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CULTURE AND POLITICS IN ALI SMITH'S *FIRST PERSON AND OTHER STORIES*

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M.A. Thesis

Ahmed Khamees Ahmed Albobdran

Supervisor

Doç. Dr. Seda Pekşen

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Examining Committee Members

Title, Name and Surname	**Signature**
Prof. Dr. Nazan Tutaş	**…….**
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Seda Pekşen	**……..**
Assist. Prof. Dr. Mustafa Kırca	**……..**

Examining Date:

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Ahmed Khamees Ahmed ALBO BDRAN

Abstract

The concepts of politics and culture play a pivotal role in humanities and literary studies with an increased interest in the dialectical relationship between the two concepts. These two concepts have taken a wide and important space in literary works, as in the example of Ali Smith's *First Person and Other Stories*. This study examines the sociopolitical norms, codes, and beliefs that govern people's relationships with one another, as portrayed in *Ali Smith's First Person and Other Stories*; focusing on how the socio-political milieu of society affects the various levels of relationships as well as the perspective of the characters, the study analyzes all twelve stories of Ali Smith's *The First Person and Other Stories*. Drawing on these two fundamental concepts, this study reiterates that individuals build their relationships based on beliefs, norms, status, and ideology of the group or class to which they belong. Thus, in every interpersonal relationship, different socio-political realities collide. Moreover, there is a close and interrelated relationship and, in some cases, a great overlap between the two concepts since most of the political and social issues, in their essence, refer back to cultural phenomena.

Key Words: Politics, Culture, Ali Smith, The First Person and Other Stories

ÖZET

Siyaset ve kültür kavramları, iki kavram arasındaki diyalektik ilişkiye artan ilgi ile beşeri bilimler ve edebiyat çalışmalarında çok önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu iki kavram, Ali Smith'in *İlk Kişi ve Diğer Öyküler* örneğinde olduğu üzere, edebi eserlerde geniş ve önemli bir yer tutmuştur. Bu çalışma, toplumun sosyo-politik ortamının çeşitli ilişki düzeylerini ve karakterlerin bakış açısını nasıl etkilediğine odaklanarak, Ali Smith'in *İlk Kişi ve Diğer Öyküler*'inde tasvir edildiği haliyle, insanların birbirleriyle ilişkilerini yöneten sosyopolitik normları, kodları ve inançları incelemekte ve Ali Smith'in *İlk Kişi ve Diğer Öyküler*'indeki on iki öykünün tamamını incelemektedir. Bu temel iki kavramdan hareket ederek bu çalışma, bireylerin ilişkilerini, ait oldukları grubun veya sınıfın inançlarına, normlarına, statüsüne ve ideolojisine dayalı olarak kurduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bundan dolayı, kişilerarası her ilişkide, farklı sosyo-politik gerçeklikler birbiriyle çatışmaktadır. Dahası, siyasi ve sosyal meselelerin büyük bir kısmı özünde kültürel olgulara atıfta bulunduğundan, iki kavram arasında yakın ve birbiriyle bağlantılı bir ilişki ve bazı durumlarda da büyük bir örtüşme mevcut bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Siyaset, Kültür, Ali Smith, İlk Kişi ve Diğer Öyküler

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INTRODUCTION

The concepts of culture and politics play an important role in literary and critical studies. The centrality of these concepts explains why these concepts have been included widely in a considerable number of literary works. Moreover, culture and politics are concepts represented in literary texts. Although there have been several ideological discussions about the operation of culture in and its effect on society, social discrimination and other social injustices continue to be prevalent in human society. With this in mind, the study examines the whole stories in Ali Smith's *First Person and Other Stories* to explore how the underlying structures influence and affect the relationships between characters in the short story. The study examines the sociopolitical norms, codes, and beliefs that govern people's relationships with one another, as portrayed in Ali Smith's *First Person and Other Stories*. Furthermore, it examines how the socio-political milieu of society affects the various levels of relationships as well as the perspective of the characters. This thesis analyzes the operation of culture and politics in the whole Ali Smith's *First Person and Other Stories*. Drawing on these two fundamental concepts this study reiterates that individuals build their relationships based on beliefs, norms, status, and ideology of the group or class to which they belong. Thus, in every interpersonal relationship, different socio-political realities collide.

This study is significant on several levels because it offers an eclectic approach to reading and interpreting Ali Smith's *First Person and Other Stories* in light of the socio-political factors that influence the perspective and behavior of individuals in their relationships with others. Further,this study gains its significance from the fact that Ali

Smith's *The First Person and Other Stories* has not previously been studied in an academic context. And it is one of the first academic studies to have analysed the entire collection, which makes it a unique and original study; despite the limitations in finding sources. It is also one of the first studies to focus on the cultural and political aspects in Ali Smith's stories. Furthermore, it pushes the boundaries of culture and politics studies in fiction and examines why social ills such as social discrimination, gender inequality, and other conflicts continue to exist despite multiple theoretical, creative, and activist efforts in the humanities and other fields.

The importance of Ali Smith's *The First Person and Other Stories* lies in raising the readers' awareness by referring to the humanitarian problems and crises that societies face. It promotes to the reader a broader understanding of cultural diversity. This understanding contributes to political and social stability, and helps build social relationships on a human basis that transcends innate and cultural differences and distinctions. In addition, this collection addresses aspects of everyday life that affect readers and their concerns. It also provides rationales for the chronic social ills that afflict human societies.

Culture is one of the most important sources that influence the level of incitement that it sows in the souls to reject injustice. Culture also plays a pivotal role in forming the national and human identity. The study of culture and politics aims to highlight this strong influence and to understand the relationship between culture, politics, and knowledge. Without cultural power, there would be no human discourse; no cultural products such as art, poetry, film, literature, news, or architecture, or even morality or religious practice; nor any of the other elements that define our identities as human beings. Moreover, such studies

aim to understand the culture as a means of producing specific identities, social relationships, and ways of understanding ourselves and the world as well as understanding cultural diversity. Furthermore, understanding how culture and politics are embodied in literary works empowers the reader as agents of change raising their awareness collectively as an audience.

The topic of culture and politics aims to provide readers with a clear understanding of the relationship between culture, knowledge, and socio-political relationships. It also draws the focus on establishing new perspectives to promote a deeper understanding of different cultures, history, historical political events, and social justice, to make a difference in a world characterized by hierarchies of power and cultural conflicts. It also provides the opportunity for a more comprehensive understanding of historical, political, and social issues through literature, the practice of critical thinking about self and society, and the advancement of analytical abilities through collaborative problem-solving.

The first chapter of this study discusses the theoretical framework adopted as a basis for analyzing the short stories. The concept of culture and politics, and their impact on the literary context are discussed. All the stories are analyzed in the light of these two basic concepts, in addition to an equally important topic, which is racism and discrimination, which has been devoted a separate section. These concepts serve as a basis for the stories that include references and meanings related to racism and discrimination in the subsequent chapters. In addition, the basic concepts of culture, politics, racism, and discrimination are employed as a fundamental basis to analyze all the stories contained in *The First Person and Other Stories*.

The second chapter deals with political and social issues portrayed in the stories, focusing mainly on historical events that formed a turning point in human history and later changed the course of many concepts and attitudes of a political and social nature. In this chapter, the thesis touches upon how Smith manages to employ those events in the literary path in the service of humanitarian issues within the historical context from the political and social points of view. The thesis examines these issues through the story of "Fidelio and Bess." Smith mixes art, literature, history, and politics by embodying political, social, and historical events in the opera within the literary context. The story includes a reference to political events in the pre-revolutionary French era through the opera *Fidelio,* as well as the social and economic conditions that afflicted the African American community in America by referring to the Bess opera in this story.

Smith also focuses on the involvement of music and art in expressing the issues of racism and discrimination that afflicted the African American community by referring to anti-racist songs and poems as an expression of rejection of injustice and oppression. Smith employs these concepts by referring to two songs from American history, "A Tisket A Tasket" and "Strange Fruit." In addition to pointing out the importance of multiculturalism and acceptance of others in human societies, the issue of social injustice is epitomized in the story "Third Person", which touches on the hierarchy and class that govern the characters' relationship among them. It also touches on the beggary and child labor, in addition to the use of children in wars. In the analysis of "No Exit", the topics of globalization, imperialism, and cultural conflict are addressed, as the story's events take place in a cinema that represents a symbol of the international conflict.

The third chapter covers the dynamics of the relationships between the characters in the stories, and the references to the relationships between the past and present. The chapter also explores the topics of continuity, change, and the difference between the past and the present, as well as misperceptions among the characters. In the analysis of "Writ", the concepts of the past and the present are examined in the character's internal dialogue, as it represents an extensive comparison in the political, cultural, and social framework, as the present meets the past through this character. In the analysis of "Astute fiery luxurious" multiple topics were examined, the most important of which is the reference to political and environmental issues. The story "The First Person" represents a return to the past, longing, and nostalgia, in addition to the idea of aging, continuity, and love. "The Present" refers to the social interactions, and to the discussions of the Christmas from the past and the present perspectives. The chapter also focuses on the discussion of the difference between the short story and the novel as portrayed in "True Short Story."

In the fourth and final chapter, the stories are interpreted and analyzed in the context of feminist literature, as feminist literature is part of the political, social, and cultural movement. The issue of gender discrimination is addressed through the story "History of History, "which includes a reference to an important historical incident, which is the execution of Queen Mary, as well as a reference to the murder of Princess Diana, and it is analyzed within the context of victimization of feminine gender. In the analysis of "The Child," the concept of gender roles and motherhood are discussed within the framework of the culture of the dominant patriarchal society.

The main purpose of these analyses of stories is to examine the concepts of culture and politics and to explore the dialectical relationship between these two concepts. In

addition, the analysis aims to focus on the social, political and cultural issues referred to in these stories, and to know the role of fiction in covering these critical issues that occupy a wide space in human consciousness and play a key role in the formation of the cultural and political identity of peoples.

CHAPTER ONE

CULTURE AND POLITICS IN FICTION

This chapter opens with a discussion on the concept of culture and proceeds to discuss the concept of politics in a literary context. Furthermore, the concepts of racism and discrimination are discussed in a separate section of the chapter in order to establish the context for the whole study before moving on to the analyses of the short stories. This thesis will focus on the specific uses and function of the concepts of culture and politics in literature when handled from particular perspectives. This chapter thus presents the foundation for the entire thesis and offers a background to the key concepts.

1.1 Culture and Politics

The concepts of culture and politics play an important role in literary and critical studies and have been defined by many scholars in several different ways. In the words of Antonio Lebron:

> Culture refers to society and its way of life. It is defined as a set of values and beliefs, or a cluster of learned behaviors, that we share with others in a particular society and give us a sense of belonging and identity. The forms that cultures take depend on what individuals can think, imagine and learn and on what collective behaviors shape and sustain viable life patterns in ecosystems. (126)

In this context, culture is a body of expectations placed on members of a particular society and is also the medium of correction and reinforcement. It is as a result of such notions of culture that Clifford Geertz explains that "culture is public" (12). This view of Geertz

entails that culture is not exclusive to an individual; rather, it is a societal construct to which individuals of a particular society are expected to align. On this note, culture can be regarded as a complex system of norms, codes, behaviors, attitudes, and traditions specific to a particular community. This further means that culture is a system of normative behavior codes to which a particular group of people is expected to adhere constantly.

Thus, it can be argued that culture is relative because each society has different cultural codes. Furthermore, the above notions of culture imply that culture is a manufactured environment that encompasses all material and non-material aspects of a group and is passed on from one generation to the next. Culture, then, is a universal phenomenon with national or geographic variations; it is the way of life of a particular social group.

According to Mariam Abdulla, the word culture is one of the most complex words in the English language. This complexity stems from the fact that it is used in different disciplines and exists in different forms even within the same discipline. This explains the prevalence of organizational, familial, religious, and national cultures. There is also an increasingly popular dimension to culture, referred to as popular culture (Abdulla 106). To understand cultural manifestation, it is necessary to understand the context in which culture operates. This also indicates problems in explaining what defines or constitutes culture since it is a product of varying contexts. The complexities of defining what constitutes culture imply that one could encounter different manifestations of culture in a literary text. There is a need to effectively understand the contextual underpinning for each cultural manifestation in the text. That is why, in the analyses of the stories by Ali Smith, I will

focus on these contextual underpinnings in a way that lays bare the particular manifestations of culture.

For reducing the complexity associated with the concept of culture, Abdulla suggests creating a typology for what constitutes culture. According to Abdulla, culture can be approached on two levels: "the level of cultural expressions and the level of belief systems, values, ideas, and attitudes" (106). She further argues that these two approaches to understanding culture are "based on the common use of two definitions of culture in the literature: non-material culture (ideas created by members of a society) and material culture (things created by members of a society)" (Abdulla 106). It can be inferred from Abdulla's view that culture is a system of mental processes that finds expression in the acts exhibited by individuals of a definite social group. Culture is what individuals conceive and express as it relates to a given social group.

This means that culture is both a mental process (influenced by what is available in society) and an expression of that process. Therefore, in the textual analysis of the manifestation of culture, there is a need to investigate mental processes and behaviors which are influenced by shared social codes to understand from which particular culture a mental process manifested in behavior emanates. To further buttress this view, Flourish Itulua-Abumere explains that

> Culture can be conceptually distinguished from society, but these notions have close connections. A Society is a system of interrelationships that connects individuals together. All societies are united because their members are organized in structured social relationships according to a unique culture. No culture could exist without societies. Nevertheless, equally, no society could exist without culture. Without culture, we

> would not be 'human' at all, in the sense in which we usually understand that term. We would have no language in which to express ourselves, no sense of self-consciousness, and our ability to think or reason would be severely limited. (1)

The above excerpt indicates that culture is the system of beliefs that shapes the individual's lifestyle and manifests itself in the thought patterns of individuals. In addition, culture is also the physical expression of these thought patterns. Culture as an expression is the obvious means by which a society's belief system is expressed through dance, literature, music, and other forms of expression. To further emphasize this, Abdulla explains that: "culture is communicated through various art forms, which provide a way for people to construct creations showing how they think and view the world, to express ideas and emotions". (106)

Literature is one of the mediums for the expression of cultural codes, norms, and beliefs. This simply entails that the cultural codes can inform the creative depictions in the literary texts of a specific society. This emphasizes a clear interrelatedness between culture and literature. According to Hesaraki, there is a bilateral relationship between culture and literature in that culture establishes a situation and context within which literature can flourish. In contrast, literature helps to extend the veneers of cultural codes and norms to a larger reach beyond a geographical location. This entails that literature is a key tool in the mobility of cultural norms.

One of the most popular definitions of culture was offered by Edward Tylor, who states that culture is a "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (cited in Peter Naibei 1). The significant points that this definition entails are: culture is

specific to a particular location, is acquired, and is based on shared knowledge. However, while the definition appears holistic, some things, as argued by Stephen Greenblatt, "seem excluded from it are almost immediately reincorporated in the actual use of the word" (225). These include material objects such as "tables, gold, grain, or spinning wheels." These objects, however, are from what Greenblatt calls "material culture." It seems that Greenblatt here divulges into the typology of culture and this, at once, opens up the complexity associated with culture. This is because implicit in Tylor's definition is that culture is behavioral, yet there are material aspects that culture denotes, allowing for a conception of unseen behaviors. Thus, culture could be a signification for any perceived philosophy explaining why Greenblatt argues that culture is "a vague gesture towards a dimly perceived ethos: aristocratic culture, youth culture, human culture" (225). Tyler may have anticipated this complexity by attributing the signifier "complex" to the "whole" that explains culture. Simply put, culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures, and behavioral conventions shared by a group of people, which influence but does not determine each member's behavior (Helen Spencer-Oatey 3).

