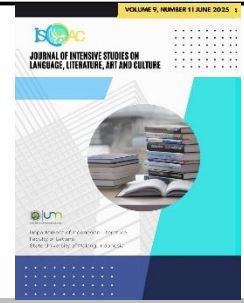

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**AN EXISTENTIAL FEMINIST STUDY ON NEHAL AND GIORGINA IN HADEER ELSBAI'S
*THE DAUGHTERS OF IZDIHAR***

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the marginalization and resistance of Nehal and Giorgina, the main female characters in *The Daughters of Izdihar* to achieve freedom. This study uses Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminist theory with a qualitative descriptive method. The findings show that Nehal and Giorgina's experiences of marginalization and their resistance to this marginalization have led them towards consciousness and characteristic transformation in revealing their existential identity.

INTRODUCTION

Humans will always seek equality as it is driven by a historical will to improve human life. One of the demands brought by society is the call for gender equality, also defined as equal opportunities and rights in all aspects of life for all genders (Gahan & Nayak, 2024). One manifestation of gender equality also relies on women's freedom as it has historically been a focus in the fight against oppression and marginalization of women's existence. In the twenty-first century, although gender equality has gradually progressed in some parts of the world, gender disparities still exist mainly due to social and cultural factors (Okan, 2024).

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These challenges are essentially global issues, which require the implementation of effective measures to address them. Whether it is the case of developed countries such as Sweden, known for its high level of gender equality, still facing discrimination against women in senior roles in business, or even Scandinavian countries that have committed to gender equality with their progressive policies, the gender gap has not simply diminished, indicating that there are deep-rooted factors that need to be addressed (Masood, 2023). This highlights that even in societies considered to be the most gender-equal with legal frameworks and institutional support, deep-rooted cultural and structural inequalities still hinder true gender equality, indicating the need for continued research on how these disparities manifest in different aspects of society, including literature.

Historically, literature has been a means to portray and reflect shifts in the representation of women's existence in society. The eighteenth century confined women to literary ideals such as the dutiful mother or the self-sacrificing wife, which hindered the depiction of authentic experiences (Balango, 2023). However, in the late nineteenth century, literature began to challenge existing norms, as authors and poets wrote literature that called for literacy and women's rights (Moradi & Shokrpour, 2020). Although there was an increase in women's voices towards the beginning of the twentieth century, women's narratives were still often marginalized in male-dominated discourses (Berg, 2023, p. 143). The contemporary movement represents a radical change, and women are given complex characters with an emphasis on themes of freedom, aspirations, and women's roles that were less represented in previous works. This shift, as mentioned in Lucas and Ordeniza's study (2023), allows for new explorations into more progressive depictions of women's roles in literature, such as satirizing social norms and exploring identity through disguise or cross-dressing.

While other literary genres may explore the shifting roles of women, fantasy offers a different perspective on themes such as women's freedom within different power structures. Fantasy can be defined as a genre of literature that generally involves supernatural beings, magical powers, and objects that present new feelings, desires, beliefs, or needs for inspection (Boucher, 2024). Unlike other genres, fantasy is free from the constraints of reality, allowing authors to address social issues, including gender dynamics strikingly (Dhantal, 2022). Existing studies have not explored how contemporary fantasy literature contributes to feminist discourses of autonomy and resistance, and little attention has been given to how this type of narrative reimagines women's autonomy within patriarchal systems. Therefore, the study of women's freedom and resistance in twenty-

first-century fantasy narratives can provide insights into the dynamic relationship between gender, power, and culture, as well as the cultural and social significance of women's existence in society.

The Daughters of Izdihar (2023) by Hadeer Elsbai is one of the fantasy novels that raises the issue of women's freedom and resistance set in the fictional republic of Ramsawa. It tells the story of two young weavers, Nehal and Giorgina, who fight against oppression. The novel depicts how these women face personal and political conflicts as they fight for freedom against a rooted patriarchal culture. The novel itself has not been previously analyzed in academic research. However, there are several related studies that analyzed other literary works related to how women's existence and freedom relate to identity, social structure, and cultural norms. The first is a related study titled *Philosophy of Freedom in Olena Teliha's Works* by Slyvka et al. (2022). This study examines how women's individual freedom in Olena Teliha's poetry is related to national liberation.

