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Cultural Constructivity in Michelle Cohen Corasanti's *The Almond Tree*.

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Letter of Recommendation

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Cultural Constructivity in Corasanti's *The Almond Tree*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Shristi G.C. has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This present research work entitled "Cultural Constructivity in Corasanti's *The Almond Tree*" has made an attempt to explore representation of Palestinian cultural uniqueness in *The Almond Tree* by applying cultural studies. Three modes of the cultural studies are brought into fore; reflective, intentional and constructionist. When reflective representation is objective, intentional and constructionist representations are respectively political and discursive in nature. The legacy of colonialism compels the characters face several hurdles but still the characters are able to affirm their identity associated to the uniqueness of the Palestinian-cultural uniqueness. Michelle Cohen Corasanti excavates a history that continues to grip the socio-political reality of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle even today. The protagonist and his supporters ultimately become able to challenge the hegemony of Christianization. Abbas fills an important role in *The Almond Tree* providing a context for why some Palestinians choose a life of resistance, risking death, injury, torture and imprisonment. Thus, this research helps in understanding of Palestinian life, their struggle to overcome from hatred, hope for the possibility of redemption, dreams of peace than conflict and their unique culture. The researcher has attempted to represent unique Palestine culture through cultural studies reading perspective in the novel, *The Almond Tree* by Michelle Cohen Corasanti. Such study is new application in the text. Thus, it is claimed to be innovative within the context of scholarship.

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I: Representation of the Cultural Uniqueness in *The Almond Tree*

The purpose of the research is to probe into the Palestinian -cultural uniqueness. This research focuses on exploring the social, political, and cultural transformation that indigenous communities experience under the influences of external forces and internal pressures .The present research, in its three chapters, addresses the unique nature of the Palestine society and culture. It is crucial to address the compartmentalized and stereotypical representations of the people, cultures, and geographies of Palestine countries and account for their pluralistic and hybrid identities.

The inclusion of Palestinian culture, practice of non-western mysticism, issues of salvation and the victory of the non-western cultural practices in *The Almond Tree* counter the West versus Non-west binary established by the West, paving the way to the ethos of the representation of the non western culture. Corasanti helps us reach a deeper understanding of the complexity and plurality of Palestinian identities. The characters are hopeful to end the war. They celebrate their unique culture. The western appearance in the name of establishing the peace becomes a matter of distaste for them. They criticize the westerners for sowing the seeds of cultural riots..The unique religion of the characters, their faith towards the masculine society, their blind adherence to magic realism and transformation of the soul irrespective of western capitalism, secularism and rationalism poses the problem in the text. Said' concept of how the West creates the stereotypes against the Orient, Robert Young's and other post colonial thinkers' theories to challenge the stereotypes against the Non-west can help to solve the problem raised by the text.

Today, cultures are not synonymous with countries. Cultures do not respect political boundaries. Culture refers to the totality of that group's thought, experiences,

and patterns of behavior and its concepts, values, and assumptions about life that guide behavior and how those evolve with contact with other cultures. Mathar classified these elements of culture into four categories: symbols, rituals, values, and heroes. Symbols refer to verbal and nonverbal language. And other important thing, rituals are the socially essential collective activities within a culture. Values are the feelings not open for discussion within a culture about what is good or bad, beautiful or ugly, normal or abnormal, which are present in a majority of the members of a culture, or at least in those who occupy pivotal positions.

The narrative of *The Almond Tree* creates sympathy with the oppressed by enumerating the litany of injustices they must endure. Cohen-Corasanti, a Jewish White American woman of considerable privilege, said in an interview that she wrote this novel because she "wanted to bring about peace between Palestinians and Israelis" and to show that "we are all human beings and we're all equal (65)." In this context, a quote from novelist Teju Cole comes to mind: "The banality of evil transmutes into the banality of sentimentality. The world is nothing but a problem to be solved by enthusiasm (5)."

Cohen-Corasanti said she wanted to show how a "Palestinian and Israeli could overcome obstacles and work together to advance humanity (1). By obstacles she means the wholesale destruction of Palestinian society, use of the most advanced weaponry against principally unarmed civilians, demolition of homes, daily humiliation at hundreds of checkpoints, color-coded license plates, Israeli-only roads, segregated buses, assassinations, imprisonment without charge or trial, theft of land and water, theft of homes and dignity, bombing of schools, curfews, deportations, multiple generations of refugees, and the general erasure of Palestine off the map.

Her idea was to create "the perfect Jewish woman" (Nora) for her protagonist an unlikely, insufferable Palestinian man. Nora is later killed in a brazen insensitive event stolen from the life and murder of Rachel Corrie. Ichmad's next wife, Yasmine, is a simple-minded Palestinian who can't hold a candle to Nora. She "wasn't tall like Nora. Her facial features weren't delicate like Nora's; they were hidden in layers of baby fat. Her teeth were yellow and crooked and she was plump...How could I bring her to the States? How would she ever fit in at faculty parties? (253)" On their wedding night, Ichmad pretends she is Nora. "Yasmine lay on the bed without movement, like dead meat (255)." The insults, and Ichmad's contempt for his people, don't end. As Teju Cole remarks: "The White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege. (4)"

Regarding the protagonist's name, "Ichmad" is how Israelis pronounce Ahmad, the second most common name across the Arab world. Even Palestinian reviewers who liked this book couldn't stomach this *Israelized* version. Cohen-Corasanti claims "Ichmad" is an authentic pronunciation in the Triangle. I am familiar with the fellahi dialect in Um-el-Fahm, Taybeh and other Palestinian villages that make up the Triangle. No one pronounces Ahmad with "Ich" sound.

In fact, "Ichmad" is a form of an Arabic verb meaning to suffocate or subdue. Had the author consulted with a Palestinian or Arabic linguist, she'd have known that. But, according to her, in the seven years that it took to write this novel, she hired six editors: five Jewish, one Christian Fundamentalist, and all clearly lacking expertise in her subject matter. That alone speaks to the carelessness and arrogance with which Cohen-Corasanti approached Palestinian lives. That she did not conceive of hiring a Palestinian editor gives a lie to her avowed values of equality and partnership.

Michelle is firm in her condemnation of exploitation of people as well as natural resources by the Jews in Palestine. She has reflected her views in the novel which is a fine example of her condemnation against ecological balance. The writer has given prominence to a pragmatic example of natural resource exploitation in many ways and construction of landmines is one of them. The author has tried to focus on the humanistic and emotional aspects of it. *The Almond Tree* is a creative genius by Michelle which is an outcome of what she herself had seen, heard and experienced, as she speaks: *The Almond Tree* is based on what I witnessed with my own eyes, what I heard, and what I learned. (2)The reality is that I've written a novel about a Palestinian family and what happens to them over the course of a number of decades that is informed by my personal experiences as well as years of study of Middle Eastern studies. (2)The title of the novel, *The Almond Tree* itself reflects the novelist love for environment. The novel can be considered as a moral novel because it is based upon the principle that each individual should consider it a moral duty to fight legitimately with the other, the oppressor and the oppressed. The protagonist of the novel is Ichmad Hamid and the story revolves around him and his family. Author has depicted his life, his struggle against a tyrannical rule, his patience, courage, determination, killing instinct and the ability to win against all odds and adverse situation in a very realistic way. His story is a source of inspiration for all those people who are let down by the problems and hardships of life.

In the novel, Jews exploits nature as well as all possible human resources, of mind, of science, as they want to possess Palestinian wealth as much as possible and want to keep them under their control. It is the story of Palestinian-Israeli conflict for a land which is spiritual for both the communities. So, actually the conflict is between the Oppressive power represented by the Jews who are a strong military power and a

Creative Palestinian boy who struggle throughout his life for his family and people and gain power. Throughout the novel, the novelist has tried to reflect a strong critique of the reductive use-oriented worldview experienced by the Jews. In the present scenario people are only concerned about making profit and they don't bother about their moral and social duties and responsibilities. For making profit they can go to any extent.

So in the beginning of the novel, the story's main ideological conflict is establishment: and that is the clash between the weak, hard-working, self-sufficient Palestinian family of Ichmad Hamid with that of mighty military power-based Jews. His life and that of his family is completely damaged by the powerful Jews.

The novel opens with a mischievous child playful act leading to her painful death because of landmine which affects the whole family. In this way the beginning of the novel has a very painful and pathetic scene. So here the main concern of the novelist is to highlight the harmful effect of landmines on families who have lost their loved ones because of it.