For culture to thus become a meaningful concept for critical discourse, its inherent paradox must be engaged in discourse. Greenblatt argues that the vagueness of culture paradoxically reflects two things: constraint and mobility. The constraint implicit in culture entails the ensemble of beliefs and practices that form a given culture function as a pervasive technology of control, a set of limits within which social behavior must be contained, a repertoire of models to which an individual must conform (Greenblatt 225). While conformity to set standards explains the culture, such boundaries are almost

unobtainable without mobility. Culture itself is a dynamic concept that evolves. As the ideas of "consociates and contemporaries" (Clifford 367) suggest, culture will always change either from ancestors dying, and some aspects of cultures fading away with their death or culture will change due to contact with other cultures. Clifford further notes that consociates (the generations of our great-grandparents and even grandparents) and contemporaries do not drop suddenly into the past but gradually fade into inexistence, thereby having picked up some aspects of culture from these consociates, they are passed to the contemporary society and which will also, with time, be passed onto the successors of the present generation. Thus, the younger consociates and contemporaries grow gradually into becoming successors. What happens, therefore, is mobility, and the mobility of culture affords culture new boundaries. Culture hence is double-faced:

> If culture functions as a structure of limits, it also functions as the regulator and guarantor of movements. Indeed the limits are virtually meaningless without movement. Only through improvisation, experiment, and exchange can cultural boundaries be established. Some cultures dream of imposing an absolute order, a perfect status, but even this, if they are to reproduce themselves from one generation to the next, will have to themselves, however tentatively or unwillingly, to some minimal measure of movement; conversely, some cultures dream of absolute mobility, perfect freedom, but these too have always been compelled, in the interest of survival, to accept some limits. (Greenblatt 228-229)

It reveals that constraint and mobility, while they appear to be two sides of a binary, are enmeshed in each other because the constraint is implicated in mobility and vice versa. This dialectic relation of constraint and mobility within culture opens up culture as an ambivalent space of improvisation and contingencies, including the idea of politics.

Therefore, a text is a product of the power structure and different social dimensions at work in a society.

From the above conception of culture, it is clear that culture exists in a particular space governed by certain rules, regulations, and policies, which, consequently, are what constitute politics. Politics, just like culture, is also a term that connotes a multiplicity of ideologies. As Modebadze Valeri argues:

> The definition of "politics" varies from time to time and from place to place. In other words, "politics" is a "loaded term." It has a wide range of meanings when used in everyday life. Politics is defined in such different ways: as the study of conflict resolution, the art of government, the conduct and management of public affairs, and so on (39).

Drawing from the above excerpt, it can be argued that politics, much like culture, is a key term that is not only polemical but also manifests in several dimensions. This loaded term of politics means that an author can engage in the political discourse of the society to which s/he belongs by raising various issues related to the political processes in a particular society. This, in turn, means that political discourse in society can be directly observed through the representations in literary texts. To corroborate this view, Najla et al. observe that: "literary works often produce political insights as well as their political ideology in their creative reality. Political novels are written expressly to raise issues, events, and characters linked to society and indirectly to politics, government, and power" (906). A society's widely held behaviors, beliefs, and traditions shape the way politics functions in society. Similarly, politics also contributes to the way of life in a society. It follows that there is a close link between culture and politics. Discourse on culture inevitably leads to ideological clashes with politics and vice versa. As already mentioned,

literary texts are mediums in which social issues are expressed. In addition, culture and politics are key social issues in a specific society (a specific social place). This implies that a literary work, in one way or another, becomes bound up in cultural and political discourses. This is in line with the argument of Nigel Thrift who claims that "an appeal to place experience will also simultaneously materialize other social and cultural relations that would otherwise remain outside the linguistic realm" (15). This means that cultural, social, and political discourses are interrelated; almost every aspect of society is hinged on these concepts. When discussing culture's relationship to politics, we find that culture, in the modern sense, requires politics and includes it. Further, both culture and politics constitute an indivisible independent unit. The two concepts meet in societal transformation, culture tends to illuminate and transform politics, and politics aspires to transform the totality of social relations, including the cultural relationship. The presence of politics in the societal sense is a condition for the presence and effectiveness of culture, just as the absence of politics in the societal sense is also a prelude to the marginalization and absence of culture. Here, the characteristics of culture and politics overlap, taking into account the difficulty of keeping culture independent of politics.

The existence of politics presupposes the existence of a free human willing to possess a developed cultural awareness, which makes them able to distinguish, compare, reject, protest, accept, choose and initiate. In addition, what indicates the existence of political life in a particular society is determined by the popular movement and initiative or by what has been termed the dialogue of social relations (Alhewar).

This dialectical relationship between culture and politics is largely embodied in literary works, and it appears more clearly in the formation of political literature. Political

literature is one of the community's political and social issues that focuses on authority, respect for the law, freedom, and human rights. Political literature engages with issues that concern the public state in any society, such as human rights issues, social justice and respect for the rule of law. This can be achieved through a literary treatment of these issues within a social framework and through the characters as mouthpieces who appear in the literary works, whether fiction, poetry or novel. It represents a merging of philosophy, psychology, humanity and art. Furthermore, political literature depends on monitoring, analysis and description, and then it comes up with political and social visions.

In light of the above, this study becomes an exploration of how novelists engage the cultural and political discourses in the society they belong to politically through the specific example of Ali Smith and her short story collection. While some novels or texts may offer solutions to problems, others provide representations that ensure a deeper understanding of the issues. One such literary artist who engages with the socio-political realities of the society to which she belongs is Ali Smith, a novelist who has addressed issues of social and political relevance in her creative writing. In this sense, this study explores the representation of culture and politics in Ali Smith's *First Person and Other Stories*.

Against this backdrop, this study examines the historical forces that influenced the composition of Ali Smith's *First Person and Other Stories* and how this shapes the representation of historical events in the text. In addition, the study explores how the socio-political milieu informs themes such as discrimination, racism, gender inequality, and cultural conflict in the society from which the text emerges. Furthermore, the study

explores the strategies used to perpetrate and sustain racist ideology while also investigating the mechanisms of resistance portrayed in the text.

1.2 Racism and Discrimination

Although racism and discrimination are not synonyms terms, they can sometimes be confusing and difficult to differentiate. There is a connection between these two terms, and the main differences are based on the accurate understanding that distinguishes each of them. Discrimination is the unfair or harmful treatment of an individual or group based on their social identity, which consists of factors such as race, gender, sexual orientation, education, marital status, family background, etc. People with various mental or physical disabilities also find themselves the target of discrimination. In addition, discrimination can be verbal, such as bullying, mockery, or threats, or physical, such as beatings (Fish and Syed 6). Rejection and exclusion are essential components of discrimination. Discrimination can take many forms, for example, the issue of gender discrimination in which many women worldwide are restricted access to education, health services, and economic opportunities. They face challenges based on gender bias and inequality, which diminish their freedom to make decisions over their personal lives. Furthermore, race is a major factor that can create discrimination. Racial segregation in the United States until the mid-20th century is an example of discrimination based on race.

In most cases, discrimination is the result of bias. Usually, prejudice means believing someone is inferior or dangerous because of possessing a characteristic that sets them apart from the rest, implying that they can be treated unfairly. This can lead to rejection and exclusion, two main aspects of discrimination that can lead to persecution.

Discrimination occurs when a person cannot enjoy his or her human or other legal rights based on equality due to unjustified discrimination, whether in politics, law, or treatment. Prejudice is at the core of all forms of discrimination based on notions of identity and the need to identify with a particular group. This can lead to division, hostility, and even demonizing others based on their different identities.

According to Doran (2021), discrimination is when a person is denied the opportunity to exercise their human rights or other legal rights on an equal basis due to an arbitrary distinction imposed in practice, law, or policy. When someone is treated unfairly or abused because of his political beliefs or activities—or what they perceive them to be—he engages in political belief or activity discrimination. Doran also explains that political activity or belief refers to ideas and deeds, provided they are legal. It also safeguards the freedom not to adopt a particular viewpoint or behave in a particular way. That implies it is illegal to be treated differently because of the support for a particular political party or lack thereof. Paul Doran categorizes this form of discrimination into two as intentional and unintentional. Intentional discrimination is related to individual, identifiable discriminatory acts committed by individuals in their private ability during interpersonal interactions. For instance, when running job interviews, a business owner is consciously less friendly towards female than male nominees. In making hiring decisions, it sometimes rejects female candidates on the spot without considering their professional credentials. Unintentional discriminatory acts, by contrast, are usually believed to arise from the psychological phenomenon of implied bias. For example, Unfriendly Behavior: Due to an unconscious connection of the word black with negative valence, an agent displays less friendly behaviours towards African-American interviewers than WhiteAmerican ones

(Dinur 115). Just like discrimination, the concept of racism occupies an influential position in social theory and daily discourses. The concept of racism carries in its negative origin implications from the political and moral point of view, as racism has become a term for political slander. Accordingly, racism occupies an important position at the heart of political and moral debates. Besides its main role in building social relations, it is considered a political ideology, and the concept of race is the centre of this ideology. According to Miles:

> Racism proposes the existence of discrete 'races' and attributes a negative evaluation to one or some of these putative 'races' (usually, though not always, the 'race' or 'races' to which the person articulating the racist ideology does not regard himself or herself as belonging). The argument that racism is a form of ideology still holds and is essential background to other work on racism produced. Although it has been identified three different 'types' of racism – a set of prejudices, opinions and attitudes that individuals or groups may hold; a set of exclusionary practices, including exclusion from the labour market and subjection to violence; and a political programme or ideology – there is a potential consensus that racism is primarily an ideology. (8)

The concept of racism has existed throughout human history and has led to many disasters. During the past five hundred years, racism by Westerners towards non-Westerners has had a more significant impact on history than any other form of racism. The most famous example of racism in the Western world is slavery, particularly the use of Africans as slaves. Slavery was fueled by the racist belief that Africans were inferior to white Europeans. Racism can also cause harmful acts such as segregation, hierarchy,

xenophobia, and other related social phenomena. Further, Black Africans were considered barbaric or savage species, as they were not considered human and based on this description, the slave trade was legalized. This legislation represented a rescue of Western culture from human equality and human rights predicament. Considering black Africans outside the human categorization was a justification for their enslavement and use in trade (Wheeler 9). These laws and legislations have greatly impacted establishing of the culture of racism and implanting it in society. This means that racism is an integrated and self-existing institution. It is not just personal impressions and behaviours as much as it is a cultural and political ideology. It is one of the causes of sedition and the most prominent cause of wars and ethnic struggles. And it could be classified as one of the social illnesses. No era has been without it, as it is considered a radical rejection of a group of people, and an exception, on the other hand.

The concepts mentioned above will be the basis in the following chapters, to analyze Ali Smith's *The First Person and Other Stories* by employing these concepts to understand the issues referred to in the whole collection. The stories include several references that could be interpreted in light of the concepts of racism and discrimination. The stories include references to political racism, race issues, religious discrimination, gender discrimination, racism against immigrants and refugees, and racism against African-Americans. The stories refer to political persecution based on ethnic discrimination. Furthermore, the stories have been grouped in the chapters on the basis of the main idea of each story, or more precisely on the basis of the story in which one aspect predominates over the other. The stories characterised by a socio-political aspect were placed in the second chapter. The stories that focus on the relationships between characters,

power dynamics, hierarchies and how characters view certain issues have been placed in the third chapter. And the stories that focus on feminist literature have been placed in the fourth chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES IN ALI AMITH'S *FIRST PERSON AND OTHER STORIES*

This chapter explores the dimensions of social and political issues portrayed in Ali Smith's *The First Person and Other Stories*. It focuses on socio-cultural and socio-political issues and actions such as imperialism, globalization, political parties, and social interactions. Further, it discusses the idea of political and social discrimination as presented in the stories. These concepts are discussed in relation to the concepts presented in the preceding chapter, politics and culture.

In Ali Smith's *The First Person and Other Stories*, three short stories "Fidelio and Bess," "The Second Person", and "The Child" have been examined within the context of social and political discrimination. Furthermore, "The Third Person" has been analyzed within the context of social inequalities, while the analysis of "No Exit" has focused on the role of globalization and the imperialism.

2.1 Arts and Politics in "Fidelio and Bess"

In this story, Smith uses opera to highlight historical, political; and social issues by merging two operas in one context. Since its appearance as a theatrical art from its very beginning, opera has been closely linked to the political arena, as it is hard to isolate opera from its political environment (Opera as Politics). Opera was distinguished by its ability to

influence the elites and the educated classes. Further, Opera's message is difficult to comprehend directly by the public class; therefore, opera as a genre in its inception was devoted to the elites and cultivated people. Historically, many operas were based on literary works such as novels, poems, and books. There was close cooperation between authors, artists, and writers. The use of opera was an important factor in consolidating some cultural values and goals such as commenting on social, political and cultural issues, besides providing a new way to see the world, in many different literary works. Opera was also used to express different countries' political and social conditions. The aristocratic families pursued to enhance their position and reputation by supporting philosophy, sciences and arts. In the phase of the state's weakness and political rift in Italy, some barons and aristocratic families aimed to support this new type of art, opera, by mixing music, drama, poetry, and painting. Opera glorified princes, nobles, and kings and reminded people of the role of the political system and the regime in people's lives. Since its inception in the courts of kings, opera has been considered an artistic genre with a purely political essence. According to Bokina:

> opera has been an eminently political art. It has reflected, in complex and mediated forms, the significant political personages and events that have shaped the modern Western world: kings and coups, classes and class conflict, rebels and revolutions. As it portrayed politics at this macro level, opera has addressed many of the characteristic themes of modern and contemporary political thought: monarchy and republicanism; the relations between classes, statuses and genders; revolution and utopia; and the roles of art and the artist within an increasingly complex society. (2)

The emergence of opera and its overlap with literary works greatly impacted the values carried by the different types of opera, the human message it embodied, and the impact of shaping peoples' cultures and reviving their historical memory. For instance, *Fidelio* stays a representation of the Revolution, which is characterized by its political ethics. From this standpoint, *Fidelio*'s connection to the Revolution lies in its portrayal of republican virtue, the universal ethical and moral criteria of an honourable citizenry.

As a literary and artistic genre within a cultural framework, opera represents a reflection in the political and social fields, especially in the exceptional and unstable circumstances that struck the international community. Smith refers in this story to two different operas: *Fidelio,* and *Porgy and Bess*. The two different operas mentioned in the story may be considered as representing two different types of discrimination in a society: the social and the political. Furthermore, through these two operas that have been injected "You know what I mean. No one can just, as it were, interject Porgy into Fidelio, you say… Anyway, I didn't say interject. I said inject (62). Smith refers to the opera's ability to express the peoples' beliefs and concerns and even add other meanings when performed in different circumstances and periods, which may explain the amendment of *Fidelio* four times. Smith refocused on the amendments as they include other cultural meanings in different periods:

> Culture's fixed. That's why it's culture. That's how it gets to be art. That's how it works. That's why it works. You can't just change it. You can't just alter it when you want or because you want. You can't just revise things for your own pleasure or whatever… Fidelio's all about revision, I say. Beethoven revised Fidelio several times. Three different versions. Four different overtures. (Smith 61)

This close connection between art, literature, and culture is embodied in operatic works. Opera has impacted shaping and forming the culture of generations through frequent modification with the instrumentals to share it with literary works. In most operas, the literary aspect is mixed with musical art. Moreover, many observers and critics have considered theatrical opera, or what is known as semi-opera, as a literary genre added to other types of literature such as poetry, novels, and plays. Although opera is an art, specifically musical art, there was a tendency and a call to separate this type of theatrical art from the main drama and to limit it to the English literary taste and the mood of the dramatists in particular (Adams 25).

Furthermore, elite social groups called for building special buildings for the opera and separating them from the general theater. The opera targeted the educated classes and aristocratic classes, as this type of art requires a deep sense of understanding and high culture. Where the opera was classified as a high cultural type in American cities; for instance, "Elite social groups began the process of constructing a separate social space in which opera could be self-evidently high culture" (Storey 36). This enhances the significance of opera in the social culture.

Smith refocuses on *Fidelio* by rereading and re-remembering the historical circumstances that accompanied this artistic and literary work. In a musical and artistic context, Smith expresses a political situation that took place in the pre-French Revolution. The political, literary, artistic, musical, and cultural aspects were mixed in *Fidelio*, where Smith refers to the historical context of that true story of the dark history of Europe, specifically the political conditions of the pre-French Revolution.