Using a postcolonial and nationalist perspective, the study's findings suggest that women's active involvement in cultural and political movements is crucial to achieving women's true freedom. This argument offers an analytical framework for understanding similar struggles in *The Daughters of Izdihar*, which similarly presents social transformation as an essential factor in women's pursuit of freedom. The second related study is titled *Women as Subaltern: Analysis of Khaled Hosseini's Novel The Kite Runner* by Ghimire (2023). Ghimire uses Chakravorty Spivak's notion of the gendered subaltern to examine the depiction of women as a marginalized group in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. While many female characters may appear passive at first, the study reveals that these marginalized women eventually awaken to the injustices they face and find the drive to confront social and religious limitations.

The dynamics presented in *The Kite Runner* are similar to those in *The Daughters of Izdihar*, particularly in relation to the influence of culture and religion on women's existence and freedom. Applying a transnational feminist approach, Jadoon's (2024) study entitled *Questioning Freedom: A Transnational Feminist Critique of the Representation of Muslim Women in I Am Malala*, explores Muslim women's freedom in *I Am Malala* emphasizing the importance of understanding women's experiences within their specific socio-cultural contexts rather than reducing them to universal narratives. This study critiques the simplification of women's struggles narratives in literature, providing insights relevant to

the analysis of women's freedom in *The Daughters of Izdihar*, which similarly contains a strong socio-cultural background. The related studies above show how societal structures, including culture, religion, and political structures, contribute to the marginalization of women's existence and their struggle for freedom.

Although these studies provide valuable perspectives, they differ from this study in terms of problem statement, genre, and focus. This study focuses on existentialist feminism in the cultural, social, and political context of the fantasy world. Unlike previous studies that examine women's freedom in a realistic setting, this study explores how *The Daughters of Izdihar* presents women's existence and freedom in a constructed fantasy society. Thus, the statement of the problem and this study aim to explore how the two main female characters in the story are marginalized by paying attention to the structure of social and cultural domination, and how they fight against this marginalization to achieve existential freedom. The experiences of the main female characters, Nehal and Giorgina, are analyzed through the theoretical framework of existentialist feminism. This theory aims to redefine gender relations and advocate for a society in which women's freedom is recognized as equal to that of men (Priyadharshini et al., 2022). By applying this lens to fantasy novels, this study fills a gap in research on women's freedom in twenty-first-century fantasy literature to explore these issues in depth, thereby enriching the discussion of gender representation and shedding light on women's struggles in fictional narratives. The results are also intended to provide insights into how fantasy literature, with specific reference to women's literature, goes beyond by reflecting the quest for women's freedom in the present day.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research approach by utilizing existentialist feminism, as it aims to examine the existential freedom of women in *The Daughters of Izdihar*. Qualitative research is a methodical, exploratory approach to understanding social phenomena, human behavior, and experiences that involves an in-depth analysis of non-numerical data (Morgan, 2022). Therefore, this approach is well-suited for generating descriptive information presented in written sentences or paragraphs that address the issue of women's freedom found within the novel. The novel *The Daughters of Izdihar* by Hadeer Elsbai serves as the primary data source. It was published by Harper Voyager in the United States of America in 2023. The research subjects are the two main female characters in the

novel, Nehal and Giorgina, who experience marginalization and resistance in their existence.

The data collection process in this study consists of several steps. The first step is conducting library research. It is done by collecting relevant data from reference books, journal articles, and websites relating to Hadeer Elsbai's works, the literary approach used in the analysis, and the issues raised in this study. The second step involves a close reading to identify emerging issues, which includes a thorough, repeated reading and examination of the novel. The third step is classification. The data used in the analysis are those that are in accordance with the conceptual framework of existential feminism and issues related to women's marginalization and resistance.

The data analysis technique employed in this research is the descriptive analysis method. Descriptive analysis in qualitative research involves examining a status, group of people, or object and providing a systematic description of the data obtained (Tote et al., 2023). This method is applied by giving a descriptive explanation of the problems found in the work through events, dialogues, actions, or the narrator's voice in the novel. There are three steps of analysis in this study. The first step focuses on stereotyping, subordination, and objectification by examining the events, dialogues, actions, and narratives that Nehal and Giorgina experience in the novel. The second step is to identify how the two female characters resist marginalization, especially through their roles in work, intellectual activities, and social transformation. The analysis is conducted by applying the existential feminism framework to the data, categorizing relevant quotes, and connecting them with theoretical concepts to understand women's existential freedom in the novel. In the final step, the writer concludes the analysis, providing a comprehensive understanding of women's existential freedom in *The Daughters of Izdihar* within the framework of scientific writing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This part contains the analysis of the novel *The Daughters of Izdihar* using the Existentialist Feminism approach by uncovering the related experiences of Nehal and Giorgina. The first step begins with the experience of marginalization of the two protagonists caused by their society's overlapping hatred towards women and weavers. The next step discusses Nehal and Giorgina's attempted resistance to the marginalization, and how the two characters use every possible strategy and ability to challenge and change the internalized constraints to survive and achieve their existential freedom as both a woman and a weaver. Through these steps in the analysis, the