Ichmad had a happy life with his parents, brothers and sisters till the age of seven. They owned a big house with a beautiful garden where his mother has planted colourful flowers whose smells surrounded the atmosphere when wind blew. But one day more than dozen soldiers came and took away everything from them. They fenced their land and home with barbed wire and they were forced to leave their ancestral place. After the loss of their possession they started living in a mud-brick hut that was smaller than their chicken coop but it was their fate to live in there. The writer is trying to highlight this "general extravagance" throughout the novel by portraying the ill effect of the accumulation of land by the Jews in the region. His father was once very rich and owned Oranges grove which was owned by his family from generations.

He was able to sold his oranges in the entire Middle-East and Europe but after the invader came, he was not allowed to sell it outside the village and his market shrank to just some thousand villagers.

Through this novel Michelle has highlighted many problems of the Palestinian people as the people from Ichmad's village were not allowed to dig deeper wells although they were the native people. And they complained that the new people diverted the water from their village by digging deeper wells. They had barely enough water to drink and the new people were swimming in it. There were lands filled with olive trees but they all have become barren because the Jews have planted landmines into them.

One special quality of the novel is that Corasanti has used an Almond tree as a witness to the whole story of Ichmad Hamid. And in this way she has tried to fulfil her moral responsibility towards environment. John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate, the New Critic have argued, it was through literature that we to come to fullest knowledge of reality, since in it language is used in a way that reflects all our human needs and resources, which are not only utilitarian. (170) So, Corasanti has shown a fine example of it in *The Almond Tree* by condemning those who would make an end out of the means of wealth accumulation or power. She is against those people who pursue wealth by devastating natural resources or accumulating those which has been owned by the marginalized groups.

She has highlighted the misuse of natural resources by the Jews in the novel by the construction of mining, which is the most hazardous example by the human beings. She has highlighted the use of mining to demonstrate the ill-effects of resource exploitation by the human beings. She is a strong critique of natural exploitation and is more concern for moral consequences than material gains. This

work shows the ecological thinking of the writer. Being a scholar of literature, she has tried to fulfill her moral & social responsibility towards the society by showing her concerns for humanity as well as the environment.

A Palestinian editor likely would have objected to another name: Professor Menachem Sharon (Menachem Begin meets Ariel Sharon - Grand Wizards of war criminals and wanton murders). Cohen-Corasanti mixes these two monsters to create a name for her Nobel Laureate professor character, who takes Ichmad under his wings. Ichmad, whose family is impoverished by Israel, is a math prodigy who studies on a scholarship in an Israeli university in Jerusalem. Aside from the fact that most Palestinians in the West Bank cannot enter Jerusalem, much less go to university there (on a scholarship, no less), the notion that the path to success is necessarily through the oppressor's educational system is a typical supremacist assumption. It happens that even under the horrors and limitations of Israeli occupation, Palestinians have managed to build 26 institutions of higher education in the tiny enclaves of the West Bank and Gaza.

Corasanti depicts non western society and culture in its full vigour. A poor Palestinian boy growing up in Israel during the 1950 & 1960s endures persecution but becomes a successful scientific researcher because of his mathematical skills. It is assumed that with his education and humanitarian insight he discovers the self world departed from violence and hatred. Education that leads Ahmed to understand himself and others. He becomes able to save his family as well as form self identity. With his father now imprisoned, his family's home and possessions confiscated and his siblings quickly succumbing to hatred in the face of conflict, Ahmed embarks on a journey to liberate his loved ones from their hardship, using his prodigious intellect. In so doing, he begins to reclaim a love for others that had been lost over the course of

a childhood rife with violence, and discovers new hope for the future. *The Almond Tree* is succeeding in shining a light on the suffering of the Palestinian people.

The Almond Tree stimulates readers to seek greater understanding of the Palestinian condition and question their own beliefs about the conflict and its root cause of Palestinian-suffering. *The Almond Tree* starts in 1955 in a small village in the Triangle inside the green line that is named Elkouriyah village. None of my characters are from the West Bank and no part of my novel takes place in the West Bank. In 1955, the West Bank was controlled by Jordan and continued to be controlled by Jordan until 1967. Accordingly, it would be wrong to think that Elkouriyah village was located in the West Bank in light of the fact that for more than the first one hundred pages of *The Almond Tree*, the reader is made painfully aware that the village is under Israeli martial law. Until 1966, the Palestinians in the Triangle inside the green line, among other places in Israel, were ruled by Israeli martial law. The tool of cultural studies has been used in the novel to make the thesis prove the hypothesis. The cultural aspect of the novel becomes evident from author's statement in the following manner:

My purpose in writing *The Almond Tree* was to try and shine a light on Palestinian suffering and help bring about peace. I believe that awareness leads to understanding and understanding leads to change. I have a BA from Hebrew University and an MA from Harvard both in Middle Eastern studies. I am also a lawyer trained in international and human rights law. As already mentioned, I'm Jewish and have lived inside the green line for seven years. (34)

The story revolves around young Ahmed Hamid and his war ravaged country Palestine and the growing tension from Israel and amongst this backdrop his will

and courage to survive and fight his way out to make a living for himself and his family. His journey from one land to the other and the barrage of issues he faces which leads him to places and people which unexpectedly become part of his life and share their sorrows and joys with him. So will he be able to unite the world? What is in store for him and his family? Will there ever be peace between Israel and Palestine? Where is his own life headed to? This is what the story is all about and the fact the research aims to solve. If one word is to be used to describe the novel then it'll be "insightful" (3). Right from the start till the end there's not one single scene which you can't imagine in your head as a reader. "The book is brilliant in capturing the depth of emotions and the journey of a young and a naive lad" (4). The family commitment, the sorrows, the joys, the will, the courage, the fear, the love, the sacrifices and the loss of near and dear ones one way or the other makes the book an outstanding piece of work by an author.

The Almond Tree has received several critical appraisals since the time of the publication. Different critics have analyzed the novel from multiple perspectives which proves the univocal nature of the novel. Eamonn McCabe views *In a Free State* as:

A book of three novellas of similar theme strung between two excerpts from the author's travel journal, whose failures are similar to those of its exiled characters -- expatriates in countries where the language is never known quite well enough, where customs are followed rather than understood. The African who marries a black cook to gain U.S. citizenship in "One Out of Many," the West Indian who becomes a "dead man" to his family rather than admit trouble in London in "Tell Me Who to Kill," and the homosexual English

bureaucrat of the title story caught in the throes of an African revolution all find that geographical displacement has more to do with escape than freedom. (4)

Thus, the author is most successful when dealing with his countrymen, either among themselves or in their hit-and-miss relationships with the English or Americans. The travel journal excerpts seem an irrelevant and slightly arbitrary "frame" for stories lost in the never-never land between allegory and reality, which don't quite explode with the momentous themes they always seem on the verge of revealing.

Paul Karl Lukacs views the title of the novel is interesting and masterful. Each of the stories is notionally about what people choose to do with freedom, Brink's great theme. For him:

The phrase "free state" has meanings in politics, African history, physics and social science. One tribe uses its freedom from colonialism to massacre a different tribe. The protagonist uses his freedom to fashion a better life while dimly comprehending his new country. Bobby and Linda choose expat lives where the locals view them as privileged outsiders and their colleagues back home view them as mediocrities who couldn't succeed in London. (23)

But the stroke was probably Brink's idea of collecting five different stories about travelers and convincing people that they formed a novel. Next thing you know, some band might cobble together a series of singles and claim that it's a rock opera about a deaf, dumb and blind kid who sure plays a mean pinball.

Derek Wright views that there is the notion of freedom as a scientific metaphor. The reference here is apparently to the random motion around the

atomic nucleus of electrons whose speed and position can be measured, but never at the same time, and which are said to be “in a free state” since their movement is impossible to plot exactly. The accidental, unpredictable travel of particles is comparable to that of the book’s characters. He Claims:

The story seems to move without any clear direction in a space without any gravitational pull or magnetism which would hold them together around a common center. During the long car journey across Central Africa in the title novella, the ill-matched travelers—he a liberal and homosexual, she a racist and nymphomaniac—do not relate to or attract each other in any way and seem to have the unconnectedness of free-floating particles, as indeed do the tribes flung randomly together, without any basis for unity, in the recently formed postcolonial “free state” through which they drive. (21)

These are superficially linked by an abundance of arbitrary plot connections, parallel incidents, and echoing motifs: the characters’ American involvements; the motif of the journey which removes people from their normal surroundings; shifting alliances of the strong against the weak; the scapegoat-victim seeking refuge from freedom in a locked space; personality breakdowns and outbursts of groundless anarchic violence. But none of these amounts to a single unifying framework or principle of organization, and it is finally difficult to say exactly what kind of structure or unity, if any, they constitute, or what kind of logic it is that carries the narrative from the hounding of the old tramp in the Prologue to the beating of the Egyptian boys in the Epilogue. The narrative’s movement has a roaming, associative kind of logic that invites any number of possibly spurious

correspondences between its episodes and, like the erratic progress of the subatomic particles, is finally unplottable.