Fidelio is considered a political opera composed by Beethoven, who made modifications in different contexts and periods. Smith, in turn, returns the concentration on the dark and bright history at the same time to the era of dictatorship, persecution, and oppression of man through this story as one of the valuable messages of literature is the embodiment of historical events that left an impact on the course of human life. In brief, *Fidelio* as an opera is based on a true story during the pre-French Revolution. The opera consists of two acts and tells the story of a woman named Leonore who searches for and tries to save her husband, Florestan, who is forcibly made to disappear by his political rival, Pizarro. Leonore hides her true self and takes on the role of a young man named Fidelio. Leonore or Fidelio works in the prison where her husband, Florestan, is forcibly made to disappear, as the story indicates that" Fidelio, instead, is unnaturally keen to meet a mysterious prisoner who is being kept in the deepest, darkest underground cell in prison" (Smith 59). Fidelio gains the trust of the jailer, Rocco, and his daughter Marzelline seemed to have feelings for him. Rocco starved the prisoner Florestan to death at the direction of the Pizarro. In any case, rumors and news spread about the arrival of an official named Fernando to inspect the prison and see the inmates' progress after rumors about the scandalous scandals in prison. Pizarro orders the murder and burial of Florestan in order to get rid of him. Knowing the plan, Fidelio asked Rocco to accompany him to the cell of the convicted prisoner, her husband, Florestan. After that, Fidelio manages to save her husband, who was dreaming that his wife would come and save him, waking up from the sounds of grave digging. After Fernando arrives at the prison, Rocco explains Pizarro's plan to kill Florestan. Pizarro is arrested, and the prisoners are released. This incident

expressed a dark historical truth, representing the political oppression, persecution, and tyranny that struck European societies before the French Revolution.

Smith sheds light on these two operas by including them in her story without any change in the origin of the story, which was performed at the opera, to achieve three goals. First, opera is dedicated to a specific elite class, highly cultivated people, and aristocratic families. The messages carried out by the opera are not easy to understand directly, especially for the mass and the public, so its inclusion in the short story facilitates the access of large segments of people to the story and to understanding the message to be conveyed. Second, Smith aims at emphasizing the common European and Western values that oppose injustice, tyranny, dictatorship, political oppression, and persecution, reviving the literary and artistic heritage. Third, Smith seeks to remind the new and emerging generations about their history ensures that what they are going through today results from previous sacrifices and historical events that changed their lives. Smith emphasizes the fact that Beethoven amended his piece four times. Each amendment introduced new concepts and readings that expressed its chronological and historical context, and this is what Smith indicated:

> It's an opera, you say. It's nothing to do with history. Yes, but it is, I say. It's post-Napoleonic. That's obvious. Imagine what it meant to its audience in 1814. Imagine watching the same moment in this opera at different times in history. Take the moment when Fidelio asks whether she can give the prisoner a piece of old bread. It's the question of whether one starving man can have a piece of mercy. (Smith 66)

Smith emphasizes the renewed meaning of events. In each period, the event acquires a different meaning from the previous one and acquires a distinct momentum and values than it was in the past. The term history has two different meanings, the first is the past with its various events, and the second is the changes that were transferred from that

past. Accordingly, Smith attempts to link the different readings and interpretations of the historical event with meaning. Smith confirms this by referring to the different meanings and interpretations of reading a scene in *Fidelio*'s opera at different times. The reading and meaning of the scene in 1814 differ from reading and understanding the scene itself in 1915 and reading the scene in 1961. Hutchings supports this point by saying that historians and philosophers, in contemplative philosophy of History, practice reason and conscious imagination to comprehend the full meaning behind past events and locate their present in relation to the future and the past (1).

The second opera, *Porgy and Bess*, bears social and political features and carries anti-racist implications. The story revolves around the relationship between Bess, a drug-addict, and Porgy, a paralyzed black man. Bess suffers persecution and torture at the hands of her husband, Crown, a murderer. Porgy, her boyfriend, tries to rid her of her miserable reality, as he succeeds in keeping her away from drugs before he goes to prison.

Porgy and Bess represents a stark expression of the life of African-Americans. Through the reference to this opera, Smith reminds people to recall history and reconsider the race and class discrimination that African-Americans were subjected to in America. Although Smith does not discuss *Porgy and Bess* much, the denotations of her messages are rich with historical, social, and political implications. Smith indicates the miserable life of large segments of African-Americans in camps and slums amid the spread of poverty and drugs. *Porgy and Bess* represents isolation, loss, drug use, poverty, injustice, and oppression, which struck the slums.

Furthermore, George Gershwin, the composer of *Porgy and Bess*, called it a "Folk Opera." In his essay written for The New York Times in 1935, Gershwin was quoted "Since the opening of *Porgy and Bess* I have been asked frequently why it is called a folk opera. The explanation is a simple one. *Porgy and Bess* is a folk tale. Its people naturally would

sing folk music. When first began work on the music, I decided against the use of original folk material because I wanted the music to be all of one piece."

Nevertheless, some observers thought that *Porgy and Bess* was a shadow of a racist era that should be totally left in the past. Hall Johnson, for instance, criticized Gershwin's work about African-Americans' life, as he was quoted "Gershwin was as free to write about Negroes in his own way as any other composer to write about anything else . . . The resulting work was not a Negro opera by Gershwin, but Gershwin's idea of what a Negro opera should be" (Johnson qtd. in Cooper). However, other critics were more permissive with what they considered a great American opera. Cooper stated that *Porgy and Bess* became a symbol of American culture worldwide.

While *Fidelio* gets closer to its end, Smith directs the attention to another opera, *Porgy and Bess* by injecting *Porgy* into *Fidelio* without a separation between the two operas. The events of the two stories blend into one, in a smooth transition between themes, events, and geography. Smith pulls us from central Europe to the suburbs and slums of Carolina, where African-Americans live. This rapid transition and the literary and artistic blending put literature and art in the face of the political and social challenges that afflicted Western societies in the last century. In the two operas' difficult and unstable circumstances, Smith introduces an important factor in relieving the wounds and pain of oppressed people: love. Furthermore, it could be argued that the common denominator that motivated Smith to merge the two operas is love. In these two operas love between characters plays a significant role as in case of Fidelio and Florestan, and Porgy and Bess. Love is a consistent and ingrained culture which serves as a successful method in easing difficulties and adversities. Smith refers to love as an element across time in opposition to

all racism, injustice, and unfairness. Not only love but art and literature also has been employed to bring the attention to the suffrage of the oppressed people, and those who were discriminated against. Porgy and Bess, for instance, originally was a novel, but later on it has represented in other literary and artistic genres such as opera, music, film and short story.

2.2 Social Inequalities in "The Third Person"

Smith uses a different style from her previous one of telling the events of this story. It is an unconventional narrative style where the third person represents an observer and a witness to a set of events around which the story revolves. The story comprises a group of couples dealing with daily events in different seasons. The unconventional aspect of the style is the way the narrative focus moves from one character to another and from one season to another within, what at first seems, scattered and unconnected events.

Smith refers to a set of issues of a social nature by focusing on recurring daily events while focusing on the stratification between the couples. She refers to fundamental social issues, such as child beggary, theft, and child labor, in addition to the social position of Gypsies as an ethnic minority. The gathering of begging children, the American troops consisting of young men heading to the Gulf region, and two British women having a vacation in the same setting is indicative of Smith's concern with social inequalities and political hegemony.

The two tourists having lunch in a restaurant are the first couple that draw our attention to the stratification of society. It is first conveyed visually through a slope in the street which affects the sitting position of the two women: "The street is a slope; one of the

women is a lot higher up on its slant than the other, even though she's just two feet away" (50). As one of them sits at a lower level than her friend, the presence of hierarchy even in close relationships that appear on an equal footing is highlighted. These two women sitting in the restaurant are approached by two children, no more than ten years old, and a girl no more than six years old. These two children are part of a larger community of gypsy children roaming the streets begging for money: "The girl standing pressed up against the women's table is dark, very pretty, very young, maybe only five or six years old… Give me money, the smiling child says" (52). Through these children Smith arouses the readers' sympathy and prepares them for a critique of child labour as well as economic inequalities. Child labour is a social as well as a humanitarian issue. It can be inferred that Smith criticizes the authorities' role in combating the issue of begging that children engage in, as it represents a breach of the social protection network system. Thus, the state has to address its effects and causes. Furthermore, children depend in their beggary on different and varied means, most of which arouse emotions and stir feelings of pity. That is how the girl child acts: "The child smiles. She speaks in shy English. Give me money, the smiling child says. She says it seductively, almost under her breath" (Ibid). It is underlined that the fundamental reason for these two phenomena, beggary and child labor, is poverty which is caused, in the first place, by social inequalities. The juxtaposition of the two women enjoying a vacation with two children begging for money is significant in highlighting the inequality, however, it also points towards the illusory nature of the social structure. What seems to be a nice holiday resort on the surface, is also a shelter for the poor as well as a launching pad for soldiers on their way to combat.

On a smaller scale the two children themselves are part of the illusion as they are not mere naïve beggars but professional thieves: "It was a piece of perfect thievery, a piece of artistry so good that the doing of it was invisible" (Ibid). Through this plot twist in which the begging of a child and the sympathy is arouses is suddenly replaced by an ingenious pickpocketing scene and a confusion of feelings both on the part of the characters and the reader, Smith foregrounds the contradictions that permeate the social structure. It can be said that there is a correlation between two of the couples narrated in the third person, as the common factor between them is the American forces and the children: the first couple is the two women at the Mediterranean resort one of whom is robbed by the begging children and the second couple comes up later on in the story as a man and his friend sitting at a restaurant. The first couple come across the American forces heading to the Gulf region, whose number is estimated to be in the thousands while the man in the second couple tells his friend the story of the death of a soldier "The soldier who has died was ten years younger than the man and was a small boy in the same neighbourhood all through the man's adolescence" (55).

The two couples are connected through their sympathy for the young people who are exploited by the social and political system. The youth of the soldiers are emphasized in both parts of the narrative which in a way resonates with the issue of child labour underlined through the portrayal of the gypsy children. Smith emphasizes the soldiers' young age, shyness, politeness, and beauty, thereby twisting the established military discourse of physical strength, bravery, and power: "They are sly looking and shy looking, polite looking and hangdog looking and only just school-leaving-age looking; they look so yound and so raw that it's really near-criminal" (Smith 51). Through such a depiction Smith

subverts the established meaning of war in the dominant discourse turning it into the "near-criminal" exploitation of young, innocent, inexperienced people. The man's story of the soldier killed in a traffic accident and the newspaper's depiction of this as a heroic accident contributes to Smith's critique of the political discourse, revealing the media's contribution to the maintenance of the exploitation:

> The man is holding a copy of a tabloid. Inside on page 5 there is a report about the death of a soldier, but because the soldier's family has asked for privacy, there are no names, though everybody in the neighbourhood knows who the articles in the papers are about. He died in the heroic fight, it says. What heroic fight? the man says. (55)

Death and exploitation are promoted as heroism through the media which acts as an accomplice to exploitative governmental policies. Smith emphasizes that child labor is not only on the streets, but it has been used in battles and wars. One is visible, whereas the other has been rendered invisible through the make-up of discourse. Smith's third person makes the latter also visible by bringing the two pictures together in one narrative.

The hierarchy that governs social relationships is indicated in another instance through the depiction of a suburban middle-class woman hitting one of the garbage man in the head for no apparent reason "A woman living in a street of terraced houses…has just hit one of the dustmen who routinely empty the wheelie bins every second Tuesday morning over the head with a garden spade" (50). The woman is described as "She looks quite well-to-do. She looks too old, too proper, too well-dressed, to have done what she's just done" (Ibid). The third person description of the woman as a mature person with a

well-groomed and tidy personality eliminates the assumption of a mental problem, but rather indicates a hyperbolic representation of middle-class superiority.

Furthermore, inequality and social imbalance are central themes in this story. This is demonstrated by the description of the nature of the two women sitting in the restaurant. The slope on which the table is placed represents the imbalances in society in general, and an inequality between the two women specifically. The woman sitting on the upslope is amazed and enjoying every moment of her time as she eats her meal. After her purse is stolen, the woman on the down slope has to pay for everything and “berate[s] herself” (Smith 52) for not seeing the thievery. She feels a state of social injustice: "She will feel, as they walk back to their hotel, the sheer unfairness of her own life again" (52). Accordingly, it can be said that the woman sitting on the upslope represents a rather privileged class who gets her money stolen by the poor. The poverty of the thieves is a result of the injustice that is maintained through the existence of the privileged class. In contrast, the woman on the downslope represents a lower class that in the end pays the unfair prize for what happens to her privileged companion. Through the downslope woman’s annoyance, apprehension, and grumbling over the incident of the theft that her friend was subjected to Smith points to a fundamental point: the burdens and economic crises are borne by the poor alone.

2.3 Entrapment in "No Exit"

The story begins when the narrator wakes up in the middle of the night, remembering a past experience of going to the cinema. The narrator is concerned about what happened to

the woman who, in the middle of the movie, went through the exit door leaving her belonging on the seat “I saw the woman who’d been sitting a couple of seats along from me get up midway through it and go down the stairs in the dark” (79). The narrator knows that the door leads nowhere and cannot be opened from the other side, which is a fact that raises a lot of questions about the final destiny of the woman or whether anyone else saw her go there: “The door swung shut behind her, and I knew, because I know a little about the building, that she’d gone out through the illegal fire exit, the one that actually leads nowhere” (Ibid). In addition to feelings of remorse for not informing the theatre administration about the situation after the movie ends, the narrator begins to remember a series of incidents and stories which, in essence, represent the predicament of others in similar no-exit situations: the story of the man who fell between two walls, the narrator's own experience with a friend, and the woman who entered the dead alley end.

The story alludes to the conflict between East and West in cultural, intellectual, and political terms, which resonates with the no exit theme, through the film that the narrator went to see: "It was a new British film about the relationship between the East and the West. Right then on the screen a man with a moustache was threatening a spiky-haired man with a kitchen knife" (Smith 79). This simple description of the film recalls British Imperialism and when put together with the fact that the exit door of the movie theatre does not in fact lead to an actual exit, it might be interpreted as symbolic of Britain’s imperial policies which on the surface offer an exit into civilization for the colonies while in reality entrapping them in hierarchies. Later on, another allusion to the movie *Eugene Onegin* contributes to the symbolism of hierarchies as it is a film about the life of an aristocrat: "we had seen a film with Ralph Fiennes in it, something vaguely Russian. Eugene Onegin

maybe. Was Liv Tyler in it? There were balalaikas on the soundtrack, or maybe I'm mixing that up with Dr. Zhivago" (81). This vague remembrance of the film with a British and an American actor as well as a Russian story confuses not only the narrator *per se* but the reader as well. However, it is this very confusion that is created by all the names and different nationalities that in the end point towards the futility of any kind of conflict, including the conflict between the East and the West. As the narrator's description of the conversion of the old cinema suggests, the old world is being replaced with a new one where such conflicts might become obsolete. The new cinema marks the reception of a new era built on the ruins of the crumbling world:

> The cinema had been converted into a new cinema from an old cinema. Its downstairs was now a pub that claimed to sell the cheapest beer in Britain; there were often people throwing up outside this pub. Above it was the new cinema, three screens tucked into the skeleton of the upper half of the old cinema, which meant that the new cinema always smelt of fried food and sometimes the noise from the pub would shimmer through the soundtrack of whatever film you were watching. (Smith 81)

The skeleton does not only refer to the main structure of the building, but is also read as a metaphor for the ancient world and its ancient values.

