

Re-Contextualizing Power and Family Relations: A Post-Structural Feminist Study of Subjectivity in Rafia Zakaria's *the Upstairs Wife*

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ABSTRACT

This study explores The Upstairs Wife (2015) by Zakaria through a post-structuralist feminist lens, focusing on family dynamics and power relations in a patriarchal society. The study examines how gender, class, and cultural identity influence women's lived experiences within the family. By analyzing the protagonist's struggles, the research investigates how patriarchal norms shape women's roles and agency. By applying post-structuralist feminist theories (Foucault, 1978; Weedon, 1997; Scott, 1992; & Butler, 1994) that deconstruct traditional gender roles and emphasize the fluidity of identity. The researcher examines how Zakaria constructs her characters, their relationships, and the tension between individual desires and collective family expectations. Through close textual analysis, the study highlights the use of language in portraying women's lived realities, revealing how power is inscribed in both personal relationships and the wider societal structures that govern them. Through the feminist lens, the researcher underscores the significance of engaging with women's narratives as a means of raising awareness about gendered power relations, fostering dialogue on systemic inequality, and contributing to the broader feminist scholarship on postcolonialism, identity, and social justice.

Keywords: Post-structural Feminism, Power Relations, Family Relations, Patriarchal norms, Postcolonialism

INTRODUCTION

The present research is a post-structuralist feminist inquiry of Rafia Zakaria's *The Upstairs Wife* (2015). The novel serves as a poignant exploration of family dynamics and power relations within a patriarchal society, offering a rich text for analysis through a poststructuralist feminist lens. This research aims to delve into the intricate interplay of gender, class, and cultural identity as presented in Zakaria's narrative, examining how these elements shape the lived experiences of women within the familial sphere. Through analysis of how the protagonist negotiates her experience of her marriage and her family system, the research investigates the ways in which the culture of patriarchy continues to dominate women's experiences and actions to this day. Therefore, the text poses questions to do with identity creation and subversion in relation to family expectations and individual desire in a masculine environment.

The research follows a close reading and textual analysis of Zakaria's novel to illustrate how she creates her characters and how she develops the issues that are put at the center of the story and that involve the relationships between the individual self and family obligations. Therefore, engaging the language of women and analyzing how power relations are hidden and constructed within familial relations and other social interactions, the study will come up with the findings. For the following reasons, this paper argues that it is important to comprehend family and power relations in the work of Zakaria. First, it adds a critical understanding of how patriarchy continues to dominate the lives of women in the global south, especially South Asian women. Thus, discussing these dynamics, the research contributes to significant debates concerning gender equality and subordination in the framework of the traditional family. It is the hope of the research, in this case, to not only present a new voice in literature but to equally participate in a continuous social discussion on feminism, identity, and power in relation to kinship and marriage within *The Upstairs Wife* (2015).

Background of the Study

A new and active strand of feminism, post-structural feminism, appears on the intellectual map because of the incorporation of post-structuralist philosophies in the discussion of gender and identity. Kristeva (1981) defines its position as one that specializes in the third wave of feminism that is followed by liberal and radical feminism. Whereas liberal feminism aims at gaining rights and entrance to the public sphere, and radical feminism relies on an idea of women's biological superior self-positing in response to demeaning representations of women, post-structural feminism pursues the discussion of the binaries of male and female subjectivity.

Post-structural feminism is a "passionately interested form of inquiry" (Aranda, 2006, p. 135) that aims to confront the power disparities brought about by patriarchy and to question the status quo. FPS is a philosophy and a methodology for nursing research that may be applied in many contexts and provides a means of comprehending and addressing institutional, social, and personal practices (Aston, 2016). The post structural dimension offers a viewpoint on knowledge and power relations, while its feminist foundations provide a prism through which to view the role of gender (as well as sexuality, class, racism, and ability). It employs a critical application of language, meaning, beliefs, values, practices, subjectivity, and agency to dismantle current power structures and pinpoint areas that require change as well as the best ways to bring about those changes (Weedon, 1997). Since poststructuralism and feminism are the philosophies that underlie FPS, it might be difficult to combine all philosophical dimensions into a coherent framework that directs study and practice.