experiences of marginalization and resistance work together to reveal the issues raised in the text and support the theme of women's existence and freedom in this fantasy novel.

Nehal and Giorgina's Experience of Marginalization

Marginalization is defined as a process that restricts certain groups of people from accessing opportunities and rights provided (V & Suresh, 2022). Thus, the persistence of marginalization is inseparable from the social, political, cultural, and religious conditions within a society. Nehal and Giorgina exist in a society that both demonizes weavers and marginalizes women. Misogyny has been deeply ingrained in the culture of the Ramsawi people. Just as Beauvoir understands freedom as being integral to one's relationship with others and the social situation, unless Ramsawi society itself as a social unit is aware of these inequalities, it will be difficult to end this marginalization (Kirkpatrick, 2023). In other words, Ramsawi's resentment towards weavers and women would continue to overlap, whereas Nehal and Giorgina would continue to be subject to marginalization in their existence.

Nehal's Experience of Stereotyping, Subordination, and Objectification

Nehal is a highborn woman from one of Ramsawi's official noble houses, the House of Darweesh. She is a water-weaver. Her ambition is always to become a student of the Alamaxa Academy of the Weaving Arts and eventually be part of the Izdihar Division's military army. The stereotyping Nehal experiences is evident in the fundamental structure of her society, her own family. One such instance is when her mother, Shaheera, strongly opposes Nehal's dream of becoming a soldier. It is that being a soldier is not an appropriate path for women as she confronts Nehal as follows:

"And it's not just about the money, Nehal . . . it would be unseemly. Married women belong at home, with their husbands. Certainly not soldiering. Besides, have you thought of what being a soldier truly means? What if Zirana actually declares war instead of skirting around the topic, hmm? What then? Shall I sit quietly while my daughter gets herself killed? You're a highborn lady, so leave the soldiering to the rabble." (Elsbai, 2023, p. 14)

Her mother believes that a married woman's proper place is at home with her

husband. More so, the fact that Nehal is a highborn lady who is expected to act as one. However, if analyzed further, her mother's opposition is influenced by what society believes to be against the law and religious norms of a woman's role. This manner of Shaheera in some way reflects how Ramsawi society is solely concerned about propriety and reputation when it comes to women's dignity. Similar to how Asma in *Jumhuriyyatu Ka'anna* is constrained by stereotypes that hinder her personal development, Nehal's experience of being discouraged from becoming a soldier by her own mother reflects Beauvoir's existentialist view that societal labeling limits women's freedom and self-actualization (Azzahra, 2022).

Ramsawa's political state also contributed to perpetuating the subordination of women. This subordination extends to the point involving physical violence and murder attempts toward women and weavers. As seen during the Daughters of Izdihar march at the parliament building, the police force acted violently by backhanded Nehal and fired bullets at a group of unarmed women, which ended up killing one of them, Labiba (Elsbai, 2023, p. 204). Even when Nehal caught Attia Marwan, the police officer who committed this crime, arguing with Naji Ouazzani, over their partnership agreement to ensure the march went poorly, Attia was blatantly unconcerned and ignored his misconduct simply because they were women. As Attia put it:

"What does it matter? She's a nobody. A woman. A weaver" (Elsbai, 2023, p. 256).

Attia's subordinating manners towards women are obvious in his statement to Nehal and Malak during their imprisonment:

"There's more honor in everything I do than you could possibly understand, woman" (Elsbai, 2023, p. 301).

Ironically, Attia is merely one among many Ramsawi who adhere to misogyny and anti-weaver values. It is thus noticeable that Ramsawa's cultural and political systems of marginalizing women and demonizing weavers overlap in reinforcing the notion of women as the Other as well as perpetuating women's subordination.