At the end of the story, the focus turns towards a character who was part of the crew that worked in the renovations of the building. By setting this part of the story in the 60s, Smith refers to an important period of human history: "It's the 1960s and all the local cinemas are under pressure to adapt to changes" (86). The 1960s witnessed major social,

economic, and political transformations worldwide. It witnessed the colonized countries' quest for liberation from the domination of Western imperialism. These transformations, led by Western powers, have forced local governments and emerging countries to adopt these global systems and rules. Weak and dependent states lost some of their sovereignty and political and value considerations due to imperial domination in the name of integration into the world order. In such a context, the attempts of the man who is trapped between two walls to get out of this predicament and make a breach in the wall that surrounds him becomes symbolically significant. It is possible to consider the two walls as globalization and imperialism, and that the attempts represent a movement for the liberation of the colonized countries from the hegemony of imperialism:

> He kicks it again. He kicks and punches and throws himself against it until he makes a hole in the plasterboard. Then he rips his way out. He never knew he was so strong. His workmates, who've been running around in front of the internal wall like scared cats, clap him on the back." (87)

Smith most clearly embodies the West-Eastern conflict in the metaphor of the trapped man and points to the setbacks and repercussions left by globalization and Western imperialism. Moreover, those repercussions of the struggle extended to strike the culture of society, its values, and morals. Western imperialism has failed to solve the dilemmas of the peoples into which it has placed them.

By pointing to the no-exit and the pitfalls imposed by the modern order, Smith points to the deep moral crisis afflicting the West. The narrator knows that there is no actual exit through the door that the woman went through because s/he had been there before:

"they'd found that mobile phone signals didn't work in there and they'd begun to panic. They banged on the locked doors. They'd shouted, but they couldn't hear anything in there from the cinema" (82). The narrator's indifference towards the predicament of the woman, his hesitance to inform the cinema administration pose him/her as a bystander, and underscore the prevailing materialism, utilitarianism, and isolationism at the expense of humanity and solidarity in modern societies.

Smith depicts the story's characters in a state of constant turmoil, entrapment, and daily physical and economic problems. The modern world strips individuals of all human values, turning them into isolated laborers. Just like the man between the walls or the woman outside the exit door, the narrator is also entrapped doing a job s/he does not like: "I wanted to leave, but I couldn't, because of the loans (85). It is the materialist world that dominates people's lives. The rules of the modern world establish themselves in the heart of the new world order. Through the relationships and conflicts of these various couples, Smith portrays a fractured world immersed in indifference and seeking to achieve materialism at the expense of morals.

The moral crisis is also embodied in the violent and thoughtless behavior of the girls throwing garbage at strangers from a bus:

> A bus had just passed you. On its top deck was a bunch of adolescent girls. They were giving you the finger out of its back window. Then you watched them pass another pedestrian, a woman walking ahead of you. The girls threw a handful of the same small milk cartons out of the top window at her. Some of them hit her. (84)

Smith portrays the state of moral disintegration through these different cases and contrasts them with the same level of societal disintegration that Western societies have been exposed to as a result of the new world order based on globalization and imperialism.

This particular incident not only portrays a moral and societal regression, but also through the reference to the McDonald's carton becomes a symbol for globalization and commercial imperialism. The throwing of the McDonald's carton can be perceived as the inclusion of Western values and instilling of a globalization culture in societies and individuals: "something hit you on the head, bounced off you and hit the road in front of you. You looked down at it on the pavement. It was a tiny McDonald's milk carton, rocking from side to side" (Ibid). Moreover, a woman throwing a McDonald's carton back on the bus may represent a rejection of these global values and cultures: "She bent down and picked up one of the tiny milk cartons, and she threw it back at the bus" (Ibid).

To conclude, there is no exit for any of the characters. They are stuck in places, in relationships, in certain jobs, and certain situations. Furthermore, the narrative emphasizes that globalization and the modern world order policies cannot solve the troubles and predicaments that these characters are entrapped in. This fact could be perceived in coming back to the film mentioned at the beginning of the story: "The film ended with nothing in its plot resolved" (80).

2.4 Music as an Anti-Racist tool in “The Second Person”

The story takes place between two lovers who are fond of musical instruments. A virtual and imaginary dialogue begins about what can be done in the musical instrument store. The narrator imagines her lover buying a machine, Stefanelli. Then, he returns on

the second day to buy another one. A state of misunderstanding prevails between the two lovers, and an argument erupts between them. Smith refers to the group of musical instruments through the conversation and the argument between the two lovers.

Through the beginning of this story, Smith leads us to the political and social message that has been incarnated in two songs. Through the debate between the two lovers, Smith sheds light on the relationship of music to politics and its social implications. She refers to two songs with a deep political and historical denotation that left a great social impact on American society. The story includes a reference to singer and human rights activist Ella Fitzgerald's song, “A Tisket A Tasket,” and Billie Holiday's song, “Strange Fruit.” Smith uses two culturally important figures to underline a political message. Through these two songs, which have political and social dimensions, Smith recalls the dark pages of American history, which included racism, injustice, and racial discrimination against large segments of society at that time. In her story, Smith merges the essence of these two songs in one political and social context:

> Did you know that this song was a huge hit for Ella Fitzgerald a mere year before Billie Holiday sang 'Strange Fruit'? And if you put the two songs together and compare them you get a real picture of race politics and what was acceptable and what was true from that particular time in recent history? (Smith 93)

The twenties and thirties of the last century witnessed a wave of racism and class discrimination. Ella Fitzgerald experienced this in her early days, as she was subjected to class discrimination and racism when she was still 17 years old. This artistic discrimination cast a shadow over public life, where finding a job was not easy or possible. As Miller describes that period of segregation during the 20s and 30s, "Fitzgerald had already faced

severe racial discrimination . . . everything was race. You couldn't go out of your zone . . . slavery is over, but you don't have jobs. So the confinement meant you had to do for yourself" (Miller qtd. in Jones).

By referring to Ella Fitzgerald's songs, Smith sheds light on the sufferings of African Americans in the last century. Ella Fitzgerald had been subjected to injustice, racial discrimination, arrest, expulsion, and she had been prevented from performing some concerts. Further, she had been prevented from holding artistic and musical activities in southern cities. A report published by USAToday indicates that Ella Fitzgerald was arrested in her dressing room in 1963. An artist, who was trying to speak out on behalf of all those who suffered, endured such harsh, prosecutorial treatment. Forty-five years later, another artist uses this fact in her short story in order to draw attention to the history of racist conduct. Furthermore, Ella Fitzgerald was not allowed to sing in southern cities as she was considered a criminal. She had been expelled many times from music shows and concerts because of her black skin; as Elli Fitzgerald explained in her interview, "It makes you feel so bad to think we cannot go down through certain parts of the South and give a concert like we do overseas, and have everybody just come to hear the music and enjoy the music because of the prejudice thing that's going on" (Ryan).

One of the forms of racism that Ella Fitzgerald and African-American women, in general, have suffered in the last century is the repeated beatings and constant insults by young white men. In an article in *The New York Times*, Nina Bernstein states, "Black girls were segregated in the two most crowded and dilapidated of the reformatory's 17 cottages, and were routinely beaten by male staff." Therefore, these practices and acts have pushed

Smith to embody the plight of African-Americans by reference to two songs which are part of African-American culture.

Ella Fitzgerald sang many famous songs, but Smith uses the song ″A Tisket A Tasket″ in her story for reasons, in my opinion, related to two main factors, which are the same that might prompt Ella Fitzgerald to sing “A Tisket A Tasket”. The first reason is that “A Tisket A Tasket” is a traditional song within the nursery rhyme genre, which is a broader category than the Lullaby, sung to children to sleep or educate them, and instill some concepts and values within them and raise them on it. According to Bellerose, "Nursery rhymes are simple, traditional songs and rhymes for children, aiming to educate and entertain them. A 'nursery' is another kindergarten word" (NurseryRhymeCentral). Furthermore, the origins of lullabies go back to the beginning of literature and its development. The Lullaby's history spans the evolution of literature from its early origins. The current slumber song and the basic coo, which the primal mother used intuitively to soothe her kid to sleep, are similar in the emotion they convey. This universally appealing emotion unites people of all ages and ethnicities, and creates a bridge of understanding between men and women in quite different life stages. Besides that, the main purposes of lullabies and nursery rhymes are to entertain and educate children, and affect their emotions; they also reflect on "the customs and the beliefs of those who first sang them" (Smith, E. S. VI). Thus, “A Tisket A Tasket” is a song for the innocent childhood that is not linked to political agendas or suspicious purposes and does not have a racial attitude or discrimination. This is the second factor that made Ella Fitzgerald sing to children and young people, as she believes in the future of the new generations and their open-mindedness away from racism and class discrimination. She expressed this explicitly in

her interview: "The die-hards, they're just going to die hard. They're not going to give in . . . You've got to try and convince the younger ones, they're the ones who've got to make the future and those are the ones we've got to worry about. Not those die-hards" (Ibid).

Therefore, the message that Smith wants to underline, in addition to recalling the history of racist political and social incidents, is that Ella Fitzgerald chose this particular song to show the grievance of African-Americans, their suffering, and concerns to children and young people. This appeal to children and young people reminds them of and introduces them to the discrimination and racism that African-American have suffered. Choosing children as the most important segment for the future society to be her audience could be considered the smartest way on the road to getting the rights of the African Americans. She realizes that relying on children as future leaders represents viable option to break racism and discrimination imposed on African-Americans.

Furthermore, the two songs have a reference to colors. In “A Tisket A Tasket,” different colors were mentioned: green, yellow, and red. Smith re-emphasizes the importance of colors in the discussions between the two lovers in her story "Was it green? No no no no! Was it red? No no no no! Was it blue? No no no no!" (Smith 96). Although the song may be viewed absurd as in the case of the narrator’s partner "a piece of absurdist nonsense, like a denial that words could ever mean anything, about a girl who loses a yellow basket" (Smith 93), the colors may symbolize the pluralism and ethnicity that Smith wants to emphasize in the face of racism and discrimination, in a society where large segments of people suffer from injustice, marginalization, and exclusion.

As for the song “Strange Fruit”, the attitude toward facing racism is clearer. The song that is written by Lewis Allan and sung by Holliday, expressed the atrocities and massacres committed against the African-Americans in the southern regions. The song revived a deep wound in American memory. Smith recalls the criminal history of America in which all those crimes were committed against African-Americans, and trials and extrajudicial executions were carried out against them. African-Americans were hanged and hung from trees. “Strange Fruit” is a metaphor for their black bodies hanging from trees. The song referred to terrorism and racism used against African-Americans to sow fear and terror in their communities.

In any case, the comparison between the two songs was present in Smith's *The Second Person* through the dialogue that she depicted in the story. Smith emphasizes the role of politics in determining the audience's preferences for listening to songs "about how one song is really more important than another song because of politics" (Smith 95). Art affects society greatly, resulting in a strong interdependence between art and social life. Art does this by instilling a set of values and opinions that affect a person’s sense of self. Further, it preserves the collective memory of society. Through art, the history built on facts is documented at any time and place. Similarly, art means communication, as it is a means by which social change can be made. Art has been the subject of study by many researchers who have linked art and the human brain, as art has positive effects on the personal lives of people and society as well. Thus, the reference that has been made by Smith to these two songs is to emphasize on the role of the music in expressing political and social stances.

Moreover, the similarity between the two songs is that both refer to color: "They're both all about color, but one's about what's really happening in the world, and the other's a piece of absurdist nonsense, like a denial that words could ever mean anything" (Smith 93). Color may symbolize pluralism and diversity in American society. It also represents the political and social racism that African-Americans were subjected to. The way that Fitzgerald changed the lyrics to the nursery rhyme, replacing the original colors with brown and yellow might be indicative of that social diversity, as brown and yellow are colors used to define non-white people in general.

Furthermore, Smith points out that one song is superior to the other. Nevertheless, both songs are about politics “if you put the two songs together and compare them you get a real picture of race politics and what was acceptable and what was true from that particular time in recent history" (Ibid). It could be argued that this comparison is based on the way and the singer's attitude in expressing their resistance to racism. Fitzgerald, for example, used a soft way in combating racism. Although Ella Fitzgerald stated in her interview that she refuses to associate politics with singing "I used to always clam up because you (hear people) say, 'Oh, gee, show people should stay out of politics" (Ryan); however, her song carries implicit political references and implicit rejection of racism and discrimination against African-Americans. Smith confirms the fact of the political role of Fitzgerald’s song by putting it on the same level of political value with Holliday’s song.

On the other hand, Holliday was more vocal and stern than Ella Fitzgerald in the face of racism. She expressed her attitude of anti-lynching directly, rejecting the injustice, violence, and brutality that afflicted the black community; Smith stresses that Holliday's range of success and influence is much higher than that of Fitzgerald. To conclude this

comparison between Ella Fitzgerald and Holliday, Margolick notes that: “Coming out in 1939 and around the time that Ella Fitzgerald's A Tisket, A Tasket was more what people expected from black girl singers ', Strange Fruit put the elements of protest and resistance back at the center of contemporary black musical culture". (7)

Further, according to Singleton, “A Tisket A Tasket”, which belongs to the nursery rhyme genre, cannot be regarded as a song of resistance. In contrast, “Strange Fruit” breaks away from the tradition of resistance as a coded expression in mainstream black music. (39) However, regardless of to which extent these two songs represent a resistance within the framework of expressing the suffrage of African-Americans, Smith emphasizes that these two songs are classified under the umbrella of “Race Politics”, and the only difference between them is about which one was acceptable and which one was true “if you put the two songs together and compare them you get a real picture of race politics and what was acceptable and what was true from that particular time in recent history?” (93).

2.5 Racism in “The Child”

The story revolves around a woman, the narrator of the story, who happens to find a lost baby in her shopping trolley while shopping at Waitrose. To the woman, it is the cutest baby she has ever seen. She waits for his parents to arrive, but she could not stay calm for long when no one comes to collect the child. She becomes anxious and frustrated and takes the trolley to the customer service desk to describe the matter and ask for their help in finding the child's parents. Nevertheless, she is told that no one has reported a missing baby. After a short while, many people gather around the woman and the child, congratulating the woman for being blessed with such a beautiful child. However, the woman keeps claiming that she is not his mother and does not even know the child.

Unfortunately, no one believes her when the child raises his little arms in the air and calls her "Mammuum" (29). The woman thinks she should go to the police to report the case so that the police can find his parents and hand him over to them. She struggles with her conscience to decide whether or not to take the baby. Nevertheless, when the baby starts talking rubbish about the woman and how the world works, she is stunned at what this little child can say at such a young age. In the end, she abandons the child in a supermarket and returns home.

The child does not stop talking about his hatred for the emigrant but believed they deserved to be sent back to their land. The message of Ali Smith in "The child" focuses on shedding light on the discrimination and hostility against immigrants. According to the child, the English man can never be a terrorist; instead, the outsider is. He said that "the real terrorists are people who are not proper English. They will sneak into football stadiums and blow up innocent Christian people supporting innocent English teams." (Smith 32). This stance of the child expresses a general culture within European societies. The hatred and hostility against immigrants are one of the forms of racist practices that have spread in European societies. In addition, what the child refers to is considered religious discrimination, a type of racism in which an individual is treated differently because of his religion or belief or because of a lack of religion or belief. It is indicated that it should not be intended to be illegal (Equality and Human Rights Commission).

The religious discrimination in the child's expressions is clear in that he condemns Muslims only. Although there is no direct reference to Islam or Muslims, two indications can be perceived that this discrimination is directed against Islam. The first, categorizing the innocent people killed in terrorist acts at the stadiums as Christians and the killer

engaged in a criminal act based on religion, is considered religious discrimination. Restricting criminal and terrorist acts as directed against Christians only and that they are the domain of another religion is considered racist and discriminatory, as terrorists kill Muslims and Christians alike. The second matter is that portraying the terrorist act as a conflict between religions is racist and discriminatory. People killed in football stadiums were not killed because they were Christians; Muslims and non-Muslims were killed alongside Christians. In addition, there is national discrimination which considers anyone who is not a native or an English as a terrorist. These characterizations and judgments based on religion, nationalism, and xenophobia against non-citizens, especially immigrants, constitute one of the main sources of contemporary racism.

In the end, the focus in this chapter, was to highlight widespread social ills such as racism, discrimination and social injustice. In addition to focusing on issues with a political and social dimension through the analysis of the stories discussed in this chapter. The four stories were analysed in this chapter in the light of the theoretical concepts discussed in the theoretical framework. The analysis relied on the deconstruction of the symbols and references found in the stories, trying to understand their meaning and the signs they signify by referring to their historical context, their impact, and reflections on reality and everyday life.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIPS IN ALI SMITH'S *THE FIRST PERSON AND OTHER STORIES*

This chapter focuses on the social and political implications of the different kinds of relationships portrayed in the selected stories. It also focuses on the power dynamics, the hierarchies, and how Smith deconstructs them and plays with them. Further, it covers a social and cultural aspect, and the different perspectives of the characters. Five stories have been analyzed in this chapter: "True Short Story", "Present", " I know Something You Don't Know", "Writ", and "The First Person".