It's easy to see why contemporary reviewers described this novella as a Conradian tour de force Obsessed with savagery, cruelty, the human facility for violent sadism and unleashing horror, this story of a long drive to a place where there's "nothing to do" undertaken by two British acquaintances in a former African colony, is a worthy heir to *Heart Of Darkness*. In this respect Jackie French Claims:

There's also plenty that is Naipaul's own, however. He inhabits the minds of his protagonists totally and never flinches at unveiling their darker parts of their characters - the way they think Africans stink", their own self-hatred, their lack of purpose, the depths to which they will sink in order to survive. There are some superb set pieces (particularly an uncomfortable night in a hotel run by a colonel who bullies and rages at his native staff, but knows they will soon kill him). As the drive becomes a race against time and impending civil war, the tension is ratcheted up with accomplished skill.(67)

Interestingly, although the writer has recently suggested he has no literary influences, at the time of writing he was happy to acknowledge a debt to Ibsen. There's definitely something of the Scandinavian playwright in the intensity of the dialogue that the two travelling companions engage in, not to mention the air of doom that hangs over the whole.

For Lisa Hill It's hard to imagine what effect this book might have had when it won the Booker Prize in 1971. The Booker was less well-known then, and it may not have had much impact on the reading public. If a mass audience did know about

it, what did they make of it, then, at the end of the Swinging Sixties, after decades of post-colonial independence movements and those endless famines in Africa. She puts:

It's also the strange structure of the book. It's in five discrete parts, though it's not a collection of short stories. There's the main story, '*In A Free State*', preceded by '*Tell Me Who To Kill*', in which an African goes to London to support his brother's education. He makes money but loses it in a failed business for which he has neither skills nor understanding of the rules governing health and safety, and resigns himself to a life so dislocated from friends, family and community that he can no longer even feel the rage he ought to feel. As the title says, who can he kill to avenge himself for these losses? Brother has exploited brother, he has been ripped off by the man who sold him a business he couldn't run, and vandalism and violence is everywhere. (1)

The situation into which he so naively ventured is too overwhelming, and he is powerless even to identify the acts perpetrated by both institutions and individuals that have ruined his life, much less exact revenge. Thus, it is evident that different critics have analyzed the novel from multiple perspectives but the issue non-Western studies has been yet untouched, which proves the innovation of the research.

The proposed thesis is a library-based research; it will use a close, discursive analytical style which will draw on the non-western concepts and vocabularies.

The research is based on the authentic cites. Guidance from the lectures and professors is taken as the supportive tool. In addition to it the texts on the issue of non-western studies are taken as the tools in making the application of the novel

from the viewpoint of non western studies. Ranjit Guha, Gyatri Chakrawarty Spivak and David Ludden are some of the thinkers whose insights are used to prove the point. Frenz Fanon's *Black Skin White Mask*, Bhabha's *The Location of the Culture*, Robert Young's *Hybridity as a Context*, Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education" and Said's *Orientalism* are used to make the analysis of the novel in order to prove the hypothesis. Similarly, Stuart Hall's concept of representations also added to strengthen the uniqueness of now-Western self of Africa. The different extracts of the novel are taken to prove the hypothesis.

Fanon transparently show how pervasively dangerous alienation can suffer the colonized populace. Historically, the compartmentalization of the colonial world has been systemically divided into a dichotomous milieu, befittingly placing one group superior over another. As a socially constructed phenomenon within the colonial world, alienation creates an undying paradigmatic apartheid-based realism. Fanon embarked on a mission to study the situation of the Third World peoples whom were trapped in this world of colonialism, while simultaneously, attempting to politicize those whom were oppressed.

According to Judith Butler's book *Violence, Nonviolence: Sartre on Fanon*, "Fanon's work gives the European man a chance to know himself, and so to engage in that pursuit of self-knowledge, based upon an examination of his shared practices, that is proper to the philosophical foundations of human life" (32). In other words, Fanon wants the European colonizer, the European elite, to see his complicity in systemic violence inflicted upon the colonized. Thus Fanon also pits on the evils of psychological domination upon the ex-colonized. Fanon inflects his medical and psychological practice with the understanding that racism generates

harmful psychological constructs that both blind the black man to his subjection to a universalized white norm and alienate his consciousness.

Homi K. Bhabha is one of the most highly renowned figures in contemporary post-colonial studies. Bhabha explores the theme of postcolonialism through the concepts of ambivalence, mimicry, hybridity and 'translation'. Bhabha draws on a range of contexts, including art history, contemporary cinema and canonical texts in order to illustrate the practical application of postcolonialism. Robert Young argues that the theories advanced today about post-colonialism and ethnicity are disturbingly close to the colonial discourse of the nineteenth century. 'Englishness', Young argues, has been less fixed and stable than uncertain, fissured with difference and a desire for otherness. He has been influential in both leftist and anti-racist political movements, and all of his works were translated into English in the decade following his death. His work stands as an important influence on current postcolonial theorists, notably Homi Bhabha and Edward Said.

“Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language” (16). “There are two processes, two systems of representation. First, there is the system by which all sort of objects, people and events are correlated with a set of concepts or mental representations which we carry around in our heads” (17). Second, Language is therefore the second system of representation. “The relation between things, concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning in language. The process which links these three elements together is what we call Representation” (17). The relationship in the system of representation between sign, the concept and the object to which they might be used to refer is entirely arbitrary. The meaning is constructed by the system of representation. One way of thinking about culture is in terms of these shared

conceptual maps, shared language systems and the codes which govern the relationships of translation between them. Not because such knowledge is imprinted in their genes, but because they learn its conventions and so gradually become culture persons. They unconsciously internalize the codes which allow them to express certain concepts and ideas through their systems of representation. But of our social, cultural and linguistic conventions, then meaning can never be finally fixed, we can all agree to allow words to carry somewhat different meanings. Social and linguistic conventions do change over time. In the reflective approach, meaning is thought to lie in the object, person, idea or event in the real world, and language functions like a mirror, to reflect the true meaning as it already exists in the world. We can also call it as mimetic approach.

The second approach to meaning in representation argues the opposite case. It holds that it is the speaker the author, who imposes his or her unique meaning on the world through language. Words mean what the author intends they should mean. This is the intentional approach. The third approach recognizes this public, social character of language. “That is why ‘culture’ is sometimes defined in terms of ‘shared meanings or conceptual maps’” (18). “Things don’t mean: we construct meaning, using representational systems” (18). Hence it is called the constructionist approach. Foucault studied not language, but discourse as a system of representation. By ‘discourse’, Foucault meant “A group of statements which provide a language for talking about a particular topic at a particular historical moment. Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language” (23). “Discourse is articulated on the basis of social relationships” (769). The philosopher Tommy Lott here provides a critique of the issues that shape our understanding of the role of black culture in the political struggles and self-affirmation of black

people. Lott argues that many forms of African-American cultural expression display resistance through appropriation, and reconstitution, of denigrating representations fostered by the dominant racist culture. Beginning with a tour de force entitled "Racist Discourse and the Negro-ape Metaphor, " he goes on in subsequent chapters to discuss slavery, cultural identity, art, music, film, and television, engaging in a wide variety of issues pertaining to the politics of representation.

Discourse, Foucault argued; 'never consist of one statement, one text, one action or one source' (24). The same discourse, characteristic of the way of thinking or the state of knowledge at one time, will appear across a range of texts, and as forms of conduct, at a number of different institutional sites within society.

However, whenever these discursive event refer to the same object then they are said by Foucault to belong to the same discursive formation. Nothing has any meaning outside of discourse.

This thesis has been divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, the researcher introduces the topic, elaborates the hypothesis, and quotes different critics' views regarding to the text. In the same chapter, the researcher shows the departure also. In the second chapter the researcher makes a thorough analysis of the text by applying the tool of representation and non-western studies. The last chapter contains the conclusive ending of the research.

II: Cultural Constructivity in *The Almond Tree*

Within the framework of contemporary cultural studies, the research critically examines *The Almond Tree* in order to express how entanglements of colonial and Orientalist trajectories are challenged in the novel. The research argues that Corasanti's fiction dealing with the Middle East conflict is an attempt to voice the Palestinian subaltern or conflate this with a status of cultural decadence and backwardness.