The objectification experienced by Nehal is also closely related to the internalized tradition of patriarchal values in Ramsawa society. For Ramsawi women, their bodies are

not necessarily their own. Their right to bodily autonomy is alienable under the male guardian construct through marriage like property to be sold. In an attempt to salvage the family honor from scandal, bankruptcy, and shame due to her father's mismanagement, Nehal is betrothed and eventually married to one of the wealthiest men in all of Ramsawa, Niccolo Baldinotti. For the sake of her responsibilities to the family, she had to sacrifice her happiness, her freedom, her desire to join the academy and the army, as well as the opportunity to discover the fullest potential of her water-weaving abilities. As she feels like a sold item, Nehal sarcastically opens up to her mother, Shaheera:

“My dowry helped pay off Baba’s debts, didn’t it? So I suppose it was worth it, selling me to the highest bidder.”

Shaheera did not flinch; she was much too accustomed to her daughter for that. Instead, shocking Nehal, she nodded. “Yes. You’re right. It was a calculated decision. We sacrificed you to save everything else.” (Elsbai, 2023, p. 316-317)

Ultimately, Nehal is left with only one option as an objectified woman, in which her marriage and bride price are the only things that can save her family's status and reputation.

One other issue about the objectification experienced by the Ramsawi women is that their existence will always be associated with their bodies. One such objectification of women's existence is shown when Nehal receives harassment from her classmate at Alamaxa Academy, Talaat, who intentionally makes lewd kissing noises at Nehal's back, brushes Nehal's backside with his hand, and scowls at Nehal like she is something on the bottom of his shoe. In response, Nagi, as the teacher, stated that although they may be flustered by the presence of women among them, he still expects them to behave like gentlemen (Elsbai, 2023, p. 120). This response indicates that such male attitudes towards female presence are somehow understandable and possibly a common occurrence. Thus, the analysis above reveals that the traditional values, laws, and political system of Ramsawa society as a whole play a significant role in Nehal's experience of stereotyping, subordination, and objectification as forms of marginalization towards women.

Giorgina's Experience of Stereotyping, Subordination, and Objectification

Giorgina is a weaver, a commoner girl in Ramsawa. She was Niccolo Baldinotti's lover for over a year before Nico was set up with Nehal (Elsbai, 2023, p. 36). Giorgina's experience regarding the stereotyping of women's nature is shown when she, Labiba, and Etedal did a fundraising event for the Daughters of Izdihar at King Lotfy's temple house. During the activity, a group of teenage boys responded unfavorably and stirred up a ruckus with them. From this moment, Giorgina realized the extent of the society's and that group of teenage boys' cynicism towards women and weavers as described explicitly:

From the day Giorgina had become a part of the Daughters of Izdihar, she was used to the outmoded views, the prejudice, the patronizing, paternalistic attitudes, even the violence but what never ceased to infuriate her was people like those teenage boys, treating them all like they were just a joke, a spectacle to be laughed at. It was one thing to be seen as dangerous, subversive at least that meant they were being taken seriously. But how many in Alamaxa thought the Daughters of Izdihar only a cohort of silly, empty-headed girls who could do nothing, who were just wasting everyone's time with stupidity? (Elsbai, 2023, p. 28)

Thus, it shows the extent to which patriarchal values stereotyping the nature of women have been internalized in the Ramsawa tradition.

In the context of women's subordination, the internalized patriarchal traditions and values experienced by Giorgina lie in the way Ramsawi people perpetuate the infantilization of women through male guardian consent. This is shown when Giorgina is arrested by the police at the Daughters of Izdihar rally. Giorgina begged Shabaan, the police commander, to release her into her own custody as she knew very well that her father would be furious if he found out she was arrested for being part of the Daughters of Izdihar. Later on, Shabaan firmly replied that Ramsawa's law does not allow him to release a girl into her own custody (Elsbai, 2023, p. 73). Perhaps this is one of the many reasons why the rally happened.

Both Giorgina and the rest of the women are grown adults and yet their rights are subordinated to these males who treat them like infants who are incapable of being responsible for themselves. Giorgina's incapacity to obtain custody of herself without male

consent shows the deeply ingrained patriarchal subordination that deprives women of their independence and upholds male dominance in both the home and the legal system. Once again the Ramsawa's law proves to be nothing more than an extension of women's subjugation beneath men's feet. Whereas men could do whatever they wanted, Giorgina had no choice but to abide under this subordination.