In light of this, feminist poststructuralist nursing researcher (Aston, 2016) has developed eight guiding principles of FPS, which are succinctly outlined below:

The philosophical movement known as poststructuralism, which first appeared in the second part of the 1960s, is where poststructuralist feminism got its start. According to Neeru (2008), Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva are regarded as the founders of post-structuralist feminist philosophy. These three, together with Bracha Ettinger, have had a significant impact on feminist post structuralism since the 1990s. Poststructuralism, which is linked to theorists like Derrida and Foucault, questions conventional wisdom on knowledge and methods of acquiring it. Thus, poststructuralism aims to reveal the processes by which meanings are created through discourse, i.e., systems of expression that are ideological in nature

due to tacit power relations. In the course of time and cultural environment, their meanings change and develop.

It is also worth indicating that post-structural feminism bases its view of the world on the assumption that all identities, including the gendered subjectivities, are instituted. This approach displaces structures and refers to identity as discursive because gender, as highlighted by Vicky (2010), is not an attribute but a construct that is fluid and qualitative to cultural and social environments. It is therefore a worldview that aligns well with post-structuralism's purpose of subverting stable meanings and asserting that language and signs construct what people consider reality. Foregrounding the political from the linguistic and ontological perspectives arising from psychoanalysis and socio-cultural critique, post-structural feminism responds to questions of language and gender subjecthood.

Power in it highlights the situational aspect of all identities, concentrating on the social production of gendered subjectivities. Power as relational, Feminist Theory aims to disentangle the complex connections between family relations and power relations (Pauline, 2018). These concepts, like power, are relational, make sense in poststructuralist feminism. In feminist post-structuralism, male or female and straight or lesbian binary are analyzable, revisable and visible. The poststructuralist theory demonstrates how power functions not only to mould us into specific types of beings but also raises questions about how society engraves itself on individualism and challenges the essentialist terms of humanist and modernist theories (Pierre, 2000).

Power is divided by gender. The trends in power allocation are the discrimination and disparity between genders, such as men and women. For example, worldwide, political decisions are made without the influence of women (Maclaran & Kravets, 2018).

Subjectivity

Subjectivity is also an important tool for post structuralism. Many scholars described subjectivity as essential part of feminism. By using Foucault's concept of power Butler (1992), Scott (1992) and Weedon (1987) provided and vide consideration of subjectivity. According to Butler (1992), subjectivity means that one person actively shows his Presence in its own social constitution. Subjectivity is said to be as a person's ability to be aware of own self and aware of his own mind and nerves and despite of any circumstances he would be able to do work along social values that are believe to influence all of us.

"All women can (and do) think about, criticize, and alter the view and thus subjectivity can be reconstructed through the process of reflective practice," according to feminist author Alcoff (1988, p. 425). Another name for this kind of introspection is "agency." MacDonald (1991) concurs that women can engage in self-reflection regarding their thoughts, behaviors, and relationships to continuously evolve in ways that are situated within social, cultural, and institutional contexts.

The misrepresentation of Muslim women has been significantly shaped by prevailing ideologies that depict Islamic countries as lands of contradiction, terrorism, and chaos, with Karachi serving as a poignant example. This is a city that was once celebrated for such wealth; today it represents terrorism, partition, military conflicts in the present, and questions of identity. In *The Upstairs Wife* (2015), Zakaria paints a picture of a society in transition and the urgent need to host Muslim women's emergent subjectivity in a pluralistic world of migrant culture and transcultural ethnic and religious factors. This work also empowers women in Pakistan by bringing the women's own stories, demonstrating their decisions, claiming their control today, thus guaranteeing that they will have agency in the future. Thus, adopting the focus of re-visioning, Zakaria enacts a transformation of the representation of Pakistani women from the domestic realm to the social, the microcosm to the macrocosm, and the private to the public, and by doing so underlines the transmuting socio-politics of a nation in transition (Aziz, 2022).

Rao (2015) highlights that the novel beautifully combines various personal stories with historical developments in Pakistan, and it is stressed how the two are interconnected. The events of the play begin with the Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra's desire to take another wife, creating a campaign for women's rights from his first wife, Hamida Bogra, and ending with the birth of the Muslim Family Law Ordinance of 1961.