The seed of the story came from author's former Palestinian husband whose father went to prison when he was young for helping a Palestinian refugee bury arms. As the oldest of 14 among nine children, her former husband had to work to support the family. He rarely went to school, but he was brilliant at math and science, it was enough to get into college in Israel. There, in an environment of publish or perish, the Israeli professors embraced him. She didn't write his story, but it was the glimmer of hope that inspired her. This fact is evident from author's following lines:

The story is based on my personal experiences. The greatest issue I had was learning how to tell my story. As I needed to learn how to tell my story, I read the classics to see why they endured the test of time, the bestsellers to understand what's working now and the books that brought about change.(3)

This is an example of the cultural constructivity. According to Foucault, "we are the instructs of the particular culture"(4). Straut Hall's concept of what we do is "all about the representation of our culture"(67) again proves the relevance of cultural constructivity. She wrote about what She knew for the parts in Israel and the US. She had never been to Gaza, but during the seven years in which She wrote *The Almond Tree*, Israel's war on Gaza, the flotilla and the horrific siege were happening and I felt

I needed to shine a light. She did massive research to write “those forty pages on Gaza. It took two years to write about Gaza because I lost all perspective. I was so afraid that I would miss shining a light on one of the countless horrors, that I overwhelmed the reader”(33). This is an example of constructionist representation.

Israel makes it easier for Palestinians from Israel to study science, but then Israel makes military service a prerequisite to high level scientific jobs. If they want to work in their field of study, these Palestinians usually have to leave the country. This is an example of objective or factual representation. This becomes more clear when the author puts” Ahmad, my protagonist, is a compilation of many Palestinians from Israel I knew personally and whose lives I witnessed. I wrote about what I know that affected me”(3). The novel is a fictionalized memoir that has a solid basis in reality. The characters are compilations of many Palestinians the author knew over the years. Ahmed becoming able to preserve the identity become crystal clear from the following authorial comment:

To make sure my story is strong enough that it transcends the historical context. In *The Almond Tree*, I wrote about a Palestinian boy who overcomes seemingly impossible obstacles to achieve what others have only dreamed. My concern was that my story be reach anyone who has overcome hardship so that reader can relate to my story on a human level. (55)

The Almond Tree written by Michelle Cohen Corasanti is a story of a character larger than life itself. It is a journey comprising of despair, hunger, fear, death, life, joy, happiness, courage, sacrifice and determination. Ahmed under such painful and stressful conditions had to see a lot during his childhood - death of his siblings due to various unwanted situations, getting his father jailed for no crime, getting debarred

form their house and ultimately moving from bad to worse situation in life. But one symbolic companion that kept inspiring, motivating and helping Ahmed is an almond tree that is grown outside his house. The unfavourable situation of Ahmed is depicted as follows when his residence is being gripped:

It was summer and the whole house breathed slowly from the heat. I stood alone in her room, hoping the quiet would tell me where she'd stumbled off to. A white curtain caught a breeze. The window was open – wide open. I rushed to the ledge, praying that when I looked over she wouldn't be there, she wouldn't be hurt. I was afraid to look, but I did anyway because not knowing was worse. *Please God, please God, please God...*(1)

They could only opt for the least living standards, lowest possible work, no possibilities of growth and then their each and every move is under the supervision of army. "Cultural studies is not one thing," Stuart Hall asserts, "it has never been one thing" (Hall 1990, 11). It is an engaged mode of inquiry committed to understanding the complex terrain of the cultural in connection with relations of power. Cultural studies presents itself, then, as less a conversation than an intervention (Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler 1992, 5). Hence, we can find the relevance of the implantation of the tool of cultural studies. The unfavourable situation of the individuals in Palestinian is gain replicated from the information of curfew in the novel, as Ahmed puts 'Curfew begins in five minutes,' a soldier announced through his megaphone from his military Jeep. 'Anyone found outside will be arrested or shot(8)'. More than a dozen soldiers were fencing their land and home with barbed wire. Ahmed's sister Nadia was kneeling under olive tree holding middle brothers Fadi and Hani while

they cried. She was younger than me and Abbas, but older than the others. This is also presenting the unfavourable contemporary life of Palestine.

In the two years Ahmed and Abbas had lived in our new house with *The Almond Tree*, Abbas and Ahmed had spent many hours in the tree watching the moshav. There they had seen things they had never seen before. Boys and girls, older and younger than Ahmad, held hands and formed circles and danced and sang together, their arms and legs naked. They had electricity and green lawns, and yards with swing sets and slides. And they had a swimming pool that boys and girls and men and women of all ages swam in, wearing what looked like their underwear. This also presents the contemporary life. Ahmed's description of the contemporary events also proves the cultural constructivity of the novel:

I knew from a young age that I wasn't like the other boys in my village. Abbas was very social and had many friends. When they gathered at our house, they would speak of their hero Jamal Abdul Nasser, the President of Egypt, who had stood up to Israel in the 1956 Suez Canal Crisis and was championing Arab nationalism and the Palestinian cause. I idolized Albert Einstein. As the Israelis controlled our curriculum, they always supplied us with ample books on the accomplishments of famous Jews. I read every book I could find on Einstein and after I fully understood the brilliance of his equation, $E=mc^2$, I was amazed at how it came to him. I wondered if he really did see a man falling from a building or if he had just imagined it while sitting in the patent office where he worked.(14)

In the novel, Jews exploits nature as well as all possible human resources, of mind, of science, as they want to possess Palestinian wealth as much as possible and want to

keep them under their control. It is the story of Palestinian-Israeli conflict for a land which is spiritual for both the communities. So, actually the conflict is between the Oppressive power represented by the Jews who are a strong military power and a Creative Palestinian boy who struggle throughout his life for his family and people and gain power.

Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. There are two processes, two systems of representation. The relation between things, “concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning in language. The process which links these three elements together is what we call Representation” (8)

.Again the unfavourable situation is being narrated as:

Abbas’s tray of coloured tea glasses scattered the sunlight that streamed through the open window like a prism. Blues, golds, greens and reds bounced onto a group of old men in battered cloaks and white kaffiyahs secured by black rope. The men of the Abu Ibrahim clan sat cross-legged on floor pillows placed carefully around the low table now holding their steaming drinks. They had once owned all the olive groves in our village. Every Saturday they met here, only occasionally exchanging a word or greeting across the crowded room. They came to listen to the ‘Star of the East’, Um Kalthoum, on the tea house’s radio.(17)

Thus it is proved that Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things. And surely it is not a simple or straightforward process.

Corasanti stated, “I didn’t need a Palestinian editor because I lived among the Palestinians inside the green line for seven years and saw with my own eyes the Palestinian reality”(51). This is statement speaks directly to the arrogance of Corasanti that Abulhawa described. Adulhawa is Palestinian, born to a Palestinian family and raised among Palestinians in Jerusalem, in Jordan and Kuwait. Her characters were composites of grandmothers, uncles, aunts, neighbors and friends. Yet she still had several of her Palestinian friends and at least one Palestinian academic read her manuscript at different stages because she understands what Corasanti clearly doesn’t that novelists should approach the lives of others with humility. The Palestinian struggle with its many painful facets is something Abdulhawa grew up with. She wasn’t an observer “on weekends while away at school, but she still didn’t presume to fully comprehend everything her grandmother and parents told her about their dispossession and she sought to authenticate her writing from those who did”(6). To do otherwise is arrogant and insensitive in the extreme. But it is an action of representing the culture from the perspective of what Chris Barker calls the “representative dynamics of cultural inconsistencies” (5). *The Almond Tree* is a gateway book for westerners learning the Palestinian story from the viewpoint of how the history has been represented. Israelis are not demonized in the book, and this is critical both because it rings authentic (Israelis, after all, are not demons but human beings in a particular human context) and because it allows the possibility of reaching genuinely broad audiences, including Jewish Israelis and Jewish and Christian Zionists.

Hall begins ‘Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies’ with a page long introductory preamble in which he explains why, in order to think about the future of cultural studies, he (like Williams) wants to revisit its past. In doing so he makes it

clear his intention is not to talk about the history of British cultural studies 'in a patriarchal way, as the keeper of the conscience of cultural studies, hoping to police you back into line with what it really was if only you knew' (277). For Hall, cultural studies:

... is a discursive formation, in Foucault's sense. It has no simple origins, though some of us were present at some point when it first named itself in that way. Much of the work out of which it grew, in my own experience, was already present in the work of other people. Raymond Williams has made the same point, charting the roots of cultural studies in the early adult education movement in his essay on 'The Future of Cultural Studies'. 'The relation between a project and a formation is always decisive,' he says, because they are 'different ways of materializing ... then of describing a common disposition of energy and direction.' Cultural studies has multiple discourses; it has a number of different histories. It is a whole set of formations; it has its own different conjunctures and moments in the past. It included many different kinds of work. I want to insist on that! It always was a set of unstable formations. It was 'centered' only in quotation marks, in a particular kind of way which I want to define in a moment. It had many trajectories; many people had and have different trajectories through it; it was constructed by a number of different methodologies and theoretical positions, all of them in contention (278).