3.1 The Novel and The Short Story in "True Short Story"

The story's events revolve around discussions about the significance of the short story. The story begins when the narrator sits in a café listening to a father and son talking about the differences between the short story and the novel. The narrator transmits the conversation between the son and his father that she listened to, to her friend Kasia. Kasia is receiving treatment in the hospital. The father and son's dialogue turns into a conversation between two writers, the narrator and Kasia. The dialogues and discussions taking place between the interlocutors represents an important review of the nature of the dialogues between the literary elite and the public class about the importance of literature, culture, and art in British daily life, as well as historical topics and an attempt to re-understand them in a modern literary context. Moreover, the discussions over the

significance of the short story move to a third level representing dialogues of the academicians and professors over the subject.

Two factors made this story widely occupy British culture and public life. First is the choice of the settings of the discussions, which has happened in three different settings, Café, virtual place (phone), and the university or college. Second is the concentration on the hierarchical relationships among the characters. Smith put these discussions and dialogues in the hierarchical and cultural context in which she highlights the literary taste and preferences of readers, writers, and academicians alike. Through discussions of the difference between the short story and the novel, Smith points to the hierarchical relationships between the characters in this story. Smith presents several dialogue pairs and indicates the nature of dominance and power practised by some individuals in these pairs.

At the story's opening, Smith describes the nature of the relationship between father and son in a way that is distinct from the prevailing pattern of relationships between father and son, which is usually framed by anger. The relationship between the father and the son is as close as possible to a coldness, as Smith assumes that this coldness might be due to the family's disintegration or divorce "Maybe they were the result of a parental divorce" (15). Through this relationship, Smith refers to human nature to prove oneself and imposing personality. The young man tries to prove his personality and intelligence to his father" the son keen to be a man in front of his father now" (Ibid). Within the framework of that relationship, the father tries to play a paternal role in accommodating the ambition and enthusiasm of the young man, as he appears in a more solemn and calm position and knows his responsibilities. With this description, Smith refers to the unsaid understanding between the two characters who represent the difference between the two generations "a man who

knows his responsibility, and now look, the boy had grown up, the man was an older man, and there was this unsaid understanding between them etc." (Ibid).

Smith also opens the door for more discussions on this topic by embodying the dialogue with Kasia. Kasia is also a writer and narrator and has an important opinion on the short story. Furthermore, Smith refers to another relationship, which is the relationship of symmetry and equivalence between the narrator and Kasia, as this story represents a real story. The relationship of fellowship and equivalence is represented in the dialogue between them. This can be seen through how they deal with each other, their flexibility and their sympathy towards each other "Kasia and I have been friends now for just over twenty years, which doesn't feel at all long, though it sounds quite long." (18).

Moreover, through the discussions between Kasia and the narrator, Smith refers to another type of hierarchical relationship. As the reference to princess Diana represents maybe considering a reference to the underclass. According to Caputi: “The ancient goddess Diana evolved as a "folk" deity, seen as protector of the underclasses- the people's goddess- a role the public assigned to Diana Spencer as well”. Smith also tries to examine the social class through her references to the hierarchical relationship between Diana representing the public class and Prince Charles representing the aristocratic and the ruling family. For example, the young man uses a beautiful term for the short story, *nymph* “Whereas the short story, by comparison, was a nimble goddess, a slim nymph.” (16), and the narrator, in turn, likens the short story to Princess Diana "The short story like Princess Diana . . . I was thinking of Diana because she's a bit nymphy" (Smith 17). Nymph refers in Greek and Roman mythology to a young "female deity," usually identified with nature, beauty, and love (World History). Moreover, it is "any of a large class of inferior female

divinities" *(Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Thus, the similarities of characteristics and values that both nymph and princess carry became more identical in terms of representing the social or inferior class; as Caputy illustrates, "Values associated with Princess Diana include compassion, love, and recognition of the primacy of the common people" (Amoaco).

Further, Smith, in some way, hints at the relationship between Princess Diana and her husband, Prince Charles. Smith sheds light on this historical issue by inserting the story of Princess Diana in a discussion with the narrator's friend Kasia. Kassia's answer to the narrator's question, "is the short story more like Princess Diana?" (Smith 17), could be interpreted as a direct hint to the relationship of the princess and the prince:

> Listen to this. It depends what you mean by 'nymph'. So, depending. A short story is like a nymph because satyrs want to sleep with it all the time. A short story is like a nymph because both like to live on mountains and in groves and by springs and rivers and in valleys and cool grottoes. A short story is like a nymph because it likes to accompany Artemis on her travels. Not very funny yet, I know, but I'm working on it. (Smith 18)

It could be argued that satyr represents the man in all its aspects, and Smith tries to liken it to Prince Charles just as she managed to liken princess Diana to nymphs. Satyr represents the "symbol of fertility, and were frequently portrayed chasing nymphs. Just as nymphs represent women's most feminine qualities, satyrs represent men's rough-edged, crude, and boisterous aspect". Nevertheless, the satyr could be a symbol for all men and not specified to prince Charles. Satyr represents all men and people who chased and abused princess

Diana. Even after her death, many satyrs keep releasing reports and accusations over the princess's loyalty and innocence.

The reference to the relationship between Diana and Prince Charles, which Smith hints at, represents a relationship of power and social domination. This traditional relationship is based on the assumption that gender plays a fundamental role in determining the nature of personal and social power, as it appears through this relationship that Diana, according to the prevailing tradition, is a weaker personality compared to Charles. The latter enjoys power, dominance and control.

The other relationship Smith refers to differs slightly from the nature of the other relationships she embodies in this story. Smith refers to a hierarchical relationship and the absolute domination of the goddess Juno, who exercised her power in imposing her will and punishing Echo: "She pointed at her with her curse-finger and threw off the first suitable curse that came into her head. From now on, she said, you will be able only to repeat out loud the words you've heard others say just a moment before" (21).

One more hierarchical relationship represented in the story is the relationship between the student and the professor through the student's question to the professor ". It was a girl's voice and it was directly asking the person giving the seminar and the chair of the seminar a question about the American writer Carson McCullers" (22). Smith refers to the well-established hierarchical relationship in the corridors of universities that governs the relationship between students and professors, to the extent that it is strange for a student to express his opinion on a particular topic: "I was a postgraduate student at Cambridge and I had lost my voice. I don't mean I'd lost it because I had a cold or a throat infection,

I mean that two years of a system of hierarchies so entrenched that girls and women were still a bit of a novelty had somehow knocked what voice I had out of me" (Ibid). Further, it shows how the professors interact with the students, as the professors did not answer her questions: "Anyway, I venture to say you'll find McCullers not at all of the same stature, the person giving the paper on Literature After Henry James said. Well, the thing is, I disagree, . . . The new girl carried on politely asking questions which no one answered" (23).

Smith moves the discussions about the short story's significance to critics and authors. She refers to statements by authors and writers about the preferences and differences between short stories and novels. One of those writers is Walter Benjamin, who was quoted "short stories are stronger than the real, lived moment, because they can go on releasing the real, lived moment after the real, lived moment is dead" (Smith 24). Benjamin reiterates the significance of literature in understanding the past and reality. Smith ends the story by emphasizing the main theme" So when is the short story like a nymph? When the echo of it answers back" (24). It could be perceived that the message that Smith aims to convey is that literature can help us better understand the past and reality.

To summarise, Smith emphasizes the hierarchical relationship between the characters in the story, writer and reader, father and son, professor and student, and wife and husband. These preferences and differences in the level of the relationships are based on the characters' positions and their level of culture. Furthermore, by depicting the dialogues in three different settings, Smith attempts to portray the different perspectives among readers, writers, academicians, and critics regarding their literary and cultural interactions over a specific cultural topic such as the differences between the short story

and the novel. For instance, the first is in a public place, a café, which symbolizes public life and readers, as large segments of people go to public cafés. Discussing such a literary topic in a public place shows literature's close interplay and interconnection in people's daily lives. It shows the role of literature in the formation of their culture.

3.2 Social and Cultural Interactions in "Present"

The story is about the Christmas celebrations and how this occasion influences people's cultural and social interactions. It focuses on this occasion from social, cultural and historical perspectives. Further, it confirms the universal and central dimension of Christmas. The story takes place in a bar between three people, two waiters, and the narrator sitting and listening to their conversation. The waiters talk about the preparations for Christmas, although it is still early for the celebrations as it is still November. The narrator listens to the conversation between the waiter and the waitress. The waitress is busy cleaning and polishing the cups and does not pay attention to the gossip from her waiter, who is fascinated and admired by the sight of snowfall, trying to attract the attention of his colleague. He is rejoicing about the approaching Christmas. The man talks to the narrator, but the narrator prefers not to engage in their conversation, as the narrator leaves the pub shortly. The narrator heads to the car, and starts weaving a hypothetical story about Christmas celebrations and participates with the waiters in the conversation.

Smith points out three important things in this story: the first is the significance of Christmas in British culture in both its Present and historical context. Second, the central and universal dimension of Christmas. Third, time is associated with memories and

imagination. Smith has managed to merge these three factors in one event. The story's title, “Present”, represents immersion between the celebrations of Christmas and the present time, as Smith wants to reiterate the close correlation between them. Present could denote the two meanings with some ambiguity. Present may refer to a gift and is considered one of the complements of the ceremonies and rituals followed in public celebrations. It is about different perceptions: how we interpret the word "present" changes the meaning. Giving gifts is one of these cultures associated with Christmas. The second meaning of Present may refer to time, specifically to the Present and the temporal context. Historical dimension could also be hinted at under the umbrella of time, as the Present has no value unless it is related to the past. Thus, it can be understood that the title was chosen to represent the close connection between gifts as a symbol of Christmas as part of the general culture of people, and time, whether past, present or future “Christmas past, Christmas present, Christmas near future” (43).

In addition, Smith tries to embody the cultural dimension of Christmas ceremonies by weaving a hypothetical story about what can be done on Christmas. She emphasizes how such a cultural activity affects people's relationships based on how this is depicted in the story. The supposed story represents a return to nostalgia, childhood, and history through imagined and assumed memories of herself when she was twenty years old. This could also be applied to the man who was memorizing his childhood at Christmas:

> I began to try to guess what story the man would have told two virtual strangers in a pub to prove what made a good Christmas. The best Christmas lunch he'd ever eaten. The best present anyone ever gave him. It would be something about his childhood since that was all he'd really wanted to talk about in there, childhood

> and lost magic, and the coming back of magic at the coldest of times in the back of beyond in the form of a simple frost that catches the light in the dark. (Smith 41)

Smith portrays the idea of Christmas as a cultural and religious practice to emphasize the historical dimension that constitutes peoples' cultures. Furthermore, in her fictional story, the narrator implies a social change in the British culture and rituals over Christmas. For example, in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, there was social discrimination among the classes that celebrated Christmas. Even though the Edwardians and the Victorians tried to make Christmas a national symbol, they failed to provide a fair chance for all families to celebrate Christmas. Johnes illustrates:

> The idea of the Victorian and Edwardian Christmas as a national symbol is, however, undermined by the fact that material deprivations prevented many working-class families from enjoying the kind of festival that the middle classes knew… most workers were limited to a few simple presents for the children and a modest celebratory meal. Christmas was thus as much an illustrator of social divides as something that crossed them. (xiii)

Smith incarnates this social change and evolution of Christmas by referring to an opposite social activity over Christmas by Fenimore's family. They organize celebrations to show the social activity that has developed and comprehended lower social classes, which were in the past confined to a specific people: "Mrs. Fenimore puts invitations through everybody's door … JACK AND SHIRLEY FENIMORE INVITE YOU TO A SPECIAL WINE TASTING. Loads of people go, all the neighbours go, my mother and father go, and they never usually go to anything" (Smith 44).

Social and cultural attraction is one of the important concepts that define the framework of the relationship between the individual and the group in different societies and cultures. Moreover, social attraction is the availability of a certain characteristic in an individual or group that makes others tend to this individual or group and are attracted to it. Among the factors that Smith implies, which are available in the character of Fenimore, are creativity, social initiative, love and the ability to organize celebrations. Social interaction or attraction contributes to the psychological and cognitive maturity of the individuals. It makes them more aware and understanding of their difficulties and how they strengthen to face them. This attitude is incarnated in the hypothetical story of Smith when the participants of Fenimore's party headed to the mountain to celebrate Christmas there. They have encountered unfortunate and harsh conditions:

> The minibus breaks down...Halfway up the mountain...the sky changes colour from blue to black...It snows so heavily that seven adults and twelve or thirteen kids get snowed into a space under a crag on Ben Wyvis... It's freezing. We huddle together, then the adults huddle the kids inside a circle of their bodies. It's afternoon. It gets dark. It doesn't stop snowing... and a lot of swearing from my father...and the man from across the road...threatening to murder Mr Fenimore, and my mother who'd worn shoes with heels on to go up a mountain in, my mother...cursing herself... and a bit of arguing about who should go for help, and Mrs Fenimore crying,Mr Fenimore counting heads every five minutes, before he sets off into the white dark to bring help back. (45)

They are also more sensitive to the feelings of others and more able to assist them. When their self-need is satisfied, they can satisfy others.

Smith stresses that as long as individuals are in a society, they must communicate and interact with others. Social and cultural events provide such an interactive opportunity, as it benefits getting to know other people with different natures, cultures and characteristics from us. Thus, they learn the art of communication with others, regardless of their differences. It also teaches them the culture of accepting others and gives them the trait of adapting and acclimating to the developments that occur to them in life matters. In addition, Smith confirms through this story that the presence of the group behind the individuals supports them, and they derive the positive energy that enables them to continue in their life. Communicating with others on social occasions gives individuals the ability to think better and thus reach creative and creative ideas that help them succeed in their life.

Although the idea of Christmas, at its core, is religious, it also represents secular rituals and traditions associated with history. People across the world have been celebrating it with traditions and practices that are both religious and secular. Christians celebrate Christmas Day as the anniversary of the birth of Jesus (History). In her hypothetical story, the narrator indicates that the preparations for celebrations on Christmas were on the 21st of December:

> Mr Fenimore's just got his minibus driving licence, and drive to the foot of Ben Wyvis to see how high up it we can get on the Sunday before Christmas, December 21st, a gloriously sunny Sunday, bright and crisp and blue-skied. (Smith 45)

This date bears two dimensions, chronological and historical, and it is directly linked to the time and the universal rituals over Christmas. Smith managed to merge the two dimensions

in one event, exactly as she did in choosing the title of the story, Present. For instance, In the Scandinavian countries, Christmas is celebrated on the 21st instead of the 25th, known as *Yule. Yule* could be considered a secular occasion but it has been celebrated lately with Christmas. The other denotation of 21 December is related to time and specifically to solstice. 21 December, which is the solstice of winter, is considered the first day of winter and also the shortest day and longest night in the year, and "from Ancient Romans to Indigenous Americans, cultures around the world have long held feasts and celebrated holidays around the winter solstice" (History). Thus, it has been reiterated that the idea of time should be understood as a reciprocal relationship between the past and the present. Understanding the Present is directly related to understanding the past, and this fully applies to the idea of Christmas, as Christmas represents a reflection of the past. As Johnes explains," Understanding all history is about understanding continuity and change, but this is especially true of Christmas because it was an event that encouraged reflection on the past" (xiv). Moreover, Smith links Christmas with the time in all its faces, present, past, and future, to assure the eternality of Christmas "Christmas past, Christmas present, Christmas near future" (43). So, Christmas is a timelessness event; it can happen anytime.Although Christmas is an exclusive British brand, as one historian has argued, "Christmas is regarded as a symbol and expression of Englishness itself" (Johnes xiii); Smith emphasizes the universality of Christmas in terms of place, time and culture.