Naqvi, (2023) conducted a qualitative study utilizing cognitive stylistics to analyze Zakaria's *The Upstairs Wife* (2015). It is their study that looked into the preliminary analysis of how Zakaria creates other worlds and uses conceptual metaphors to explicate Pakistan's politics. The authors insist on the continued exploration of the Pakistani political autobiographies with the use of cognitive stylistics and schema theory, pointing out that literary analysis can solve serious political problems following the development.

Ahmed (2015) notes that in the novel, Zakaria constructs a complex narrative of Karachi by connecting private lives to Pakistani socio-political history and offering an intelligently interconnected blend of the two in the lives of women inhabiting this city. Such is the role of Aunt Amina, who helps Zakaria to convey suffering arising from the division within the family due to worsening violence and political instabilities. The story contrasts Amina's challenges with the growth of the city from prosperity to a place that is characterized by fear and conformity and thus establishes the tenacity of the people of Nairobi. Zakaria's personal focus on her family migration to Karachi creates a deep understanding of the people's lives in Karachi today, which makes this work essential for the analysis of contemporary Karachi.

Mujahid (2015) highlights Zakaria's remarkable ability to blend personal narrative with historical context in the novel. This paper focuses on analyzing Amina's story—the protagonist of the book—who is trying to accept the fact of her husband Sohail's decision to marry another woman, in reaction to which the author explores the social and political state of Karachi. Zakaria convincingly dramatizes the conflicted interiority of her protagonist, Amina, and handles polygamy in Islamic culture with subtlety and sympathy even as she is clearly a feminist writer. Recognizing some inconsistency in her scathing of the public figures, Mujahid lauds the book for its gentle yet profound analysis, which, adds the reviewer, "opens and interprets the complex realities of the lives of women of Pakistan."

Yusuf (2015) explores the intricate dynamics of Zakaria's *The Upstairs Wife* (2015), which resolves around Aunt Amina dealing with the conflict in her husband Sohail's polygamous relationship. Forced by family pressure to bring forth an heir as they failed to conceive a child, Sohail becomes intolerant, following Islamic law, spending time between Amina and his new wife, whereby Amina harbors secret hatred for her husband. Yusuf builds on Zakaria's contemplations about her family's move from Bombay and their struggle to regain their selfhood within the confines of a housing society in Karachi with a nod towards the city's ethnic strata. The connection made between the struggles Amina faces in her private life and the political situation, such as Benazir Bhutto and the MQM, as well as the backdrop, creates a consuming context; however, it is a looming critique of the politically biased representation of historical events. Thus, as Hentzi (2005) claims, this framework is also the instrument for not just the critical evaluation of literary texts but also for examining the discursive construction of power relations within the language and culture. Consequently, post-structural feminism, by focusing on the construction of gender norms, offers a tool for the deconstruction of texts and the evaluation of the representations of women's lives that they offer.

Research Statement

This study investigates the re-contextualization of power and family relations in Rafia Zakaria's *The Upstairs Wife* (2015) through the lens of post-structuralist feminist theory. By engaging with theorists such as Foucault (1978), Weedon (1997), Scott (1992), and Butler (1994), the research interrogates how subjectivity is constructed within the intersecting frameworks of patriarchy, class, and cultural identity in a South Asian postcolonial context. It examines how women's lived experiences are shaped by both familial structures and societal expectations, focusing on the tension between individual agency and collective obligation. Through close textual analysis, the study foregrounds how language encodes power relations in personal and social interactions, thereby uncovering the mechanisms through which gender roles are normalized, contested, and redefined. Ultimately, the research underscores the importance of feminist readings of women's narratives as sites of resistance, aiming to contribute to broader dialogues on postcolonial identity, gendered subjectivity, and social justice.

Research Objectives

The current study is based on the following objectives:

1. To analyze how *The Upstairs Wife* represents the interplay of power, subjectivity, and family dynamics in a patriarchal cultural setting.
2. To explore how post-structuralist feminist theories deconstruct traditional gender roles in Zakaria's narrative and highlight the fluidity of women's identities.

Research Questions

1. The study aims to answer the following research questions:
2. How does *The Upstairs Wife* depict the construction of women's subjectivity within the intersections of patriarchy, class, and cultural identity?
3. In what ways do post-structuralist feminist perspectives illuminate the tensions between women's individual agency and collective family expectations in Zakaria's narrative?

