Revolution. That was when “Canada” became farfetched for her as she states: “I like the name “Canada”; it sounded far away and very cold but peaceful. My brother and his wife were lucky to be there. They could live a normal life and worry about normal things” (2007:137). She closes her narrative in an epilogue concluding that Canada is “where we would belong” as it “safe’, beautiful and a free county (2007:298). This sentence is singled out because Nemat bolsters the fantasy of Canada’s project of nation- building - that irrespective of one’s nationality, a life in Canada means egalitarianism and liberty to be oneself. Canada is a county in the West, it is the Great White North, a place in which Nemat can live to disentangle herself from the terrible place called the Islamic Republic of Iran.

En route to her land of possibilities, waiting in a line at the airport in Zurich, Switzerland, she sees a group of Canadian students and feels jealousy asking herself “what it felt like to be a Canadian” (2007:298). She stares at the students and guarantees herself that they would have a good life in Canada. To end her epilogue and to give a brief description of the Canadian students, having bright smiles, she puts (2007: 298):

I knew at that moment, as I watched those teenagers with their bright and carefree smiles, that we would be fine in Canada. It would be our new home where we would be free and feel safe, where we would raise our children and watch them grow, and where we would belong.

To be a 'Canadian' which is Nemat's articulated ambition, echoes on the fact that one's personality and personal concern gain superiority in the West which is in exact opposite to the despotic Islamic regime. This longing for a common Canadian-ness is indicative of "sustained hegemonic empire-building" (Saljoughi 2008: 40). This is articulated, in Nemat's text, by embracing the West which very conspicuously ignores any kind of abatement on the part of Western countries in creating the very situations in the countries of the Third World from which Nemat and others are fleeing. She is grateful to Canada as she puts "this strange country that had offered us refuge when we had nowhere to go" (2007: 1). Nemat strengthens her sameness with the Western audience through embracing Canada which makes her narrative authoritative (Saljoughi 2008). Nemat bolsters the concept that the imperialism is needed to save the Third World countries through her reflection on how the geopolitical place of Canada has assisted her to conciliate her traumatization. Nemat's account of life in Canada is pithy and is depicted through rose-colored glasses. When writing about the Canadian immigration process, she only refers to a county that "had offered us refuge" (2007: 2). She never mentions the strenuous and discriminatory measurements through which a temporary/permanent status is given to people for immigration (Saljoughi 2008). To depict post-revolutionary Iran, Nemat portrays an absolutely negative picture of Iran. Nemat keeps referring to the hostage taking which happened in 1979 and the demonstration of Iranians against the United States asked by Khomeini as he calls America the "Great Satan" (2007:116). She never understands the revolution as she time and again mentions "nothing had really made sense since the revolution" (2007:116) and it "brought nothing but destruction and violence" (2007: 137). The whole sense of the revolution is disparaged to zero as she never points out that why this revolution happened. She overlooks mentioning Shah's dictatorial regime and what it had done to the nation. She was against the revolution and wanted it not to happen. As the school year of 1979-80 began, she felt like she "was sinking into darkness. Everything gradually changed for worse" (2007: 133). Watching the streets from the window of a bus, the Iran she sees is a dejected place like "All color and happiness had been drained from the city. People only wore dark-colored clothes and looked down as they walked...Almost every wall was covered with harsh slogans that promoted hatred" (2007: 115). The comparison of the past Iran to the present Iran is common in Nemat's work. According to Fiore (2010), Nemat shows the Iran before the revolution as democratic and tolerant of many different religions: "Before the revolution, at least in my lifetime, people's beliefs and faith had never been an issue. We had girls of different religions in my school, but we have been expected to ... be polite and respectful of one another..." (2007: 110). To provide another example of this, she shows this in a scene where she, a Christian, and her boyfriend Arash, a Muslim prayed together accepting one other's religion: "I have to say my prayers before sunset," Arash told me that evening as we sat in his backyard. "Can I watch you?" "You come up with the strangest ideas," he said. But he agreed, and I watched him without saying a word. (2007: 81). Sometimes later in the text, Marina is reading Arash a part of Bible (2007: 83). Later, Nemat shows that Arash was the first person she fell in love with. She employs this passage to indicate that the post-revolutionary Iran is not tolerant of different religions. She also displays that in Iran during the Shah, a woman wearing a mini-skirt could be standing next to a woman wearing *chador*: "This was the time of the Shah and women didn't have to dress according to Islamic Rules" (2007: 24). She should have explained to her Western audience that during Reza Shah's reign, women were coerced to unveil irrespective of their religious tenets and beliefs and even in Mohamamd Reza Shah's time, there was a discriminatory policy against veiled women though the Unveiling Act was lifted. She fails to elucidate for her readers that political dissenters, during the Shah, were opposed very severely by Shah's secret police, SAVAK. This kind of selective writing is a typical phenomenon in native informers' writings where they intentionally do not disclose some realities in favor of imperialism (Dabashi 2011). Her explicit abhorrence of post-revolutionary Iran is obvious in a statement where she feels like a stranger in the Iran after the revolution (2007: 103-104):

The world in which I had grown up and the rules by which I had lived and which I had believed to be set in stone were falling apart. I hated the revolution. It had caused violence and bloodshed, and I was sure this was just a beginning. Soon came the military curfew, and soldiers and military trucks appeared at every corner. I was a stranger in my own life.