Rather cultural studies is a mix of 'founding moments, transformative challenges, and self-critical interrogations' (57), to borrow the words of Henry Giroux. It is thus

constantly mobile, as changes in the different formations, methodologies and theoretical positions that go to make up cultural studies produce different and even conflicting interpretations of it. Hall emphasizes this point by drawing attention to the way in which European theory 'interrupted the already-interrupted history of its formation' (282). Indeed, he spends a large portion of the essay tracing some of the 'theoretical moments' he sees as having decentred cultural studies, forcing it to radically reconceive its identity. In doing so, he places particular emphasis on the interruptions to British cultural studies produced by feminism, by the question of race, and by the 'discovery of discursivity, of textuality', listing:

the theoretical advances which were made by the encounters with structuralist, semiotic, and poststructuralist work: the crucial importance of language and of the linguistic metaphor to any study of culture; the expansion of the notion of the text and textuality, both as a source of meaning, and as that which escapes and postpones meaning; the recognition of the heterogeneity, of the multiplicity, of meanings, of the struggle to close arbitrarily the infinite semiosis beyond meaning; the acknowledgement of textuality and cultural power, of representation itself, as a site of power and regulation, of the symbolic as a source of identity. These are enormous theoretical advances (283).

This history has two immediate consequences as far as Hall's account of cultural studies is concerned. First, far from a simple nostalgia for the political commitment that lies at cultural studies' roots, Hall's raising of the question of the 'archive' - of what is included in the cultural studies archive, within what limits, according to what overdetermined paths - by way of a 'retrospective glance' clearly contains within it

the possibility of critically ‘reflecting on, *and intervening in*, the project of cultural studies itself’ (277; my emphasis). This possibility occurs because cultural studies, for Hall, does not have a single history or identity, but is rather unstable, open and contested, always being challenged and changed according to the nature and specificity of the problems it addresses. The 1990 conference in Chicago on ‘Cultural Studies Now and in the Future’ thus provides Hall with an ‘opportunity for a moment of self-reflection on cultural studies as a practice, on its institutional positioning and on its project’ (277), and consequently for thinking cultural studies otherwise, for performing it differently, for re-imagining and recreating it.

Second, a contrast is established between the vision of cultural studies Hall presents at the beginning of his essay, and that which he provides at the end: between a theoretically destabilized and decentred cultural studies, in other words, which recognizes heterogeneity and multiplicity and which postpones meaning and closure and hence is open to change; and a cultural studies defined in terms of a stabilizing organic intellectual politics. These two aspects of cultural studies exist in a state of ‘tension’ for Hall in this essay: a ‘tension between a refusal to close the field, to police it and, at the same time, a determination to stake out some positions within it and argue for them’ (278). Indeed, it is precisely on these ‘two fronts’, the theoretical and the political, that the organic intellectual is required to operate:

On the one hand, we had to be at the forefront of intellectual theoretical work because, as Gramsci says, it is the job of the organic intellectual to know more than the traditional intellectuals do: really know, not just pretend to know, not just to have the facility of knowledge, but to know deeply and profoundly. So often knowledge for Marxism is pure recognition - the production again of what we have always known! If you are in the game of hegemony you have to

be smarter than 'them'. Hence there are no theoretical limits from which cultural studies can turn back. But the second aspect is just as crucial: that the organic intellectual cannot absolve himself or herself from the responsibility of transmitting that knowledge, those ideas, through the intellectual function, to those who do not belong, professionally, to the intellectual class (281).

Like Williams, then, Hall warns against uncritically accepting a set of theories, including Marxist theories. And like Williams, he, too, sees 'intellectual theoretical work' as providing a means of combating this danger. Nevertheless, Hall is extremely wary about the possibility of taking this too far. As soon as he has finished acknowledging the open, heterogeneous aspect of cultural studies, he immediately sets about trying to limit and contain its impact; the reason being, quite simply, that cultural studies' radically experimental, self-reflexive side risks rendering the field too chaotic: there is a danger in all this of theory running amok and decentering cultural studies to such an extent that it risks becoming just about anything. 'Although cultural studies as a project is open-ended, it can't be simply pluralist in that way', Hall insists. 'Yes, it is a project which is always open to that which it doesn't yet know, to that which it can't yet name. But it does have some will to connect. It does have some stake in the choices it makes' (278). So, while acknowledging that 'there are no theoretical limits from which cultural studies can turn back' (281), Hall at the same time attempts to establish a boundary line beyond which cultural studies cannot go without risk of losing its identity *as cultural studies*. And this boundary, as far as Hall is concerned, is marked by its 'politics', by cultural studies' 'political aspect'. As he says in one of this essay's most frequently cited passages:

It does matter whether cultural studies is this or that. It can't be just any old thing which chooses to march under a particular banner. It is

a serious enterprise, or project, and that is inscribed in what is sometimes called the 'political' aspect of cultural studies. Not that there's one politics already inscribed within it. But there is something *at stake* in cultural studies in a way that I think, and hope, is not exactly true of many other very important intellectual and critical practices (278).

Although cultural studies for Hall is characterized by the tense relationship between theory and politics, then, we can see that the two sides in this relationship are not assigned equal priority. While he is perfectly happy to use the 'political aspect' of cultural studies to raise questions for its theory, he is not quite so happy about the prospect of theory challenging cultural studies' 'political aspect'. And it is this ultimate privileging of politics on Hall's part that has led to 'Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies' being so often appealed to by those wishing to stress the importance of politics to cultural studies as a source of the field's continuing relevance.⁵⁸ Politics here is what marks cultural studies out as different and distinct, and which thus separates a cultural studies which limits the destabilizing and decentering effects of theory from a cultural studies which would not. It is certainly at this *political bottom line* that Hall and his followers would no doubt like the tense relationship between theory and politics to stabilize and hold firm. But what makes this essay so interesting when it comes to contemplating the relation between theory and politics in cultural studies is the sheer fragility of the border Hall attempts to draw around cultural studies' identity as a politically committed body of thought. For all Hall's efforts to keep cultural studies' theoretical aspect within manageable limits, and for all the importance that has subsequently been attached to this essay, 'Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies' contains a number of openings whereby theory

is able to pass through this otherwise heavily policed frontier and place the identity of cultural studies radically in question.

His use of the expression 'I think and hope' in the passage just quoted appears to provide one such opening: can there not be detected in this a degree of recognition on Hall's part that his attempt to locate 'something' which is 'at stake' in cultural studies, and which it has to have in order for it to *be cultural studies*, is based at least to some extent on wishful thinking? Another comes with Hall's acknowledgement, a few lines later, that the boundary line he is attempting to mark out around cultural studies by means of its politics is an 'arbitrary' one. 'I don't believe knowledge is closed', he writes, 'but I do believe politics is impossible without what I have called the "arbitrary closure"; without what Homi Bhabha called social agency as arbitrary closure. That is to say, I don't understand a practice which aims to make a difference in the world, which doesn't have some points of difference or distinction which it has to stake out, which really matter. It is a question of positionalities' (278).⁵⁹ Now, of course, these two aspects of cultural studies exist in a state of 'tension'. In fact it is this tension, this 'dialogic approach to theory' (278), which for Hall, later in the essay, 'defines cultural studies as a project' (284) and marks its specificity:

...I want to insist that until and unless cultural studies learns to live with this tension, a tension that all textual practices must assume ... it will have renounced its 'worldly' vocation. That is to say, unless and until one respects the necessary displacement of culture, and yet is always irritated by its failure to reconcile itself with other questions that matter, with other questions that cannot and can never be fully covered by critical textuality in its elaborations, cultural studies as a project, an intervention, remains incomplete. If you lose

hold of that tension, you can do extremely fine intellectual work, but you will have lost intellectual practice as politics. I offer this to you, not because that's what cultural studies ought to be, or because that's what the Centre managed to do well, but simply because I think that, overall, is what defines cultural studies as a project. Both in the British and the American context, cultural studies has drawn attention to itself, not just because of its sometimes dazzling internal theoretical development, but because it holds theoretical and political questions in an ever irresolvable but permanent tension. It constantly allows one to irritate, bother, and disturb the other, "without insisting on some final theoretical closure" (5).