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The present research is a qualitative study of *The Upstairs Wife* (2015) by Zakaria. Hooks' (1984) theory was employed to analyze the novel from the post-structuralist feminist perspective. For the analysis of this chronicle, a close verbal reading of the novel was done to collect the textual excerpts from the text of *The Upstairs Wife* (2015). According to Bruce (2010), close reading is reading a material carefully, intently, and methodically to gain a deeper comprehension of its meaning. According to Davis and Womack (2002), "close reading" first appeared as a scholarly literary approach in the 1930s and began to change in the 1960s. Because of its characteristics, "close reading" has been valued as an approach for interpreting literary texts. It involves reading and rereading for a deeper comprehension. Hinchman & Moore (2013) state that the objectivity of close reading in determining the text's genuine meaning is its fundamental quality. The researcher examines the minute patterns that are embodied in metaphor, symbolism, irony, and paradoxes by closely examining the text. Researchers can reach the point to grasp the meaning within the boundaries of the author's writings.

The strategies to 'Close reading' are as follows:

- Reading and Reading the Text: For the analysis of information and text's message.
- Annotate: In this stage, after reading and reading, the most important ideas and sentences are identified by the researcher.

- Recapitulate: Summarize the ideas within the structure of the text. Find out how ideas and themes related to each other in the text.
- Determine the Significance: Analyses how and why certain themes attract more attention than others especially to the researcher.

The late 1980s saw the rise in popularity of close reading as a literary analysis technique. Closed reading was a common technique in feminist stylistics and deconstructions (Gallop, 2007; Hinchman & Moore, 2013). For example, Mills (1998) employed close reading to examine how texts are created under pressure from a variety of sources and how these factors ultimately affect both the audience and the creation of subsequent texts.

Post-structural feminism serves as a vital framework for understanding the complexities of identity, power, and resistance in contemporary society. By challenging essentialist views of gender, it emphasizes the fluidity of identities and the limitations of defining individuals through a single axis of identity. Weeden (2014) argues that traditional feminist frameworks often fail to account for the diverse experiences of marginalized groups. This she argues remains a limitation of feminism since “Feminism must grow wider to encompass the various voices and perspectives of minorities within these discourses” (p. 45). This calls for inclusion and draws into the foreground the need to embrace intersectionality that recognizes how oppression and resistance exist in complex spaces.

Thus, the theory of intersectionality as a concept gets to the foreground within post-structural feminism; it was introduced by Crenshaw (1989). Crenshaw, in his work, described the intersection as social identity forming corresponding kinds of oppression or privilege, such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. She explains it as, “The intersectional experience is more than the status of the two individual recommender and recommended factors added together” (p. 140). This view situates with Weeden’s (2014) observation; these multiple identities cause a matrix of domination. This matrix is very important because it helps explain how multiple oppressions cause people to be more affected when they are dealing with structures in society.

Feminist approaches employ close reading as a tool to assist explain the distinction between women's subjectivity and postmodern constructions. Ahmed stressed that critical reading should be taken into account for the critical study of the theoretical text and employed close reading in feminist theory as a methodology. Each of these instances suggests that a comprehensive interpretive framework is necessary for close reading. Numerous aspects were involved, particularly the reader's position and context. Each reader approaches the material from a perspective that is supported by their societal critique. If one were to critically examine the literary women's heritage and the 1970s liberation of taboo sexuality, the 1980s interconnected approach to race, gender, and class, and the oppression of imperialism, one would see the differences. These illustrations show that close readings not only validate oppositional readings but also serve to close the gap between different approaches to reading (Lukic & Espinosa, 2011).

Foucault (1982) further enriched post-structural feminist notions by changing the meaning of power. According to him, power is not only repressive; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth (p. 781). This unique realization almost eliminates the established paradigm of power as a vertical structure and indicates that power is an intrinsic feature of interaction. He also goes on to say, “Where there is power, there is knowledge, and where there is resistance, there is power” (p. 790). In consequence, people are not only objectified by power but are also able to resist this process and become its agents.