3.3 Misjudging Appearances in "I Know Something You Don't Know"

This story revolves around a boy who returns from school one day, goes to bed, and does not leave his bed for months. Doctors were unable to diagnose his condition despite conducting many medical examinations: “It was a condition which didn’t show up on tests.

It was most likely a post-viral condition. Three different doctors had seen him: the GP, a consultant paediatrician at the hospital . . . did all the same tests on the boy's feet and hands, looked into his eyes and ears, took blood" (100).

The mother spent large sums of money to treat her son but to no avail. After a state of despair and the inability of modern medicine to find solutions to her son's illness, the mother resorts to alternative remedies. The mother contacts two therapists, Nicole Campbell and Karen Pretty, as a last resort for healing her son "Outstanding accurate understanding from qualified registered therapist Karen Pretty. The other advertising box had only three words in it and a number. Nicole. Trust me" (101). Nicole robs the mother, and although Karen does not steal from her and does not deceive her, she feels that Karen also stole from her.

Smith indicates a contradiction concerning the nature of the relationship between East and West throughout the story. The logical fallacy of the dichotomy of the backward East and the developed West is portrayed through the story of the mother. She has worked, until her son became bedridden, for Western operating companies which exploit third-world countries in exchange for their advanced services "she had been an assistant clerk in the office of a company which made a lot of money installing digital phone networks all over the Third World" (102). However, the advanced medicine of the West fails to provide treatment and diagnosis for the boy's disease as a result of which the mother resorts to alternative, Eastern, medicine. Therefore, it can be said that Smith asserts that the hypothesis that Western development always provides the solution is unrealistic.

Resorting to an alternative treatment represents a final attempt for the mother after a series of disappointments she suffers due to the doctor's failure to treat her son. However,

her disappointment is no less than before after being deceived and robbed by Nicole, the healer that she found on the yellow pages:

> By the way, can I get a glass of water? The boy's mother went to the kitchen and filled a beer glass with tap water. When she came back the front door was shut, the cheque had gone from the arm of the armchair with the chequebook and the bank card, there was no sign of the woman anywhere up or down the street outside the house and it wasn't till half an hour later when she looked for her handbag that she realized it was gone as well and so were the two. (103)

Although the second healer, Karen, does not steal anything material, the mother is still disappointed as she thinks Karen also failed to cure her son. Karen does not take the money, but the woman still feels robbed because, on the outside, nothing changes, so she feels robbed of hope as this was her last resort:

> The boy's mother insisted. She gave Karen Pretty two folded twenties and a ten. Karen Pretty took the money and put it down on the carpet by the chair leg. She called a taxi firm on her mobile . . . Peace to you, Harriet, she said when the taxi drew up outside the house . . . The boy's mother watched the taxi drive away . . .Then, in the sitting room, she kicked the folded money across the carpet until it disappeared under the sofa. (108)

The paradoxical irony that stems from the mother's perception and consequent attitude towards the advertisements published by these two healers is significant: Nicole, who wrote "trust me" on her ad is the one that the mother trusts but also the one who robs her of her money. On the other hand, the mother finds Karen untrustworthy because she had misspelled "complementary", yet Karen does not rob her, does not even accept the

money she is offered, and as the ending of the story indicates contrary to the mother's suspicions, she seems to have cured the boy. The irony here points towards the unreliability of words and appearances.

The story's focus in these events is the boy, and Karen's diagnosis of his condition is the closest to reality and credibility. Upon returning from school, the boy refuses to leave his bed without any physical injury. One supposed explanation is that the boy was subjected to a psychological trauma. He may have been subjected to severe psychological pressure or a conflict in school with his peers and friends, or he may have been exposed to severe fear that we do not know the cause. The introversion and isolation that the boy feels reinforce the hypothesis that the boy has been subjected to intimidation, threat, or bullying, as the boy is afraid even to open the window or the curtains "he'd kept his eyes shut and in a small voice from the bed had said: please don't" (100). So Karen's explanation and diagnosis of his condition of having a continuous struggle to prove himself and get rid of his opponents are logical, yet the mother does not take Karen seriously as she makes these comments as part of a tarot reading session: "A struggle for position will end in improvement, she said pointing at the boy on top of a hill with a stick, fighting off a lot of people below him with sticks" (106). Furthermore, Karen believes that he will get better, but this depends on his family also, as his illness is associated directly with the troubles that his family suffers: "A reawakening, she said pointing to the family climbing out of a grave beneath a giant set of wings" (106). In addition, Karen's interpretation fits with the specialists' interpretation of the boy's illness. Specialists point out that this type of psychological paralysis is not useful in treating with drugs, as the illness is the accumulation of a group of causes and psychological factors that affected the patient and

thus led to his paralysis. Thus, the logical interpretation of the boy's illness is that he got a Psychological Paralysis or Conversion Disorder which usually happens "when mental or emotional distress causes physical symptoms without the existence of an actual physical condition. The physical condition is caused by the stress or emotional trauma" (Wells). Cases of this illness can last for a short period, not exceeding days. The patient recovers after that, and the period can be long. The matter depends on the rapid disappearance of the psychological causes of this problem. Each case has its causes, so it is impossible to determine a psychological cause that can result in psychological paralysis.

Moreover, the comment made by Karen: "pointing to the family climbing out of a grave", could be interpreted that the boy's situation to get better is related directly to the ability of his family to get rid of its troubles. The boy lives in a state of internal conflict and severe psychological pressure:

> A struggle for position will end in improvement, she said pointing at the boy on top of a hill with a stick, fighting off a lot of people below him with sticks. A difficult journey to a calmer place, she said pointing at the boat full of swords in the water. A reawakening, she said pointing to the family climbing out of a grave beneath a giant set of wings. (106)

The struggle may also be caused by the absence of his father. This is indicated through the boy’s struggle with the teddy bear which represents the absent father as it was a gift from him. Nevertheless, it could be inferred that his parents' relationship no longer exists, and he and his mother are left by his father, who resents him. Thus, it can be concluded that the conflict with the bear is a conflict with his absent father, who needs his presence in his life

to support and encourage him: “he would shift out of the bed when the bear least expected it and sneak up without it noticing and punch the bear right in the mouth. Then he would wrestle it. Though it would fight back hard, he’d beat it. He’d kick it. He’d bite it in the ear. He’d eat the bear” (108). One of the probabilities that could be said is that the struggles and pressures that the boy experienced in school are due to his family problems. So the boy may feel a state of inferiority in front of his peers, which leads him to blame and conflict with his father. In the end, the boy has already begun to improve gradually and recover.

To conclude, Smith stresses the central role of the family in society and that the disintegration of family ties cast a shadow over the family members. Neurological diseases and psychological problems that affect family members are usually the results of psychological and social reasons. The pressure, trauma, and bullying the boy was possibly subjected to was the main cause of the disintegration and decay of his family. The boy knows something that nobody else knows. Also, the narrator knows something the reader does not know which puts them in a similar situation as the mother of the boy.

3.4 Meeting of Past and Present in "Writ"

The story represents a dialogue between the present and the past on several social, political and cultural issues. Moreover, it focuses on how the views and concepts have changed over time. The story focuses on the aspect of age and maturity in perceiving and interpreting general life events. It is a supposed internal dialogue of a person in different ages. As experiences, perceptions; and knowledge increase with age. The narrator begins a series of assumptions about advising herself and a warning about some of the things that she went

through when she was young, but she retracts her attempt to provide the advice she was discussing. It is a dialogue between two generations represented in the same person, each with a different point of view, artistic preferences, and literary taste.

One of the essential issues in this story is time and change. It can be said that Smith indicates that the concept of time is based on a dialectical relationship between the past and the present. Sometimes the present covers up the past and erases it from the existence and context of life, and sometimes it becomes difficult to understand the present without referring to the past. However, the past is weak to the influence of the power of the present. The present represents life, while the past represents its ruins. The narrator's internal conversation represents a dialogue between the dualities of the old and the new, the present and the past, experience and inexperience, eternity, ephemerality, and oblivion.

Furthermore, one of Smith's main ideas is to focus on the relationship and duality of the past and the present, which is shown by the narrator's attempt to compare current behaviors and concepts with what they were in the past. The narrator considers the past as a standard in this comparison. Smith emphasizes that the idea of change and replacement is the ruling idea of life. The essential in the context of life is change, impermanence, and replacement, which is what the mother's memory indicates. Moreover, social habits and daily life practices have also changed; for instance, she no longer drinks instant coffee because science has revealed facts about its damaging effects on health "I like the instant kinds of it, she says. The other kinds taste too much. Yes, but instants are full of freezing agents, I say. They do all sorts of damage to your synapses" (111). It tells us how buildings and places have changed:

> The common is actually a common burial ground; it's where they buried most of this city’s thousands of plague-dead centuries ago. Beneath the feet of the dogwalkers and the people coming back from the supermarket, under the grass and the going snow, under the mound where the paths all come together, are all the final shapes their lives took, all the bare bones. (114)

Moreover, it shows us how people, generations, concepts, and ideas have changed. Similarly, the language is also not outside the context of replacement and change, many new words and phrases have been introduced into it and replaced, and other old phrases and words have vanished. For instance, when the narrator says, "You go girl," which means good on you, the phrase has been understood literally. Later on, the narrator realizes that the new generation does not understand most of the old phrases, then clarifies that it is a borrowed phrase from the cultural heritage of the blacks "It means good on you, too right, that kind of thing. It's American. It's borrowed from black culture. It's from later. I mean, you're too young for it" (111). In addition, there is a difference in the interpretation of the word "Writ" and how it is written. The way it is written has changed over time. The narrator in her young age insists that the phrase on the grave of John Keats consists of two words in the modern form," Written water," while the narrator insists that the phrase is made up of three words" Writ in water," which is the old form of the phrase "it's writ in water, I say. It's three words, not two. No, it's written, like one word, she says. It isn't, I say. It's writ. Then in. Then water" (115). Smith points out that language is constantly changing and that understanding its meanings has changed over time. Nevertheless, although it has changed

its meaning throughout history, the origin of the meaning is preserved "It's changed its meaning over time and at the same time it's kept its meaning." (Ibid)

Moreover, the inclusion of the name of the poet John Keats was not arbitrary but rather had a direct connection to the essence and title of the story. Smith borrows the famous John Keats epitaph "writ in water" written on his grave to emphasize the idea that the past is doomed to disappear and that all beings, according to the law of life, are destined for demise and extinction. The interpretation of this epitaph, from which the story's title is derived, shows that everything is ephemeral. Moreover, the interpretation of Keats' epitaph "writ in water" by words of Reynolds is" the concept of all things being transitory, as in the transient nature of human existence we are all just passing through on the journey of life; the perception being that some will leave an indelible mark, and others will not. Furthermore, this epitaph could be interpreted as a protest against Keats' destiny, depriving him of immortality. (Stacey)

To conclude, it could be argued that Smith emphasizes that the notions of continuity and immortality do not exist in the context of life. Further, the hypothesis of eternity and continuity is false, as everything is subject to the substitution philosophy and natural order of things.

3.5 Multiple Perceptions in "Astute Fiery Luxurious"

The story begins with the arrival of a suspicious parcel to a homeowner who suffers from pain in their knee due to being traumatized by a toy in the past, yet, the parcel seems misdelivered, as the address sent to did not belong to them “A weird parcel came, I said. It’s got our house number on it and the correct postcode and everything, but it’s not

addressed to us and I didn't notice until after the postie had gone" (120). The character calls to notify their partner about the parcel. The partner assumes that the parcel was sent wrong. Moreover, there is a state of suspicion and fear about opening the parcel. However, they open the parcel, which smells bad. The couple leaves the parcel in the kitchen and sits down, and in a moment of silence "I picked it up and carried it through to the kitchen and put it on the table, then I had a terrible urge to wash my hands" (Ibid). The couple takes on memories of their past and childhood. These memories have a political reference which is the focus of this story or at least one of its main concerns. The character remembers their childhood days as a teenager when they were 17 years old:

> Tell me something that actually happened, you said. Something about you that I don't know, from when you were seventeen and I was sixteen and we lived in different towns and didn't know yet that each other had even been born. I thought for a moment. 1983 is the year I was in love with Heyden, I said. With who? you said. Natasha Heyden, I said. But she only answered to Heyden. (125)

Furthermore, this story's political reference has been represented in two places. The first is television and media programs in the eighties, and the second is a reference to environmental policy in Britain.

Smith sheds light on the eighties and how the media covered and tackled that period. The media did not cover topics that directly impacted the life of British citizens:

> We were watching an I Love 1980s programme, one we'd watched twice before. We were talking about how it had become possible that there never

> was a miners' strike, a war, a rightwing landslide, a massive recession or any huge protest march; instead there were only Rubik's cubes, Transformers and a puppet TV compere shaped like a rat. (124)

Smith sarcastically criticizes television programs that did not focus on economic stagnation, miners' strikes, protests, and marches that accompanied that period. Rather, the media and television programs in that period focused on shows and entertainment programs, ignoring the economic recession that struck Britain in 1981. Accordingly, it can be said that Smith brings back to mind and focuses on the political and economic situations when the conservative party took the power in 1980s. Further, Smith cynically slags off the media for not handling such important issues at that time. Rather, media was focusing on entertainment and shows programs. Although the narrator indicates that stagnation, marches, and workers' strikes had not occurred; however, it could be inferred that Smith uses a sarcastic and sardonic method to denounce the media performance in that period, as the media neglected covering the miners' strike of 1984 and the protests that followed.

Furthermore, the most obvious political issue is related to Natasha Heyden. The character talks about their old relationship with Heyden when they were in school at 17. The character tells about Natasha's behavior, such as killing things, especially squirrels: "So all the time I spent anywhere near Heyden was time that Heyden was killing things, or waiting to kill things, or finishing them off, laying out a row of dead things on theirlawn" (126). Smith focuses on environmental policy in Britain and how successive governments, politicians, and parties dealt with the phenomenon of the spread of gray squirrels. The story goes back to the era of Queen Victoria when Britain imported gray

squirrels, which spread so horribly that they could no longer be controlled. Moreover, the gray squirrels imported to Britain threatened the original red squirrels. Thus, in 1937, the British House of Commons enacted a law allowing the killing of gray squirrels that kill red squirrels and obligating citizens to report the presence of gray squirrels (Cohen). Nevertheless, this law was repealed after 77 years, specifically in 2014. The issue of killing and containing gray squirrels took a wide space in Britain, where more than 18,000 were killed between 2006 and 2008 (Adams). Smith embodies in this story the position of the British government and political parties on killing the gray squirrel by referring to Heyden, the squirrel killer. She is expected to have become part of the government, political system, and parties. Smith shed light on British policies and governments' plans to address these environmental issues. Accordingly, Heyden's action cannot be viewed as an individual act or behavior; Natasha Heyden does not represent herself but rather the government's policies, the state's strategy, and the political parties positions.

Moreover, it could be argued that Heyden represents the authority that forces citizens to take procedures against the grey squirrels: "And then she made me kill the squirrel" (127). Furthermore, Smith has used Hayden's personality to express her dissatisfaction with the government's actions and party policies. The term "Psychpath" is not exclusively related to Heyden's character but rather refers to the policies adopted in this regard.

In the context of talking about the politics of the parties, Smith's position on the two major parties in Britain, Labour and Conservative, could be perceived through this quote which she embodied in her story “Writ″: “Don't, by the way, vote Labour in 1997; it's like a vote for the Tories" (112). Smith believes that the policies of the Conservatives

and Labor are very similar and that the reference to the elections that took place in 1997, which represented a revolution in the balance of political power in favor of workers, was nothing but a change of faces. Under the leadership of the young Blair, the workers defeated the Conservatives, who had held power since the 1980s. Accordingly, it can be said that Smith's implicit criticism of the policies pursued in the eighties under the leadership of the Conservatives does not necessarily mean support for the Labor Party. On the contrary, Smith sees that public policies are fixed and do not change, and both parties are at the same level.