The objectification experienced by Giorgina is also associated with her constrained agency under the male guardian construct through marriage. Just like Nehal and many other Ramsawi women whose fate and reputation were never entitled beyond marriage, Giorgina was never entitled to choose her own husband. The moment her father is visited by Zakariyya, a rich and decent man for a marriage proposal, Ehab does not think twice and disregards his daughter's consent (Elsbai, 2023, p. 116). As if as his saving grace, Ehab is pleased to have sold his daughter to a worthy bidder. In the meantime, Giorgina is stunned at the misery she is about to face knowing she can never be happy, satisfied, or fulfilled as Zakariyya's wife. Since he doesn't want her to work, it seems like she should also give up her involvement with the Daughters of Izdihar, a community of women that gave her some semblance of purpose. She has to choose between sacrificing her freedom and purpose as a woman for her family's reputation and stability or sacrificing her entire family's reputation for her own love and happiness. Once again, for some reason, women have always been placed in a state of sacrifice.

The objectification that Giorgina faces is also manifested in how her existence and accomplishments will always be associated with her body. Attention and control over women's bodies and appearance for the sake of reputation and propriety is the only thing that Ramsawi people care about. Consider the harassment Giorgina faces in everyday life like the moment she suffered the leers and had her knee swept by an unknown man's hand while hitching a ride on a mule cart (Elsbai, 2023, p. 135). In dealing with these unpleasant attitudes, just like any other Ramsawi woman who suffered the leers as she did, she would usually just move away and say nothing. She knew very well that if she or other women said something, these men or abusers would only roll their eyes or call women hysteric. As though degrading the existence of women as human beings, their value is solely defined by their physical appearance and marriage offerings. Giorgina's experiences demonstrate how deeply systemic oppression is accepted and internalized in both legal and cultural structures, as patriarchal values in Ramsawi society subjugate women through

infantilization, objectification, and the denial of autonomy.

Nehal and Giorgina's Resistance to Marginalization

Resistance is defined as an individual's ability to challenge or reject pre-existing systems or actions (Humă et al., 2023). As Beauvoir's understanding of existentialism underscores the need for women's transcendence or resistance to move beyond societal constraints (Beauvoir, 2010, p. 813), Nehal and Giorgina attempt resistance using every possible strategy and ability to survive and achieve their existential freedom as both a woman and a weaver. The marginalizations that Nehal and Giorgina experience have led them towards consciousness and characteristic transformation to achieve existential freedom.

Giorgina as a Working Woman

Despite being part of her responsibility to her family, working at Anas' bookstore becomes one of Giorgina's ways to survive in a society that marginalizes women and weavers, and to find her life's essential purpose. This is shown in the narrative:

Most days, Giorgina was practically thankful for her family's poverty; her employment granted her much needed time away from her father. It allowed her to have some semblance of a life. As it was, Giorgina lived a life of constant lies, a precariously built house of cards that could easily collapse and destroy her. Her parents did not realize her work at the bookstore was broken up into shifts, nor did they have an inkling of how much free time Giorgina actually had.

This allowed her to participate alongside the Daughters of Izdihar—albeit anonymously—and it allowed her to have Nico, whom she was about to meet for tea before her shift at the bookstore. (Elsbai, 2023, p. 41)

This indicates that working provides her with greater freedom than staying at home with her family. As Beauvoir (2010, p. 813) points out work can offer them a wider scope of activities and interactions within society and intellect, working allowed Giorgina to redefine her identity and achieve self-actualization outside her confined notion as property or

subject. Thus, Giorgina's job at the bookstore gives her a way to fight against marginalization and the constrictive boundaries of her family and society.

Nehal and Giorgina as Intellectuals

Nehal is solely passionate and concerned with her water-weaving skill and all that can help her develop this skill, including enrolling in the Alamaxa Academy of the Weaving Arts and becoming an accomplished weaver. Her intellectual engagement is manifested in her involvement as a student of the Alamaxa Academy. It is not just about going to school but also part of achieving her existential purpose. It is when Nehal finally manages to get Nico's approval to attend the Alamaxa Academy that she envisions all the possibilities she has always dreamed of:

Instead, she occupied herself with the possibilities that lay ahead of her. Rather than spending her days as a bored society wife, Nehal would learn to fight. She would finally, finally, gain full control of her waterweaving. She would be among like-minded women who would not scowl at her weaving or back away in fear if she lost control for a moment. They would not treat her like an outlier.