According to Weeden (2014), oppressed persons silently put up a fight against perceived dominance, stating that “resistance is not just a counterpoint to repression, but a voice of power” (p. 62). This kind of

reframing changes paradigms from passive, oppressive models where people are oppressed to models where people are liberating themselves. Foucault (1982), in line with the above arguments, makes points that subjects are always in pairs that are involved in power relationships. He submits that “Power relations at every level are always opposed by the power of those who contest them” (p. 785). This dynamism shows that resistance is part and parcel of power relations because it creates an ability for the subjugated to challenge dominant forms of power.

Power and identity dynamics cannot be fully understood without giving credit to knowledge. Weeden (2014) has generalized that knowledge is context dependent, and it can either reaffirm the power of some while diminishing the power of others. This suggests the need for exploring the ways knowledge is performed and shared, especially with disabled others. For instance, different educational institutions tend to promulgate existing paradigmatic assumptions and obscure the points of view of minorities. Foucault’s discussion of discourse supports this argument because, according to Foucault (1982), discourses are not only the enactments of power; they are also the locations of power. Thus, this participatory kind of conception indicates that the creation of knowledge is a political process in which the other can subvert the existing kinds of knowledge and present their own stories.

To address these themes, the current study made use of qualitative research design and techniques, including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions targeting different participants. This approach enables the gathering of voluminous qualitative data about participants’ perceptions of power and/or resistance. The inclusion of voices is essential as it reveals how oppression and the resultant resistance manifest in disparity from identity context to context. The analysis of the themes related to explore the gender and power relations was relied on the matrix of domination developed by Foucault (1982); Crenshaw (1989); and Weeden (2014), meaning that the concentration was on the separate identities and their experiences of power and oppression. For instance, a Black homosexual woman may have an experience different from that of a white heterosexual woman, thus showing why it is important to consider an intersectional approach. Crenshaw (1989), for example, points out that Black women’s experiences are excluded from both feminist and anti-racism frameworks. The experience of marginalization and oppression also shows that intersectionality provides a proper perspective to discuss the violations of rights of people with multiple memberships.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Qualitative approaches were used in the study to understand how different identities create multifaceted forms of oppression and resistance. This included finding out the nature of the stories of resistance within communities and how they are told. For example, storytelling as a cultural strategy can be viewed as offering a certain form of opposition to some of the more traditional narratives with which citizens are presented, and which in turn seems to offer individuals a means through which they might begin to take back control of their own stories.

This section focuses on the analysis of each collected textual excerpt individually to discuss key messages in response to the research questions of the present study. During the close vocal reading, 15 extracts were examined with an emphasis on intersectionality, power relations, oppression, and resistance from the perspective of post-structuralist feminist theory. To investigate the themes, each literary extract is examined individually while keeping in mind the research goals of the current study.

The following textual lines that were garnered during data collection are presented one by one to highlight the themes by the insights of new criticism. In addition, the researcher provides reflexivity and the contribution of the researcher to the findings of the study. The analysis is given below:

1). It is a mild winter evening that has awakened many to spring, and so many had left their windows open with iron bars as in the image above. Even though the other sights and sounds are screened by metal, the noise of other children, a far-off hawker, a car horn, the smell of exhaust, and a neighbor cooking come in. (*The Upstairs Wife*, 2015, p. 1)

This excerpt lays down the introduction to a text that is grounded in the olfactory imagery of the lives of people in a city. The depiction of the open windows during a mild winter evening brings in the community aspect into the society, depriving one of their individuality from personal, including or exclusive space. The noises of children at play, sellers, car beepers, and the stench of fumes and roasting foods also keep the movie full of urban feel. Nevertheless, this stereotypical picture also foreshadows socio-economic living conditions of the community. The fact that windows are ‘barred’ can be considered as having a connection with security, which relates to class issues. Air, when windows remain open or are opened a little, ineluctably points to a relative factor of safety or comfort that the majority in the community may not afford to enjoy. This suggests how spatiality and class position explored here are intertwined, how the latter shapes the distribution and lifestyle of the former within the urban fabric. Moreover, the presence of hawkers and the fumes from the vehicles are indications of a community of people who are poor.

The cooking smell that comes in through the window from the neighbor’s house introduces the theme of the residential nature of the show. The odor of cooking, which is directly connected with women’s work, points to the matter of searching for gender aspects of the domestic environment. Still, the fact that this scent is present in households erases the boundary of public from that of the private and gives the audience a sense of embracing domesticity. However, this communal aspect of domesticity is not as clearly articulated against the domestic ideology as one might expect; rather, it suggests the possibility of a more indeterminate model of identity and interconnection. There is rich experience of senses in this passage, and this makes it connect with Sara Weedon's fluidity of identity.