3.6 Narrating A Story in "The First Person"

The themes of the past, aging, and continuity are important in this story, as this story, in terms of its narrative style and its topics, represents a different kind from other stories. The essence of the story is about telling the story itself. The story begins between a couple, each alternately representing the first person. They begin to weave stories about their meeting with the other person's relatives. The first person is worried about meeting the other person's parents, while the other person is worried about meeting the first person's friends. The rationale for their concern is unknown, but it is possible to understand their concern about being judged by other people; thus, they begin to knit stories to overcome their fear and protect themselves from other people when they meet.

This story includes several important topics, such as referring to the past, the old and the new in the context of age, and the love of continuity in addition to social relations. The story unlocks by talking about the association of the old with the new, as both couples are new to each other. However, at the same time, they are acquainted in the old way: "This,

though, is a new you and a new me. In this particular story we are new to each other in the oldest way" (134). The first person refers to his/her old age compared to the other person, and s/he feels the loss of the pride of his youth: "I'm not completely sure the body can take such bright new newness when, like mine, it's gone well past all the acceptable newnesses" (Ibid). In addition, s/he feels that their old age has greatly influenced their social relations, and s/he no longer wants to meet anyone, especially the relatives of the other person. It is the feeling of isolation caused by age and that s/he feels sluggish from meeting others, from hearing their conversations and stories: "I'm a bit too, eh, old for it. I'm a bit too old, say, to be meeting anybody's parents. I'm the age of a parent myself" (135). Moreover, this tension and anxiety usually accompany the elderly, making them grumble and nervous. Although their partner did not ask for anything other than to move the table," All I did was move the table and make some coffee" (Ibid), the first person began to list their worries and dreads pressing against them. Furthermore, aging produces introverted habits and behaviors and increases the desire for social isolation: "I'm definitely too old to have to do all that meeting somebody new's lifetime haul of dearest friends" (Ibid). There is fear and tension from meeting others, facing their questions, and bearing their pressures. Therefore, the first person tries to calm his/her partner's fears about his/her friends' acceptance of his/her presence in his/her life without explaining and justifying their relationship: "who'll simply accept your presence in my life without having to have any back story. Lucky, eh? Liberating, eh?" (Ibid).

Once again, the age difference reflects a discrepancy in thinking and viewpoints. The first person hints that the gap between the youth and the old is wide. To embody this vast difference in thinking, opinions, feelings, dimness, and vitality between the youth and

the old; Smith borrows the phrase "Crabbed age and youth," which is believed to be the beginning of a Shakespearean poem. This phrase sums up the sharp contrast between the old and the youth. The disparities of the comparison mentioned in the poem between the youth and the old are like the difference between the sky and the earth. The poem's beginning indicates that youth cannot live alongside the old, as the youth abhors age, and age disgusts the youth. The poem likens the difference between the old and the youth to the difference between summer morning and winter; winter is cold and lonely, while summer is more lively and active. In addition, there is a great disparity between the youth and the old in terms of thinking, habits, opinions, and desires. This age disparity cannot perpetuate their love, as it directly affects the continuity of the relationship between the couple. This statement irritates the other person and provokes its implicit dissatisfaction with the statement. Although the age disparity does not exceed 15 years "It's only ten years, you say. It's not that much. Well, fifteen" (136); yet this could be regarded as an explicit statement by the first person about the inability to continue together. Therefore the other person feels a state of turmoil and confusion from not knowing the reason for the first person to stop their relationship "I can't imagine what such a reason would be" (Ibid).

The other person has realized that the love relationship with their partner has reached a state of stagnation and the end of the dead end. The first person realizes that everyone is capable of love. However, continuity in love is difficult, as the frustrating thing is the inability to continue and reach a state of stagnation. The other person raised the alarm that the first person would stop loving and relationship; At this stage, the other person sought to replace the effort in changing the first person's point of view and make love to revive the passion of the beginnings of relationship and love; Because there is a chummy

relationship between longing and continuity, as soon as the beloved's passion and eagerness dies, it stops in the continuity of love. So the other person craves continuity and perpetuates the momentum of the relationship and communication. It is overwhelmed by a state of contemplation and staring at the sky:

> Is it them that are the birds that sleep on the wing? you say. Yes, I say. Wow, you say. And never land on the ground? And keep flying and flying, and have to have their nests up high so they won't touch the ground, and have to keep the momentum going? Yes, I say. Imagine, you say. Like a song that never ended, like a constant ever-evolving music, like you'd just keep going and keep going with it, even when you're asleep (Ibid).

The other person seeks to find an analogy between their relationship by comparing it to the nature of the lives of those birds that continue to fly in the sky in terms of maintaining the momentum and continuity of the relationship. The first person wishes and yearns to imitate those birds flying in the sky, which do not stop in flight and fly and that will not land or touching the ground. It can be said that the other person seeks to reconcile a relationship like an endless song, and music that continues to evolve and develop. It is the state of continuity that everyone is looking for in achieving the essence of love with the other.

Despite attempts to highlight continuity and communication, there is no consolation for the other person. Perhaps, it is a feeling of despair, "It's hopeless", as the halts and departures are inevitable. In addition, the first person uses explicit expressions to distance their partner and clarify their differences: "You're not the first person who ever made me feel like this". However, his/her partner emphasizes the present, not the past: "I'm the first

person today, though" (137). In the end, the first person realizes that they don't own anything: "I know for the first time that I maybe don't own anything" (144). The stories we tell shape us and the people around us. We create illusions through our stories. What matters is "now," as the character says. We use the pronoun "I" in the present, and this is how we establish our existence anyway. To conclude, this chapter has focused on the the power dynamics, the hierarchies, and how Smith deconstructs them and plays with them. Further, it discussed a social and cultural aspect. It also focused on understanding the different perceptions of the characters as it has been portrayed in the selected stories.

CHAPTER FOUR

DIALECTICS OF GENDER IN ALI SMITH'S *THE FIRST PERSON AND OTHER STORIES*

This chapter examines the concepts of gender roles, gender discrimination and the social oppression that the protagonists have faced in the stories within the context of patriarchal culture. This chapter focuses on the two stories, "The Child," and "The History of History*"* which will be analyzed in the light of the concepts mentioned above, after a discussion of the patriarchal culture and its norms that result in a dialectics of gender.

4.1 Patriarchal Culture

Patriarchy sets the roles that the male and female gender are expected to play. This is what Tyson (2006) calls patriarchal gender roles, which "cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive" and "cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive" (85). Under the guise of these societal constructs (gender roles), inequalities against women are perpetrated. Tyson defines patriarchy as sexist because it promotes the belief that women are inherently inferior to men. This belief in the innate inferiority of women is a form of biological essentialism, as it is based on biological differences between the sexes that are considered inherent in our immutable nature as men and women. According to Tyson:

> Patriarchy is thus, by definition, sexist, which means it promotes the belief that women are innately inferior to men. This belief in the inborn inferiority of women is a form of what is called biological essentialism because it is based on biological

differences between the sexes that are considered part of our unchanging essence as men and women. (85)

The assumption that men are superior to women has been used to support men's hegemony in positions of economic, political, and social power, in other words, to keep women powerless by denying them educational and occupational opportunities to gain economic, political, and social power. Historically, the lower status historically held by women in a patriarchal society has been formed culturally rather than naturally.These gender roles have been used to justify inequities that still exist today, such as denying women equal access to leadership and decision-making positions (both in the family and in politics and the corporate world), paying men more than women for doing the same job, and convincing women that they are not fit for careers in fields such as engineering.

The standpoint in these discussions is to differentiate between the two terms, sex and gender. The former refers to the biological constitution as female or male, whereas the latter refers to cultural programming as feminine or masculine. In other words, women are not born feminine, and men are not born masculine. Rather, these gender categories are constructed by society (Tyson 86). The concept of gender role is a product of the interaction of individuals with their social environment. Gender roles are established based on the differences between the sexes in accordance with the prevailing culture in a society. Gender role socially produced concepts that result from interactions between individuals and the environment to which they belong. It is part of the social structure and belief. Therefore, it can be said that the concept of gender role differs from one society to another and from one culture to another, but in its essence it confers advantages, characteristics, status and values to individuals because of their sex. The concept of gender role is mainly based on social

beliefs and masculine values, which assume that women have a natural affinity for the role assigned to them, while men also have a natural affinity for the role assigned to them.

The general perspective towards gender roles suggests that masculine and feminine roles can be learned and are not necessarily influenced by biological characteristics. Further, a feminist perspective on gender roles asserts that because gender roles are learned, they can also be unlearned, and that new and different roles can be created. The feminist perspective believes that one is not born but rather becomes a woman within a socialization process, “gender socialization" through which females become women through a process whereby they acquire feminine traits and learn feminine behavior.

Against this backdrop, Smith illuminates these concepts through two stories, "The Child" and "The History of History". She portrays these concepts through the role assigned to the characters in these two stories. In these two stories, the mother and queen Mary are portrayed as victims of a male-dominated society and a prevailing patriarchal culture.

4.2 Gender Roles and Motherhood in “The Child”

The story revolves around a woman, the narrator of the story, who happens to find a lost baby in her shopping trolley while shopping at Waitrose. To the woman, it is the cutest baby she has ever seen. She waits for his parents to arrive, but she could not stay calm for long when no one comes to collect the child. She becomes anxious and frustrated and takes the trolley to the customer service desk to describe the matter and ask for their help in finding the child's parents. Nevertheless, she is told that no one has reported a missing baby. After a short while, many people gather around the woman and the child, congratulating the woman for being blessed with such a beautiful child. However, the

woman keeps claiming that she is not his mother and does not even know the child. Unfortunately, no one believes her when the child raises his little arms in the air and calls her "Mammuum" (29). The people around her notice her restlessness and think she must be a new, inexperienced, stressed mother who cannot take care of her baby. The woman thinks she should go to the police to report the case so that the police can find the baby's parents and hand him over to them. She struggles with her conscience to decide whether or not to take the baby. However, as they drive in the car when the baby starts making offensive remarks about women and how the world works, she is stunned at what this little child can say at such a young age. In the end, she abandons the child in another supermarket and returns home.

When the story's narrator finds a baby, she is expected to feed and raise it because it is considered a woman's duty to bear and care for children. When the baby cries, an old man says to her, "Go home, dear. Give him his supper, and he will be all right" (32). The old man's thought gives her the idea that she should go home and feed the baby. The women in the supermarket also have the same attitude toward how the narrator should behave with her child. They represent women who have unintentionally internalized the patriarchal ideology due to the culture imposed upon them.

Moreover, the narrator herself is affected by the patriarchal culture. When she first meets the child in the trolley, she asks "Where's your mother?" (27), and not where your father, as she already is has been under the impact of the patriarchal culture and implicitly endorsed the gender role assigned to women as mothers. The baby found also argues that a woman's role is to produce and care for her children and that she should not go outside.

He tells the woman, "Women should not work at all. That is not the natural order of things" (32).

In addition, most of the people at the supermarket in this opening scene were women. This further affirms that women are expected to be the home keepers. The only man depicted in this first scene is an old man "who seemed rather too poor a person to be shopping in Waitrose" (28). This confirms the fact that youthful men are not expected to be found in marketplaces as that is the reserve of women.

The fact that women's place is in the house is further strengthened using the words of the child who remarks: "Women shouldn't work if they're going to have babies. Women should not work at all. It's not the natural order of things" (32) This shows that women are expected to be domesticated and should not have a place in institutions outside the home. The child, when he speaks, presents the same idea that women should not go outside and participate in the activities that are supposed to be done by men. They should stay at home and take care of their children. The child's argument shows the patriarchal thoughts of the society where women are not preferred to go outside and participate in any social, economic, or political activities because they are associated with the male gender.

As the woman takes the baby and begins to drive the car, the child says to her, "You're a really rubbish driver...I could do better, and I can't even drive" (31). The child's words again show that driving is an activity assigned to the male gender and that women cannot perform this activity out in the open. The above is symptomatic of how women are regarded as unskillful at tasks. A male child, who has never driven a car, claims he is a better driver than a woman. Not only is the driving skills of the woman termed "rubbish," a child who cannot walk claims to be able to do better than a woman simply because she

is a woman and he is a male. Just before the woman dumps the child in the woods after she becomes fed up with his vulgar comments to her, the child re-echoes the fact that she is a bad driver thus: "you are a terrible driver. How do you make a woman blind? Put a windscreen in front of her" (34). This is an instance of such patriarchal attitudes towards women where they are not regarded to be on the same level, in terms of proficiency, as the man.

On the one hand, this story presents how a woman is supposed to behave in a society where she is seen as an entity whose purpose in life is to sit at home, raise children, and do chores. On the other hand, it shows how a woman tries to deny her role shaped by society. She strives to be an independent woman by rejecting these ideological gender roles. Similarly, there is also the portrayal that the woman is incomplete without a man and a child. This is evident in the contemptuous comments that the child makes to the unnamed narrator. On the way home, the unnamed narrator imagines the nature and level of delight that her neighbors would express at seeing her with a child. In addition, she imagines that her father "would dandle the child on his knee. About time too, he'd say. I thought you were never going to make me a grandfather" (33). This shows that she needs to have a child to make others happy simply because she is a woman. The fact that her father would not care to ask her how she became pregnant shows that a woman of a certain age needs to have a child to be fully regarded as a woman. The narrator's description of her father's mentality also projects the conventional view that a woman has to produce children. This same sentiment is shared by her neighbors, who also be "would be amazed that I [the unnamed narrator] had hidden a pregnancy from them so well" (32). This shows that it is social conditioning that a woman needs a husband and a child to be regarded as complete.

Moreover, the child tells her that he knows what she needs. He tells her she needs to be pregnant, which further enhances the fact that women are regarded as children-producing beings. This is why the unnamed narrator's father would be happy that she (the unnamed narrator) had made him a grandfather. A woman is thus assumed to be a baby-making being, and even the unnamed narrator appears to accept this patriarchal norm.

The story presents the idea of motherhood from two different perspectives. The biological mother of the lost child does not return to claim her child. Her actions show that she did not want to continue her role as a mother. She intentionally abandoned her baby because she wanted to free herself from motherhood's social pressures and responsibilities. Furthermore, because she was perceived by the patriarchal society as an important object in the biological process of childbearing, as a child-bearer who has to perform a series of activities involving the care and upbringing of producing children, on the other hand, the woman who bears the child is not its biological mother, she did not give birth to a child. However, she is so attracted by the baby's beauty and melodious voice that she falls in love with the baby. She decides not to leave the child helpless because of her motherly love for the child. She says, "I had decided to keep the beautiful child. I would feed it. I would love it ...everyone Everyone would agree that the child was the most beautiful child that ever to grace our street" (Ibid).

The child in this story is portrayed as an abusive one. He is a representative product of the patriarchal culture that continues to treat women as inferior to men. While the unnamed narrator talks the child home in the car, he constantly comments about sexual issues, making the unnamed narrator uncomfortable. The child, in this case, can be regarded as a representation of the voices in a patriarchal society. She describes the baby's

appearance thus: "The child in it was blond and curly, very fair-skinned and made up, with big cheeks like a cupid or a chubby angel on a Christmas card...It was an almost embarrassingly beautiful child" (26). It is a woman who knows nothing about motherhood who decides to adopt a stranded baby and raise him as if he was her child, even though he was forced upon her due to the tremendous pressure society places on her at the supermarket. She goes so far as to think when she sees the baby crying, "It's hungry, I thought, and my hand went down to my shirt, and before I knew what I was doing I was unbuttoning it to get myself out" (32).

In the end, the narrator decides to abandon the child and leave him in the woods before she retreats and leaves him in a supermarket: "I found a trolley . . . and emptied the child into it out of the blanket, slipped its pretty little legs in through the gaps in the child-seat. There you go, I said. Good luck. All the best. I hope you get what you need." (35). The narrator's refusal to adopt and embrace the child and return him to his place represents a rejection of the rules and norms imposed by the patriarchal culture and adopted by society. This refusal represents a breaking of those societal restrictions that are based on patriarchal culture.