Yet included in this presumably must also be the 'arbitrary' borderline - the 'theoretical closure' - Hall himself attempts to draw around cultural studies by means of its politics. For while on the one hand Hall challenges the way in which history is used to close down and police the meaning and identity of cultural studies in 'Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies', on the other hand does he, too, not strive to close down and police the identity of cultural studies by means of its 'political aspect'? Can this conception of cultural studies as being ultimately a political project be decided upon once and for all? If cultural studies does not have one fixed or stable identity that is always and everywhere the same, but is rather heterogeneous and multiplicitious and self-critical, is its politics, like its history, not also open to transformative challenge and change?

The story starts in the year 1955 and goes up to 2009 during which Ahmed Hamid went through various stages encountering various inspiring characters - like his father, his childhood teacher, his first love, his professor ; and more than those the

characters who tried to downtrend/ demean him from time to time. The hardship the protagonist faced along with his family members can be clarified from the following lines:

Mama put her fingers to her lips to tell Abbas and me not to speak as we crossed the hall to our younger brothers' room. They were still sleeping, so she went in on tiptoes and motioned for us to stay outside. She knew how to be quieter than Abbas and me. But Amal was not there. (3)

The protagonist is presenting how the repressive society has made compelled to stop their mouth, or listen. *The Almond Tree* stimulates readers to seek greater understanding of the Palestinian condition and question their own beliefs about the conflict and its root cause. It is a novel forged from the traditions of its precursors.

The author has presented a heart-wrenching and inspiring story for everyone. Ahmed will remain a sturdy example of how motivation and survival instinct combined with intellect made him rise from the ashes. Love and hate are portrayed beautifully as two sides of the same coin through Ahmed and Abbas. The author writes freely here, not complicating her language too much. The different eras spanning Ahmed's life are well divided into books. Her narration is so cogent that one can visualize the hills nesting almond and olive trees. Tragedy is carefully blended with little moments of joy to create an endless pasture of life.

The Almond Tree follows the character of Ichmad Hamid throughout his life. The book starts with his family living on the orange farm in Palestine where his family has owned for decades. Quickly, we see him pushed off the land by Israeli soldiers and into a one-room house for his family. But even that can't last and the home is soon destroyed and his father sent to jail. Ichmad and younger brother Abass

go work in construction and must abandon their education to the chagrin of their former teacher. Teacher Mohammad teaches Ichmad at night to neuter his talent for math and physics and convinces him to enter a math competition in Jerusalem where he wins a scholarship to the Hebrew University. His mother is unwilling to let him go but his father insists and Ichmad goes to live amongst the enemies of his people, the Jews.

This story is one of loss and perseverance. Ichmad must learn to forgive those who have destroyed his family and work along with the Jews he has been raised to despise. I'll stop my plot summary here, but know that almost nothing goes right for Ichmad through the book. It's almost safe to predict that anything that seems to be going right will fail. From this respect, the book is very lifelike. According to a critic Stephen Jobbs:

I greatly enjoyed the pace at which this book went. The plot went hurtling forward and I finished it much quicker than I thought I would. For that reason, I'll say this book was a great fictional showing of the history of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. It was educational and entertaining. (14)

Cohen Corasanti is obviously preaching peace and understanding through education. With Ichmad's schooling, he learns to interact with and make friends with Jews. He sees understanding and acceptance on both sides while studying at school. His nephew has the chance to study at MIT, but cannot get out of Gaza to seize the opportunity. The nephew loses hope with no chance of education and no way of ever leaving Gaza because his father (Ichmad's brother) is a member of Hamas. This view becomes evident from the view of the author:

As I mentioned, the lack of emotion in Ichmad made him harder to relate to and I think the story suffered from that. I would have liked to see fewer scenes and instead more emotional description and reaction from the characters which would have helped me sympathize with them more. The author's ability to keep her plot interesting and moving forward is more than commendable. She's written quite the page-turner which I think all writers hope to produce. (65)

The first Jewish person we meet is an Israeli soldier who is described as pimply-faced and brutal demeanor. On the other hand, Ichmad Hamid, boy genius, hero of this novel, is handsome with beautiful eyes and hair, intelligent and compassionate, whose innocent family is constantly abused by such as these. Next, the reader meets a murderous Iraqi Jew, the construction boss at the site where Ichmad Hamid and his younger brother Abbas, mere children, are forced to work to support their family when their father is arrested. This is evident from:

And then the screams came. It was Mama's voice, then Baba's from somewhere far behind us. Then I realized that Amal wasn't gone. I could see something. I could see her arm. It was her arm, but her body wasn't attached to it anymore. I wiped my eyes. Amal was torn up like her doll after our watchdog ripped it apart. I opened my mouth and screamed so loud I felt like I was going to split in two. Baba and Uncle Kamal ran up, panting, to the sign. Mama didn't look at them, but when they got there she began to whimper, 'My baby, my baby (6)

The Iraqi's son was murdered and he carries his hatred for the Arabs in his heart at all times and is unafraid to display it. The next is a survivor of the Holocaust, Menachem Sharon, eventual mentor of Ichmad, who at first is presented as his enemy. His family

was all murdered in Europe. He is a professor who is mean and biased and is unafraid to show his displeasure with the enemies of the Jews, even in his classroom where he tries to thwart Ichmad's every effort to succeed. His first wife is presented without redeeming features, as well, a hater of all that isn't Jewish. Then we meet his second wife who is someone who shows him the "right" way as she works to help the Palestinians. She arranges for Ichmad to tutor Nora, a beautiful Jewish girl who hopes to go to Gaza to help the Palestinian cause. Her parents are Jewish but are presented more as if they are missionaries. Nora is a Jew with a free spirit, unlike the others already presented, she is more akin to a flower child of that era, with posters saying "make love not war" and peace signs in her room. She falls in love with the hero of the story, boy genius, Ichmad Hamid. Against all odds, they marry. She and Ichmad symbolize the bridge to a future of harmony where both cultures can live in peace. It symbolizes a blending of their worlds, although it is short-lived which may also foreshadow the continuing failed effort of the Middle East peace process.

Hall endeavours to bring 'Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies' to a close by addressing the problem of the institutionalisation of British and American cultural studies, and by saying 'something about how the field of cultural studies has to be defined' (285). In doing so, he focuses on what he sees as the astonishing theoretical fluency of American cultural studies, something he regards as going hand in hand with the profound danger of institutionalisation:

Some time ago, looking at what one can only call the deconstructive deluge (as opposed to the deconstructive turn) which had overtaken American literary studies, in its formalist mode, I tried to distinguish the extremely important theoretical and intellectual work which it had made possible in cultural studies from a mere repetition, a sort of

mimicry or deconstructive ventriloquism which sometimes passes as a serious intellectual exercise. My fear at that moment was that if cultural studies gained an equivalent institutionalization in the American context, it would, in rather the same way, formalize out of existence the critical questions of power, history and politics. Paradoxically, what I mean by theoretical fluency is exactly the reverse. There is no moment now, in American cultural studies, where we are *not* able, extensively and without end, to theorize power - politics, race, class, and gender, subjugation, domination, exclusion, marginality, Otherness, etc. There is hardly anything in cultural studies which isn't so theorized. And yet, there is this nagging doubt that this overwhelming textualisation of cultural studies' own discourses somehow constitutes power and politics as exclusively matters of language and textuality itself (286).

Although by no means 'anti-theory' (281), Hall thus laments what he perceives as a loss of political commitment on cultural studies' part; and he advocates the return of the project of cultural studies from what he terms in an earlier part of the essay 'the clean air of meaning and textuality and theory to the something nasty down below' - by which he means the politics of cultural studies, its "political" aspect' (278). This has led Jon Stratton and Ien Ang to interpret Hall as displaying feelings of regret in this essay regarding the 'Americanization' of cultural studies: 'regret over the loss of a "Birmingham moment" when cultural studies was still a marginalized practice and arguably a more genuinely "political" one as well, when doing cultural studies was not primarily concerned with academic professionalism but connected with and energised by the metaphor of the organic intellectual'.⁸ For Stratton and Ang, there 'is

a sense in which the Birmingham moment is constructed in this narrative, if not as the origin, then at least as representing a purer, more authentic, more unco-opted mode of cultural studies' (373). But it is not so much the narrative Hall constructs regarding cultural studies' political origins that interests me. Nor is it the myth of marginalization and fear of institutionalization Tony Bennett has identified as accompanying this narrative: the idea that cultural studies was initially 'an autonomous cultural, political and educational project', formed 'outside the institutions and practices of higher education', and that it later became something else upon being institutionally co-opted.⁹ Bennett argues forcefully that cultural studies should stop subscribing to this romantic idea that it can be 'somehow outside of or marginal to institutions' (3) - a myth he sees as rendering cultural studies practitioners blind to their own positions in such institutions - and instead take account of how, right from the start, the 'dynamics of higher education have played a key role in shaping the intellectual agendas of cultural studies' (2), in a more 'thoroughly self-conscious and strategic fashion' (3). I will discuss some of the possible consequences for cultural studies of such a self-conscious appreciation of its institutional origins shortly.