2). My grandparents chose to stay, bolstered by the assurances of others in their community who balked at the prospect of becoming refugees in a land they had fought for, but that remained unpredictable and even mysterious." (*The Upstairs Wife*, 2015, p. 35)

This excerpt helps to comprehend what identity, community, and power mean during the periods of changes. Fighting for the grandparents who were afraid of the future despite leaving their homeland, one can also analyze the main principles—the feeling of belonging to their community, their dwelling in it. To counter such thinking, people depend on the words of fellow members in their community encouraging them to stand against displacement. The use of the present tense with the phrase “fought for” has colonial implications or national radicalisms or sectarian strife; it reinstates the nationalism-cum-community and power frame. Such a decision of the grandparents to stay means they do not surrender and feel like refugees in their country. This is due perhaps to the fact that they are in a position to appreciate the fact that their community once fought for independence/self-rule. Weedon’s idea of the fluidity of identity and a focus on the interactions between the personal and the collective.

3). "Many difficulties were encountered during the voyage to Pakistan." (*The Upstairs Wife*, 2015, p. 43)
This small excerpt does an excellent job of giving readers an idea of the struggle of immigration to Pakistan and the physical, mental, and moral warfare that migrants faced, as well as implicit references to power relations and oppression. The use of the phrase “dotted” with hardships minimizes the suffering that is associated with the difficulties faced, lessening the impact they endure. Some of them are very subtle in implying that the experiences of the migrants reflect the structural injustice that is ordained by the colonialism, nationalism, or social domination. National origin and religion can be inferred as criteria

of oppression underlying the plot of the story in the context of the voyage to Pakistan, and, probably, class can be inferred as well. The decision of the migrants to move from their home country to another country that had recently formed a nation-state is one of the difficult conditions of people's identification. It is doubtless that they experienced different problems in accordance with the social position, material conditions, and networks. This intersectionality reveals how power worked to affect some people more than others due to their multiple marginalities.

The compactness of the message understates the essence of pain and strength of migrants that is reflected in their experience. The misery they experienced is evidence of such realities as colonialism, nationalism, and structuring of society into superior and inferior castes. But they do not give up their attempts to reach PAK; they also seem to fight back to some extent. This idea is close to Weedon's theory of fluidity of identity because the migrant's experiences make the distinctions between the national, religious, and personal identities quite indistinct. The voyage, as we see it, is a process of rebuilding, a new definition of self and group identity that has to emerge in response to hardship.

4). Therefore, for Suraya, both partition and motherhood were forms of liberation.' Since all of them in her father-in-law's house were marked by the unfinished tears of families separated by far more than a few blocks, there was hardly any parsing of the small separation she exacted for her own family. (*The Upstairs Wife*, 2015, p. 9)

The boundaries between personal and collective identities are not well defined. **Suraya's** liberation is not solely a triumphant heroine's desire, but it is contextualized in the displacement of the partition. The notion relates identity to multiple roles based on family, society, and history and, when placed at the crossroads, opens opportunities for resistance. Tackling the subject matter, Hanif is able to complicate the narrative around resistance and liberation by showing the agency of a counternarrative subject while maintaining the oppressive framework operating around her.

This excerpt also demonstrates how voluntary and involuntary factors interact on the individual level, at the level of the family, and at the level of the community. Of By juxtaposing the public historical events that are happening outside and the ordinary life of the inhabitants of this world/large maternity ward, Darrieu and Larrikketter emphasize the idea of the individual and the collective. It also portrays the reality of a stereotyped society where systemic structure erases more specific experience and absorbs truth into a larger tale. The conflict based on the conflict of the individual experience and the heavy machinery of history illustrates that the dynamics of power exist and form the working social realities. History and being a teenage mother overpower this brief but telling excerpt that points to a marginalization of identity in society. The phrase "a dose of history almost too big to swallow" refers to gigantic proportions of the events, which can hardly be swallowed with eyes and heart by a young mother who has to take her new reality into account.