4.3 Gender Discrimination in “The History of History”

Smith embodies in her story important historical incidents of British history. She emphasizes the incident of the execution of Mary Queen, which is regarded as a controversial event, as her involvement in the Darnley murder is still disputed by some historians. Some biographers still show sympathy for her, believing she was innocent

(Ágústsdóttir 75). Smith believes in the role of fiction in demonstrating facts and distilling the culture from those misconceptions and lies that stuck to it:

> We are living in a culture that insists on lying as its delivery of how we are living. It insists on telling us information about which we are left wondering whether it is true or not … fiction and lies are the opposite of each other. Lies go out of the way to distort and turn you away from the truth. But fiction is one of our ways of telling the truth. (Higgins)

The interpretation of gender roles as portrayed within this story has been done according to two main dimensions: the first is the historical dimension, and the second is the feminist dimension. Smith combines these two dimensions by re-reading the present and the past. Smith's literary ingenuity enabled her to knit more than one story in her text, thus opening it up to more than one interpretation.

The story begins with the narrator's return from school, where s/he describes the mother sitting at home while the father is at work. The narrator has to do the homework, which is to: "Write a newspaper report of the death of Mary Queen of Scots. Translate pages 31 – 33 of La Symphonie Pastoral by André Gide. I hated La Symphonie Pastorale" (Smith 72). The novel revolves around a blind girl who is raised and cared for in the home of a priest. It could be inferred that the homework that the narrator was asked to do was not written arbitrarily. It can be noticed that there is a link between the two subjects due to the similarity in the characters of Queen Mary and Gertrude, the heroine of La Symphomie Pastoral novel in terms of the limitations they both face. Queen Mary became the heir to the throne of Scotland when she was only six days old. Then, she was sent to France for her upbringing. Gertrude also represents a case of a woman whose way of life was imposed on her because of her blindness. She was brought up without her will and did not make her

own choices. The lives of the two characters had been shaped and manufactured in accordance with the purposes of the people around them, and they had been utilized in an exploitative way. Gertrude is a blind girl raised in a Catholic priest's home; after she grew up, he tried to exploit her (Persson). These conditions could be similar to those of Queen Mary, as she was also brought up under the custody of Henry II of France, who tried to exploit her by marrying her to his sick son, dauphin Francis. Moreover, Queen Mary also embraced Catholicism, representing a key dilemma in her life.

Through the homework the child does, Smith sheds light on Queen Mary and the story of her execution. In doing her/his homework, the child has chosen four titles for his report after making the required amendments to the child's first draft report. The titles are "fashionable," "embarrassing," "wearing a wig," and "noble breed." It could be perceived that the first two of these titles are related to the female identity of Mary, while the other two are related to her identity as the queen. The first two titles, very fashionable and embarrassing, are all about a woman's external appearance. In his report, the child focuses on the external appearance of the queen as being half naked and wearing bright red underwear. These details show how the young generation raised in today's society has internalized the objectification of the female body, especially in journalism (192).

The story focuses on the queen as a woman, not as a leader. History tells us that the queen did not choose her life herself, but rather it was imposed on her. She did not choose to be an heir to the throne, and she did not choose to go to France, she did not choose her first husband. Queen Mary fell victim to political and religious struggle. In addition, she was utilized as a tool in the competition over the throne. Since her inception, Henry II of France sought to marry her to his sick son, dauphin Francis. The purpose of her marriage

was to secure control of Scotland. Where the marriage was a political treaty with the Scots to unite France and Scotland into one kingdom, it turned out later that the treaty considered Scotland to be attached to France. The treaty had been signed due to the weakness of Queen Mary's political acumen and experience (Cavendish). Moreover, the English sought to marry Queen Mary to the heir to the English throne, Edward Tudor.

In religious terms, Queen Mary suffered from the Catholic-Protestant conflict, as the baby queen was raised on the Catholic religion in France. However, the rapid rising of Protestantism in Scotland plunged her into a big dilemma. Queen Mary was seen as the carrier of the old religion that she had to abandon in favor of the new religion, Protestantism. Therefore, it can be said that one of the main reasons that determined the form and nature of the English policies towards Queen Mary is her Catholic religion. Besides being a religion that Queen Mary embraced, Catholicism represented a symbol of her political alliance with Europe, specifically France and Spain, and the Scots rejected this. In some literary works, Queen Mary has been portrayed as the rejected mother of the Scottish nation and was even viewed as a bad one. Furthermore, returning to Scotland represented a real political disaster due to the threat imposed on Elizabeth's throne, which eventually led to her execution after 19 years of imprisonment.

It is worth mentioning that Queen Mary had been victimized by her gender. Ágústsdóttir notes that the governing idea for some critics is that:

> Mary the feminine mother, and this is significant, not the least because, in historical fiction, there has been a marked tendency to assess Mary in relation to her cousin and rival, Queen Elizabeth I, Mary being the "feminine ideal, a woman victimized by her gender" while Elizabeth is

> the masculine woman "because she … puts the public world of politics above the private world of emotions. (76)

It can be said that there is a great deal of similarity between Princess Diana and Mary. The situation was not much different regarding utilizing and employing women for governance and power purposes. Further, people's opinions, points of view, and ways of thinking about women have not changed either. In her short story collection, *The First Person and Other Stories*, Smith shows how women are victimized. Although the reference to Princess Diana in the previous story, “The True Short Story” was less clear, she can be classified as a persecuted woman and put her in a position of comparison and similarity with Mary. Time is an effective remedy for many false beliefs and perceptions. However, these two stories point out that "history repeats itself," showing the rooting of society's heritage and its view toward women. The similarities between the two characters are many. Princess Diana - also - had to accept a new style of life which regarded her as - not a woman with an independent identity:

> The royal family imposed a new identity on her, which was glamorized by the press and the demands of her international celebrity. She was expected to be a wife and mother as well as a royal spokesperson and stylish symbol. As she tried to fulfill her duties, she felt that neither the royal family nor the press adequately praised her. the tabloids would create one image of here and she would react... she expressed to her friends one day that she did not know who she was. (B. Smith 23)

After the writing of the report, Smith focuses on the concept of gender roles through their conversation between the mother and the child. Through the story, it becomes clear that the mother is tired of the traditional and stereotyped life imposed on her. She is tired of being used as a home service tool whose job is to cook, wash, clean and take care of the

children. The mother refuses to be regarded as an electric machine, such as a washing machine. She refuses to be dealt with like a rigid entity whose value is linked to the service it provides to others. The mother has regained something of her life and her value as a human. At the story's beginning, Smith depicts the mother as reading a book and sitting relaxed with her dog. The child does not accept the new way of life of the mother; he hates and loathed her behavior:

> She began to say things like, I'm a person, and all that kind of thing. Then she was just, like, watching TV a couple of weeks ago, that programme The Good Life, it was something about the posh one singing in a choir. And she stood up and said, I am no longer your wife, to my dad, and I am no longer your mother, to me. Then she went out in the car and we didn't know where she'd gone, and when she came back it was two in the morning and we thought it would be okay, but the next day she was still saying the stuff. (Smith 76)

In her/his mind, the image of motherhood is associated with cooking, cleaning, taking care of children, and other household chores. The child's perception of this situation results from the inherited societal upbringing, which does not look at the mother and the female more than as a household tool. The mother's failure to perform her domestic duties from the child's point of view is compared to madness and irrational behavior: "No, I mean really mad, I said, not just normal mad. She won't cook anything. She says I'm to call her by her real name" (Smith 75). Rather, it is considered a departure from the norm. This is what Smith points at through the mother's position against the stereotyped image of women. The mother has broken these inherited societal constraints that oppress women. The hedge and fence that the mother destroys represent the social restrictions placed on women:

> My mother had cut down the hedge at the end of the garden, which meant there was nothing between our garden and the train-line. There was no fence at the end of the garden at all anymore. There was no sign of the dog. Look. Now we can see so much further. (Smith 77)

Moreover, the mother believes that the narrator, her/his father, and men, in general, must learn how to do domestic work. Those works, such as laundry, are not exclusively associated with women. Rather, men must participate in these tasks, and if they do not know, they will learn over time, but the most important thing is to break the image and societal boundaries that are imposed on women: "I'm running out of clean clothes, I said. I've almost nothing left to wear that doesn't need to be washed. I don't know how to work the machine. Neither does Dad. You'll manage, she said" (Ibid).

The fundamental point in the similarities between that the mother and Queen Mary is that the two characters are victims of a male-dominated society and a prevailing patriarchal culture considers women merely a means of production and looks at women as inferior to men. The culture of patriarchy prevailing in societies imposed a gender role that women must work according to. Queen Mary is seen as a production tool for the heir to the throne and a tool for political alliances. The mother is seen as a domestic machine whose duty is to do the work of domestic service. The two characters are surrounded by societal restrictions imposed by patriarchal culture. Both, Queen Mary and the mother of them objectified by men.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has analyzed Ali Smith's *The First Person and Other Stories* to underline the importance of the cultural and political dimension in contemporary British literature. The collection portrays an emphasis on the correlation between culture and politics and the role of literature in raising social awareness. The stories underscore political incidents and cultural concepts that cast a shadow on the nature of the relationship between members of society. To clarify this aspect of the collection, this study has focused on the nature of the hierarchical relationship between characters. The concepts of politics and culture are employed in the collection with references to arts, such as opera and music, in the literary context. The analysis of the stories with direct political references are separated from those with cultural references. However, it is challenging in some stories to prevent the overlap between the concepts of culture and politics. This has been portrayed through the issues referred to in the stories, such as racism, discrimination, elections, voting, music, opera, rituals, and different perceptions.

The focus was on examining every cultural and political reference in the stories that have been analyzed. Through these analyses, it has been sought to uncover new meanings for the literary texts, vocabulary, and symbols that Smith touched upon. These references and symbols were interpreted in the light of the theoretical framework in the first chapter. In analyzing the stories, parallels between the literary texts and everyday life were portrayed. Smith's unique style gives enough space for the reader and researcher alike to interpret and understand the message to be delivered. Although the literary text may carry

many interpretations, the focus in this thesis was on analyzing the texts from two perspectives, political and cultural.

In the first chapter, the concepts of culture and politics, and the dialectical relationship between them have been discussed as the theoretical framework for the subsequent chapters. And a separate section for racism and discrimination has been allocated. The types of discrimination and the ideology of racism has been explored in light of which the relevant topics were discussed.

In the context of this thesis, it has been found that there is an overlap between culture and politics. Culture has become the dominant factor in contemporary international relations. When we look at the references Smith refers to in several analyzed stories, it could be found that the basic arguments in modern political thought are based on cultural phenomena in the first place. In the analysis of "No Exit", it could be inferred that there is a close correlation between culture and politics. The topic of globalization, for instance, has been interpreted in the light of the references to the symbols included in the story, such as the movie theatre and McDonalds. In the analysis of "The Third Person" and "The Child", there are references to the Iraqi war, US forces, and terrorism. Despite that, there is no direct reference to the war on terrorism, yet the American invasion of Iraq has been categorized under the umbrella of the war on terrorism. The war on terrorism is also a cultural war that exceeds the boundaries of military actions. Wars can happen due to discrepancies in culture, thought, and the system of values and traditions. Moreover, the reference made by the child over the terrorists killing Christians is classified under cultural and religious killing. Accordingly, war is a cultural phenomenon that complements the

three sides of Smith's triangle embodied in the culture and politics syndrome: globalization, the clash of civilizations, and war. The stories include several political concepts and stances within a broader and comprehensive literary and cultural context. It can be concluded that the relationship between culture and politics seems closer today than ever before.

In the second chapter, the stories were analyzed from a political and social perspective, depending on the references and symbols included in the literary text. In the analysis of "Fidelio and Bess", there is an allusion to the political persecution of governments that preceded the French Revolution through Beethoven's only opera, *Fidelio*. Although *Fidelio* was performed four times at different intervals, Smith refers to this opera as a story to emphasize the historical and political events that impacted the lives of subsequent generations. In addition, the goal of the examination conducted was to inform the largest number of people of the difficult conditions that the Western people went through during the era of dictatorship and tyranny. In the same story's context, Bess, besides Fidelio, is inserted through which Smith indicates the injustice, marginalization, and miserable life that African-Americans were subjected to in America. Integrating both of these operas into one story indicates an emphasis on the unity of Western values , their common history, and the suffering of their people regardless of place or geography, as well as enriching the cultural awareness of the current generations and educating and cultivating them. Moreover, Smith employs music as a cultural tool against racism and discrimination. In the analysis of "The Second Person," there is a reference to the songs of Ella Fitzgerald, "A Tisket A Tasket," and Bilie Holiday, "Strange Fruit". Through these two songs, Smith reminds us about the waves of racism and discrimination that swept American society in the thirties of the last century. In addition, through the references included in the Fitzgerald

song, it can be argued that Smith rejected racism in all its forms, including racism directed against Japanese and Asians, and did not limit her position to racism directed against the African-Americans only.

In the analysis of "No Exit," there is a reference to imperialism and globalization as traps for developing or third-world countries. This reference has been reiterated in the story "I Know Something You Don't Know," where the developed countries are seen to exploit poor and third-world countries. In "The Third Person," Smith sheds light on social injustice, child labor, beggary, and theft. Further, there is a demonstration of the policies of the British parties, as the narrator denounces the deadlock and the lack of renewal in the political programs of the British parties and considers that the Conservatives and Labor are two sides of the same coin. She also criticizes the environmental policy of the successive governments of the British state, including the killing of squirrels as part of environmental combat. Moreover, she criticizes those policies, and condemns the authority, the government, and the officials because of killing those wild animals.

In the third chapter, the nature and the dynamics of the relationship between the characters in the stories have been examined. It has been found that the relationships among characters, in most cases, are classified according to two types: hierarchical and equivalent. Furthermore, this study focused on the different perceptions of the characters on certain topics. The references in literary texts bear multiple meanings, and understanding these meanings differs from one character to another. Further, Smith gives the reader enough space to understand the meaning by themselves. For instance, in the analysis of “Present”, the title present may refer to a gift and is considered one of the complements of the

ceremonies and rituals followed in public celebrations. Giving gifts refer to cultures associated with Christmas. The second meaning of Present may refer to time, specifically to the Present and the temporal context. Thus, it is about different perceptions: how we interpret the word "present" changes the meaning.

In the fourth chapter, the references and topics related to feminist literature and the prevailing masculine culture in society have been discussed. The focus was on the issues of gender roles and gender discrimination against women. In the analysis of "The History Of History," "The Child," and "The True Short Story," Smith's portrayal of discrimination and oppression against women have been explored. Discrimination against women, in Smith's view, includes all women, regardless of their social status or position. Smith points out that Princess Diana was subjected to discrimination and persecution until she died in a traffic accident, wheras Queen Mary was executed. Besides, Smith emphasizes that the oppression and discrimination against women can be practiced by all men, regardless of age, position, or time, within the prevailing patriarchal culture, as for example, Queen Mary was persecuted by the nobles around her, and the child discriminated against the woman who found it in the store.

In the context of gender, it can be concluded that Smith did not generally identify the identity of the narrator's sex. In many of the stories analyzed, Smith did not reveal the identity or the gender of the narrator, and the narrator's identity remained ambiguous to the reader. It seems that Smith considers that relationships among characters and acts are more important than the identity of the narrator. The reader's lack of knowledge of the narrator's identity prevents prejudice and judgmentalism in advance. Smith repeatedly returns to the

notion that gender is practically irrelevant; rather, what people experience is significant. For example, in "The History of History," "The First Person," "Present," and "The Second Person," the narrator's sex is not revealed.

Ali Smith's *The First Person and Other Stories* represents an expression of daily life practices and covers cultural, political, and social issues. It explores topics related to the public life of people, their history, and culture. The collection refers to a group of political, social, and cultural practices and concepts. It focuses on relationships between individuals and the characters in the stories. This study acquires its significance based on several levels: first, because it offers an eclectic approach to reading and interpreting Ali Smith's *First Person and Other Stories* in light of the socio-political factors that influence the perspective and behavior of individuals in their relationships with others. Second, it pushes the boundaries of the study of culture and politics in fiction and examines why social ills such as social discrimination, gender inequality, and other conflicts continue to exist despite multiple theoretical, creative, and activist efforts in the humanities and other fields. The scarcity of academic material on Smith's work, as well as the plethora of ideas that her texts involve in the reader invite researchers working in the field of social studies to consider the rest of this prolific writer's works in various thought-provoking contexts.

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