And then she would graduate. She would join the army—she hadn't quite figured out how that would work with Nico, but she was sure she could arrange it. She was determined to rise through the ranks and become somebody, somebody important, whose name was spoken with respect because of her abilities and accomplishments rather than her birth or marriage. (Elsbai, 2023, p. 49-50)

Her intellectual skill is manifested in her ability to improve her water-weaving skills, as she has put a lot of effort into her training, which has pleased both herself and her teacher (Elsbai, 2023, p. 152). This indicates that her desire to gain full control of her abilities and accomplishments serves as a manifestation of gaining her identity and existence. Being “someone with respect because of her abilities and accomplishments rather than her birth or marriage” and “all her progress in weaving, all her own strength and determination” can be interpreted as a way to claim individuality and break free from the constraints of the

social structures imposed upon her (Elsbai, 2023, p. 152). Likewise, to be treated “not like an outlier” can be interpreted as a way to assert her right to be recognized as equal and not as the Other. Just like how Dalida reclaims her identity through intellectual pursuits and creative expression after her divorce in the novel *Dalida*, Nehal's relentless effort to master water-weaving reflects existentialist feminism's call for women to transcend imposed roles and assert their subjectivity beyond birth and marriage (Mauludina & Al-Anshory, 2024).

In the case of Giorgina, she has always had an interest in scholarship and knowledge. Unlike Nehal, who entered the academy, Giorgina's intellectual engagement is shown in her contribution to the writing of The Daughters of Izdihar's magazine, *The Vanguard*. The opportunity to express her opinion in the form of writing, and her contribution to writing articles in *The Vanguard*, serve as her attempt to claim her individuality, and her existence, and break free from societal constraints that have been suppressing her voice and opinion. It is also her critical thinking and writing skills that encourage the public to understand and hear their side of the story about what really happened at Parliament regarding the Daughters of Izdihar and the terrorism charges against Malak. Giorgina coaches Nico to give an interview to the *Alamaxa Daily* to tell what Attia Marwan did, throws his support behind them, and then alludes to Attia's patron without mentioning Ouazzani's name, just as Giorgina did things like this all the time when she wrote her own articles, alluding to things without saying them outright, allowing her readers to come to their own conclusions (Elsbai, 2023, p. 284). Her critical thinking ability in coaching Nico to build an argument for the interview with the *Alamaxa Daily* shows that women as intellectuals play a role in promoting forms of thought, just as her words successfully managed to flip the public's opinion and carried on notes of sympathy for the Daughters of Izdihar. Nehal and Giorgina both use intellectual engagement to assert their individuality and fight against social marginalization. Nehal does this by becoming an expert at water weaving and going to school to be recognized, while Giorgina uses reading, writing, and critical thinking to regain her voice and have an impact on public discourse.

Nehal and Giorgina as Social Transformists

Nehal was already infuriated by Ramsawi's marginalization of women and weavers long before she enrolled at Alamaxa Academy, as it was mentioned that she had already subscribed to *The Vanguard*, a magazine owned by The Daughters of Izdihar, which detailed

their attempts to convince Parliament to expand women's rights to vote and run for office in the new constitution (Elsbai, 2023, p. 51). This shows that personal emancipation was already ingrained in her and that she had long been interested in political and social movements that opposed patriarchy in Ramsawa. However, while living with her parents, she did not have the access and connections to manifest it. It was only after entering Alamaxa Academy as a student that her sense of emancipation and belonging from shared goals began to grow stronger, as described:

Shaimaa, Mahitab, Carolinna, Zanuba, and Dawlat: here were five other women, five other weavers just like her, with the same grievances and ambitions. For the first time in her life, Nehal felt an acute sense of belonging, like a puzzle piece finally fitted into its rightful place. She wondered if it was like this among the Daughters of Izdihar, when they held their clandestine meetings and their very public rallies if part of why they fought so hard was not just to win their freedoms, but because they valued the camaraderie that came from shared goals. Nehal had not thought of suffrage often, but she'd thought of her unequal station in Ramsawa, the ugly leers she got just walking down a street, her inability to make any significant decision without the approval of her father or husband. If the Daughters of Izdihar were working to upend all that, shouldn't Nehal do her best to help them? (Elsbai, 2023, p. 109)