These are the only really positively presented good Jews, and they are good because they promote the Palestinian cause and anti-Israel sentiment. The novel opens with a horrific scene of loss and sadness. A young child, heedless to the danger, steps into a closed area in the Palestinian Territory controlled by Israel, and is blown up by a mine in front of her mother's and sibling's eyes. They were helpless to help the 4-year old child as she ran through the minefield chasing a butterfly. (Anyone familiar with the Holocaust poem, "I Never Saw Another Butterfly" will make the association that his little innocent sister will never see another one either.) If the author is

comparing the Holocaust to the situation in the Palestinian Territories, than she has lost us entirely.

The author also pays particular attention to the number of Palestinians crammed into a small area with barely any amenities to support life, but she ignores the fact that the size of Israel is miniscule and there is far more available land in the Arab countries which have never allowed the Palestinians to enter and assimilate. Jews, however, look after their own people and even allow them into the country regardless of their background. That said, the book is a tragic tale of horror. It is evident from:

I was disgusted by the unjust brutality the author accused Israel of committing. Although I believe they have justification in being overcautious, because of the past incidents committed against them by the Arabs, the existence of so much hate and anger on the part of Israel came as a shock to me. After all the brutalization of Jews, down through the ages, I thought we would have had more compassion on our side rather than vengeance. (77)

Today, cultures are not synonymous with countries. Cultures do not respect political boundaries. Culture refers to the totality of that group's thought, experiences, and patterns of behavior and its concepts, values, and assumptions about life that guide behavior and how those evolve with contact with other cultures. Hofstede (1994) classified these elements of culture into four categories: symbols, rituals, values, and heroes. Symbols refer to verbal and nonverbal language. And other important thing, rituals are the socially essential collective activities within a culture. Values are the feelings not open for discussion within a culture about what is good or bad, beautiful

or ugly, normal or abnormal, which are present in a majority of the members of a culture, or at least in those who occupy pivotal positions.

Encyclopedias also provide (collective) definition of culture:

Culture *may* be defines as behaviour peculiar to Homo Sapiens, together with material objects used as an integral part of this behaviour, specifically culture consists of languages, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of Art, rituals, ceremonies, and so on the existence and use of culture depends upon an ability possessed by man alone.” (7)

Culture is not only something you are born with. It is also learned from family, school, religious teachings, television and media and the government of a country. Advertisements, magazines and movies are also powerful guides. For example American music videos promote a certain style of dress, values, expression and attitude for young people. Many young people like the cool speak of American pop music rather than talking in their home language and Afghanistan too. Schools and religious organizations also play a big role. Religion has many rituals specific to a particular culture.

And most important factor is the identity. A person’s identity is made up of their own character combined with their family and social roots. Identity, like culture, is ever changing. For example a woman can be a teacher, mother, wife and driver to her children. She can also be a famous politician fighting for justice or a farmer growing crops for food. She may also be involved in looking after her community or supporting the extended family. To herself she may be all of these and much more. At

the same time her being a woman of a particular race, root or being rich or poor influences her identity.

The novel takes off with the death of Ahmed's toddler sister Amal in a land mine when she wanders into one after a butterfly. Ahmed's and his family's life progressively begin to worsen as each of their possessions are appropriated by the Israeli occupational forces beginning from their abundant orange orchards and their home to even the one room house that they shifted to later. The author puts:

The last straw is reached when Ahmed's Baba is accused of terrorism and arrested by the Israeli soldiers. Ahmed and his younger brother Abbas, at the age of twelve and ten, shoulder the responsibility of providing for the family by working on construction sites. In a world where the Palestinians have no stronghold over their homes, their belongings and their lives, Ahmed's father directs him, through correspondence, to take the more peaceful route, and not to harbor hatred in the face of extreme adversity. (299)

His mother, understandably on the other hand, holds the Israelis responsible for everything inflicted on the family. Ahmed, a math prodigy, obtains a scholarship to an Israeli University for further studies and in the end is awarded the Nobel Prize for his achievements. Ahmed's maturity sees a transformation from an Israeli antagonist to the more acceptable stance of normalization and acquiescence of Israel and their atrocities. However, the redeeming action by Ahmed comes in the end as he acknowledges his own roots and resolves to do his bit for the Palestinian cause.

Corasanti, a Jewish American female author, chose to write in the persona of an Arab Palestinian Muslim male character thereby facilitating the questioning of the problematic relation between the identity of the author and that of the protagonist.

Despite the unfavourable situation the protagonist is deterred to save the aura of his culture. This is the nature of representation Corasanti make of Palestine culture.

The Almond Tree humanizes a culture and brings characters from a distant land to life, with a family united by love but divided by their personal beliefs. From Ichmad's staunchly traditional and at times overbearing mother, to his father who believes in the power of education, the crux of the family's story lies in the growing dispute between two brothers, Ichmad and Abbas, who choose very different paths in order to create a new future. Gifted with a mind that continues to impress the elders in his village, Ichmad Hamid struggles with the knowledge that he can do nothing to save his Palestinian friends and family. Ruled by the Israeli military government, the entire village operates in fear of losing homes, jobs, and belongings. But more importantly, they fear losing each other. On Ichmad's twelfth birthday, that fear becomes a reality. With his father imprisoned, his family's home and possessions confiscated, and his siblings quickly succumbing to the dangers of war, Ichmad begins the endless struggle to use his intellect to save his poor and dying family and reclaim a love for others that was lost when the bombs first hit. Michelle Cohen Corasanti is a Jewish American and has written a book that many may consider to be inappropriate for her to write, for her book's central character, Ichmad [sic], is a Palestinian, and not just any Palestinian, but a boy genius whose intelligence far outstrips almost all of the other characters in this book: Israeli, Jewish or otherwise.

In *The Almond Tree* Ichmad attains an Arab scholarship against all odds and gains entry to an Israeli university. The tensions being felt by Palestinians in Israeli institutions have been covered by other writers such as Sayed Kashua and Cohen Corasanti does not cover these relationships to the depth or with the type of humor or irony Kashua uses so masterfully in *Dancing Arabs*. But she does deal with the split

identities and selective vision that artificially enforced racial, religious or ethnic divisions can bring about. Israeli students who know Ichmad grow to accept and love him while continuing to loathe other “Arabs,” while Ichmad cannot tell his mother that he has Israeli friends. Similarly, the Jewish American liberal parents of Ichmad’s girlfriend who have brought her up on a diet of peace and love for all mankind cannot take it when she goes out with a Palestinian.

They cannot bury her. Permits are needed by the Israelis to marry, to travel, to work, to build a home, to go to school to bury, to even buy fruit from was formerly their own trees. There is no freedom in occupied land. When Ichmad was only twelve, his father was imprisoned for a crime that he did not commit. His family was tear gassed out of their home by soldiers who said that they were terrorists. Sarah, one of his sisters tripped and hurt her forehead. Ichmad tried to breathe air into her but she died. The soldiers shot up the house with Uzis and then dynamited the remains. Everything was gone except for a lone almond tree that Ichmad had named Shahida or witness. His father was in the desert in a horrible prison. His mother was still like a child, not educated, bossy and very dependent. His brothers and sisters were all younger than him. How was this boy going to provide enough food to keep his family from starving? How was he going to protect them from the storms of nature and even worse the whims of the soldiers? How was he going to keep his promise to his father make something of himself? I wish everyone single would read this amazing book to be able to understand what it is really like to live in an occupied land.

“...May the battles that we fight be for the advancement of humanity”

(165), This remarkable story is one that comes from the authors inner core, crafted by her personal experiences that make this a raw, candid read that contains such poignancy and intensity as to really touch your heart. Michelle Cohen Corasanti is

brave to bear her soul to the world, but it takes not only strength of character but determination to present to the world a `real picture of how things are and to push forward with ones own beliefs as a free human being. The Palestinian dominance within Israel is the central focus of this detailed, thought-provoking narrative as the author wanted to help bring about peace to the Middle East.