To delegitimize post-revolutionary Iran, Nemat tells the story of her imprisonment as the aggressive result of the Islamic Republic's revolution. She informs the readers of the time when she was 16 and was charged and declared guilty with no trials. That is how the Western readers would surely see the Iranian government as illegitimate and get the feeling of wanting to help the Iranian women under the barbarous regime. Later, she describes how the Islamic Republic banned everything beautiful and how it was against beauty. This is illustrated in a scene going to school when the school's principal, Khanoom Mahmoodi, and the vice principal, Khanoom Kheirkhah "stood at the school entrance with a bucket of water and a washcloth and inspected every student entering the school. If they saw one of the girls wearing makeup, they scrubbed her face until it hurt"

(2007:134). This is the 'exotica' which the Western audience is looking for in narratives from Muslim countries. The Iran of the past is idealized as a period of cultural and religious freedom. Nemat implies that Iran before the revolution was much better than the present Iran. That is the reason for the author's idealization of the past. Nemat and the characters love to look back as the current condition of Iran is repulsive. This contributes to the West's assumption about Islam that regards all Muslim as backward and against anything modern. The Western readers are led to believe that they should help Iranians by helping them to go back to the better time. Nemat's life narrative and life narratives like hers sketch the life, culture, and people of Iran using irony which reflect Sardar's first principle by deriding their people and cultures. Sardar argues the knowledge of the postmodernist is not produced "through inquiry but by imagination" (Sardar 1998: 9). He asserts that "Irony, ridicule and parody are the basic tools with which this postmodernist goal is to be achieved" (Sardar 1998: 9).

Saljoughi (2008) argues that Nemat uses known event and shared memories with the Western audience to make her narrative reliable and to portray the horrible post-revolutionary Iran. She utilizes the incident of Zahra Kazemi, a Canadian-Iranian photojournalist who passed away in 2003 in Iran after being apprehended, jailed and beaten to death accused for taking photographs of a demonstration outside Evin. Nemat is, in fact, taking advantage of the grass roots' knowledge about or their interest in Zahra Kazemi's story. By linking to Kazemi's catastrophic case, Saljoughi (2008) opines that Nemat tries to imply that there are similarities between what she went through and what happened to Kazemi. Nemat claims that the world noticed Kazemi's death because she was Canadian (2007: 299). Nemat's narrative is meant to corroborate the expectation of Canadian readers of Iran that this country is predestined to be located in 'bad news' sect of the newspaper. Nemat's utilization of the well-publicized Kazemi's case is, indeed, an Orientalist repetition of Middle Eastern women to already restricted grass root knowledge of Iran. It also provides Nemat with a way to make her book be singled out amidst a large number of other prison memoirs replete with bravery and courage but never get a great deal of attention as Nemat's narrative. To conclude, she asserts in postscript (2007: 301):

I wished I could have saved Zahra. I wished I had died with her. But my death wouldn't have helped anyone. I had a story to tell. Zahra had given Iran's political prisoners a name and a face; now it was my turn to give them words.

6. Conclusion

Nemat's narrative is not just a documentary text based on her life. Rather, these kinds of books are a fiction created in favor of Western imperialism and neo-conservatism. The treatment of Islam, Muslims, and the land of her birth are projected as weird and unfavorable to the foreign gaze. This bizarre treatment serves politics and it is employed in favor of imperialism. That is how she panders to the Western prejudices; planting a negative depiction of Islam and Muslims in the minds of the Western audiences. This deliberately ignorance is based on an androcentric theory that Muslim women are always docile, submissive and passive creatures in Islamic countries and with displaying this while being dramatized, her text create justification for the foreign intervention to save women. Thus, why these narratives are appealing and attractive to the West should be evaluated in the context of foreign policies of the West. The Orientalization of Islam and Muslims in this text is used to capture Western attention, and to attract the global market.

It is admitted that women are subordinated to enact the male Islamist and patriarchal rules of the society but Nemat makes a generalization about a large portion of Iranian population by assuming position of 'otherness' in Iran. That generalization such as her depictions of gender relations reinforces the notions of Orientalism about Iran that are vitally significant in legitimizing the Western supremacy. The discourse of Orientalism authenticates the West as 'modern' and sophisticated' and relegates Iran to 'tradition', a euphemism for 'unsophisticated.' *Prisoner of Tehran* presents to the West the 'Otherness' that the West is already familiar with from the previous discourses of Orientalism. Although a reiteration, it is still wanted by the West to bolster the Orientalist binary; this can be called re-orientalisation. Nemat's text is also significantly important for the West as it can manufacture consent for the public that Iran needs to be intervened militarily; hence, she can be a native informer serving imperialism. Nemat's familiarity with the expectations of the Western readers helped her to have an authentic-sounding account. She wrote her narrative for the Western consumption. Unfortunately, many Western readers take her memoir as pure truth and reality. However, Western readers should be aware of the fact that what the authors record in their narratives is only one person reality. What they write is a recollection which is altered and amended over time by some subjective factors.

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