As Beauvoir (2010, p. 753) suggests women to work towards greater social change collectively by engaging in political and social movements, Nehal's emotions and experiences such as “an acute sense of belonging, like a puzzle piece finally fitted into its rightful place,” “the camaraderie that comes from a shared goal,” or her “unequal station in Ramsawa” can be interpreted as Nehal's desire to help eradicate oppression and reconstruct patriarchal values in ways that promote gender equality in Ramsawa. This is the starting point of Nehal joining the Daughters of Izdihar, attending their meetings, and as is well known, joining their marches and rallies, which unfortunately often put her at a disadvantage. Just like how she was not circumspect and cautious in joining the march at the parliament building without a face veil, which led to her being caught by the police, her

picture being printed on the newspaper headlines and ruining the Baldinotti family's reputation, and worst of all, it led to her being expelled from Alamaxa Academy that she had been fighting for. This series of events makes her regret and realize one thing: that if only she had been more circumspect and more cautious. Nehal, who always hated cowardice, eventually regretted her mistaken prudence for cowardice (Elsbai, 2023, p. 223). This regret eventually drives Nehal to take action to fix everything that had broken, to clear their names, establish the truth of what happened at Parliament, and get the city on their side. That way she can eradicate the oppression imposed on them and take back their rights both as individuals who are women and weavers in Ramsawa.

While Nehal only gained access to the Daughters of Izdihar after marrying Nico, Giorgina herself has been a part of this association for quite some time. It was Malak Mamdouh, who started the Daughters of Izdihar, who never failed to amaze her. Giorgina envied Malak's confidence, her quality of oration, the way she carried herself, the way she spoke so calmly but firmly, the way her voice carried even though she did not raise it, and Giorgina herself could not imagine herself up on a platform in front of so many people trying to convince them of her controversial viewpoint; she would open her mouth and nothing would emerge (Elsbai, 2023, p. 57). Indeed, Giorgina had even attended some of the Daughters of Izdihar rallies and meetings before. In the march at the Parliament building, for instance, Giorgina stands among them and finds herself in a state of exhilaration as she finds herself smiling, and then, shouting along with the others (Elsbai, 2023, p. 194). It is obvious that during this moment Giorgina finds herself as part of a collective change not only for her freedom but also for the broader reconstruction of patriarchal values in ways that promote gender equality. Moreover, during the hunger strike in front of the Parliament building, Giorgina overcame her inability to deliver a speech in front of the senators and the rest of the crowd. She copied Malak's elocution skill set in her speech and practiced what to say (Elsbai, 2023, p. 311).

In accordance with the part that have been mentioned it shows Giorgina's character development, who initially refrained from speaking up in a situation that put her up on a platform in front of so many people, to finally being in Malak's position as she opens her mouth in front of the crowd to convince them and the senators regarding their rights as women. At this point, Giorgina eventually acknowledged the need for concrete initiatives to speak up against marginalization so that all Ramsawa women, including herself, could gain

their freedom. Nehal and Giorgina's journeys demonstrate how personal experiences of oppression and collective camaraderie within the Daughters of Izdihar serve as sources for political awakening and active resistance to patriarchal structures, ultimately leading both women to embrace their capacities in advocating for gender equality in Ramsawa.

CONCLUSION

Nehal and Giorgina's experiences of marginalization and their resistance to marginalization provide a framework that shows their existential identity as a woman and a weaver. These two factors work together to reveal the issues raised in the text and support the theme of women's existential freedom in this fantasy novel. This is shown by how the stereotyping, subordination, and objectification of the Ramsawi society have led these two characters towards consciousness and characteristic transformation to achieve existential freedom. Nehal and Giorgina's resistance to marginalization is also a manifestation of achieving existential freedom itself where both characters use every possible strategy and ability by becoming working women, becoming intellectuals, and becoming social transformists to challenge the internalized constraints and to survive as both a woman and a weaver.

One advantage of this study lies in the application of existentialist feminism to a fantasy novel, which allows for deeper insight into the lived experiences of fictional characters as representations of real-world gender struggles. The implications of this study go beyond literary analysis, as this study is expected to provide life lessons and social sensitivities for readers on the issue of women's freedom and existence, and may inspire scholars to conduct further research exploring how themes of marginalization and resistance are expressed in different cultural settings. However, this study is limited by its focus on a single text, leaving room for future research to conduct comparative analyses across works. Ultimately, this research emphasizes that facing marginalization in both fiction and reality often requires struggle and transformation, as well as in the context of achieving existential freedom as a woman. Nehal and Giorgina's journey illustrates how liberation emerges through conscious resistance as well as a redefinition of self and existence.

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