One follows the story of Ichmad Hamid as he struggles through life in the knowledge that he can do nothing, and is utterly and completely helpless to save his friends and family. Living on occupied land his entire village operates in constant fear of losing all that they hold most dear including their homes, jobs and belongings but most importantly each other. Ichmads twelfth birthday unknowingly to him is the catalyst for great change, as his world is suddenly & unexpectedly turned upside down.

His father is imprisoned and his family home and belongings are confiscated, amidst his other siblings soon succumbing to hatred in the face of great conflict. Ichmad then begins an inspiring journey using his intellect to try and save his poor dying family, and in doing so he reclaims a love for others that was lost through childhood violence, hence hope is kindle. This stunning story embodies the true meaning of love and selflessness, and that great fight that the main character goes through for trying to save all that matters to him in life. It shows readers the actual meaning of life by presenting to one, quite openly the horrors that take place within the far corners of this world and that as you read will take place whilst one contemplates upon this message. Sometimes one must fight for what they believe in, for what you deem to be right and just and for those that you love .There is so much injustice, so much hatred in the world and the divide within social hierarchy is still

widening constantly, as new leaders rule with different ideals and those who oppose them feel such wrath.

Being a Jewish American writer, she has depicted the sufferings of Palestinians and the atrocities of the Jews in her novel, *The Almond Tree*. In the novel, Jews exploits nature as well as all possible human resources, of mind, of science, as they want to possess Palestinian wealth as much as possible and want to keep them under their control. It is the story of Palestinian-Israeli conflict for a land which is spiritual for both the communities. So, actually the conflict is between the Oppressive power represented by the Jews who are a strong military power and a Creative Palestinian boy who struggle throughout his life for his family and people and gain power. The unfavourable situation of 2009 has also been depicted in the novel to prove its cultural constructivity. This also gets evident from:

The year 2008 did not start well. For the last week, Israel had been waging war on Gaza. Yasmine and I had just returned home from a New Year's day party, when I grabbed the YV remote off the coffee table and clicked the button, anxious to see the latest news. Yasmine snuggled next to me on the couch. (293)

Throughout the novel, the novelist has tried to reflect a strong critique of the reductive use-oriented worldview experienced by the Jews. In the present scenario people are only concerned about making profit and they don't bother about their moral and social duties and responsibilities. For making profit they can go to any extent.

The primary theoretical approaches that help us to understand the concepts of representation are reflective, intentional, and constructionist approaches to representation. The reflective approach: "Meaning is thought to lie in the object, person, idea or event in the real world and language functions like a mirror, to reflect

the true meaning as it already exists in the world,” (176). Essentially, this theory explains that language imitates the true meaning of the object, person, etc.

The intentional approach: “Words mean what the author intends they should mean,” (177). The theory is difficult to prove since everyone may have his or her own private way of interpreting an event or image. The constructionist approach: “We must not confuse the material world, where things and people exist, and the symbolic practices and processes through which representation, meaning and language operate,” (177). This approach states that people construct meaning through concepts and signs- we produce our own meanings to objects through our own language.

The constructionist approach is the most popular approach and it helps us understand the cultural power of media by helping us understand the images we are seeing and how the meanings of objects are social constructions and do not have fixed meaning. For example, if women are always portrayed in the media as subservient, objectified objects, then those characteristics will always be assigned to what it means to be a woman; however, through the shift in definition of females, those meanings can alter and change.

Culture is, in the words of E.B. Tylor, "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." (Tylor 1871:1)

As a defining aspect of what it means to be human, culture is a central concept in anthropology, encompassing the range of phenomena that are transmitted through social learning in human societies. The word is used in a general sense as the evolved ability to categorize and represent experiences with symbols and to act imaginatively and creatively. This ability arose with the evolution of behavioral modernity in humans around 50,000 years ago. This capacity is often thought to be unique to

humans, although some other species have demonstrated similar, though much less complex abilities for social learning. It is also used to denote the complex networks of practices and accumulated knowledge and ideas that is transmitted through social interaction and exist in specific human groups, or cultures, using the plural form. Some aspects of human behavior, such as language, social practices such as kinship, gender and marriage, expressive forms such as music, dance, ritual, religion, and technologies such as cooking, shelter, clothing are said to be cultural universals, found in all human societies. The concept material culture covers the physical expressions of culture, such as technology, architecture and art, whereas the immaterial aspects of culture such as principles of social organization (including, practices of political organization and social institutions), mythology, philosophy, literature (both written and oral), and science make up the intangible cultural heritage of a society.

In the humanities, culture has also frequently been understood as an attribute of the individual, the degree to which they have cultivated a particular level of sophistication, in the arts, sciences, education, or manners. The level of cultural sophistication has also sometimes been seen to distinguish civilizations from less complex societies. Such hierarchical perspectives on culture are also found in Class based distinctions between a high culture of the social elite and a low culture, popular culture or folk culture of the lower classes, distinguished by the stratified access to cultural capital. In common parlance, culture is often used to refer specifically to the symbolic markers used by ethnic groups to distinguish themselves visibly from each other such as body modification, clothing or jewelry. Mass culture refers to the mass-produced and mass mediated forms of consumer culture that emerged in the 20th century. Some schools of philosophy, such as Marxism and critical theory, have

argued that culture is often used politically as a tool of the elites to manipulate the lower classes and create a false consciousness, such perspectives common in the discipline of cultural studies. In the wider social sciences, the theoretical perspective of cultural materialism holds that human symbolic culture arises from the material conditions of human life, as humans create the conditions for physical survival, and that the basis of culture is found in evolved biological dispositions.

When used as a count noun "a culture", is the set of customs, traditions and values of a society or community, such as an ethnic group or nation. In this sense the concept of multiculturalism is a political ideology that values the peaceful coexistence and mutual respect between different cultures inhabiting the same territory. Sometimes "culture" is also used to describe specific practices within a subgroup of a society, a subculture (e.g. "bro culture"), or a counter culture. Within cultural anthropology, the ideology and analytical stance of cultural relativism holds that cultures cannot easily be objectively ranked or evaluated because any evaluation is necessarily situated within the value system of a given culture.

The story has shown that not every novel or story has to be judged keeping the same parameters or paradigms in mind. We the readers do not have to follow the benchmark or yardstick taught to us by western form of education. The world comprises of people of different cultures and traditions. Each culture is distinct and unique in its own way. They have their advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, it is not a proper judge and pass comments on the 'other' culture wearing the lens of a dominant culture. Corasanti has beautifully written and the mountains echoed, which simultaneously brings together the old and the new. It has distinguished, enriched his work and aided in their elevation to a special place in the Non-Western literary canon.

III: Cultural Preservation and Identity formation

The present research uncovers the cultural constructivity in *The Almond Tree*. The Palestine culture is represented by the author in the text which is the finding of the research. The political, cultural and historical uncertainties are represented in the novel. The author makes reflective, intentional and constructionist representation of Palestine culture. The thesis also illustrates that Corasanti's fictional text blends the legacies of the ex-colonized and the ex-colonizer to deconstruct a biased narrative integral to the vision of the Arab-Israeli conflict. With the balanced view of the Palestinian question, Corasanti emphasizes significant colonizer / colonized constructs engaging cultural dynamics which lead to conflict rather than dialogue between both sides. Deploying a plethora of voices as reflection of the attitudes of a multi-ethnic community, the incidents of the novel are presented to unearth the protagonist challenging the cultural inconsistencies and confirming the identity.

The protagonist Ahmad could never achieve what he did if he only remained in his village. He came from a rural, impoverished village. Due to his brilliant mind, he is able to achieve a scholarship to Hebrew University and then onto Harvard as a post doctorate. Israel has a policy of pushing Palestinian intellectuals into the sciences as a form of ethnic cleansing. Story of *The Almond Tree* is about a 12 years old child born in one of the Palestinian families living like slaves in a country that was once their own -Israel. Under these dire conditions members of these families were not allowed to go for a respectable job, for studies, for a well built house, for any good opportunities in their life. Cultural studies does not have a single history that *can be* simply returned to. Nor does it have a fixed or stable identity that is always and everywhere the same, be it that based on an idea of the organic intellectual or otherwise.

The author has written a Pro-Palestinian novel largely ignoring information about why the conflict exists and has therefore presented a one-sided presentation of the Middle East crisis, a situation that has existed for decades. The research has tried to read it with an open mind but the presentation was so biased, even in the description of the characters, that it was really hard to do.

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