5). Karachi, the Muhajirs, the MQM had asserted, could therefore be rightfully owned by the Muhajirs. To be more specific, those who had sought to become merely 'Pakistani' only to find themselves forevermore 'muhajir,' or 'refugees,' in a world that had categorically fixed them and everything around them by ethnicity. (*The Upstairs Wife* , 2015, p. 180)

That MQM itself declared that now only Muhajirs can claim Karachi is a clear indication of how the process of ethnicization of identity and politicalization of belonging has occurred. Cohosting as a phenomenon therefore becomes power in operation and civitas, showing how some groups seek to control and prescribe the narrative of nationalism. Therefore, the Muhajir's claim to own Karachi is to redraw a new identity to its cultural and political structure. Ethnic classification is oppressive to the extreme; it was

emphasized by the fact that the people who wanted to be just ‘Pakistani’ have lost out and are now labelled ‘muhajir’ or ‘refugees’ forever. This cycle reinforces intersectional oppression, where people are differently represented, not in pegging them to their class, race, gender, and other aspects.

By erasing all others and unifying all under the banner of ‘muhajir,’ the way in which one asserts their identity and the points of belonging to which one can lay claim is reduced to a simplistic calculus. This creates an echo with what Sara Weedon called the fluidity of identity: identity is dependent on a context, fractured and influenced by multiple factors. This is well demonstrated by the Muhajir, who shuttle between ethnic, national, and personal identities. As such, this also symbolizes a protest against oppression, as the Muhajir community struggles to regain and redefine themselves. However, this resistance is not simple, as it reproduces ethnic categorization and may reiterate such power relations. This tug of war between claiming one’s identity and protesting the power dynamics involved in constructing the self demonstrates how the numerous social structures define personal as well as societal experiences.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The analysis of *The Upstairs Wife* (2015) by Zakaria gives a complex view of microhistory, history, and culture. In this sense, the text conclusively analyzes how a post-structuralist and a feminist theory help one to identify the political situations in Zakaria’s memoir. The analysis foregrounds cultural norms and regulations regarding gendered relationships, power dynamics in the family and in the nation, and the dynamics of power change. The portrayal of power dynamics in the figure is seen in the first research objective, which seek to examine political and cultural theory of post-structuralist feminism when applied to Zakaria’s memoir. In light of this, the reader learns about envious power in the historical narrative told by Zakaria as works both in formal political capacities and behind closed doors.

Thus, power is written as complex and as bending with winds, influencing characters’ circumstances on different tiers. For example, the limited autonomy of Aunt Amina reflects the way in which the familial and societal mechanisms maintain the patriarchal power. Indeed, as the analysis indicates, marriage to another wife against the wife’s wishes is informed by the political and religious social relations that place women in a structural cervix. The text also reveal how power is not only in the political processes but in culture and relation. This is in tune with the post-structuralist feminism perspectives that deconstruct the power along structuralist in a manner that flat the distribution of power across structures. However, the historical context of Pakistan under General Zia ul-Haq is important for reading power in the memoir. Islamization policies made legal reforms that further evolved women’s subjugation, openly and especially in the private sphere. The analysis ensures that these policies increased the patriarchal domination of families, and dominant male authority over women in society. Therefore, the interlinkage between the power politics and family relations in the text shows a way how social institutions contribute to a man’s oppression of women.

The second research objective discusses that cultural norms regarding marriage, family and gender dominated the story. In this context the woman is a nurturer first and foremost as a wife, daughter or a mother. While it narrates the rigidity of marriage customs throughout one segment of the text, the wedding of a relative of Zakaria makes it clear how culture maintains gender roles. It is proposed that bride’s rigid sari that resemble the tent demonstrate how restrictive the culture is. This imagery captures how women are confined to roles that do not allow them to express themselves as they wish, thus supporting the argument that culture is a way of guarding and containing people. Using a post-structuralist feminism theoretical framework since it challenges clear-cut male and female roles in the society, it is easy to envisage how cultural practices synchronised continue to oppress women.

The analysis furthermore shows how domesticity and women's work as cooks or caretakers are linked to culture that supports the stereotyped gender roles. Refusing Brontë's association of women with domestic space as a reproductively regulated prison, the memoir nevertheless acknowledges how women's labor is located in the home and can participate in challenging ways. This complexity can be explained by the post-structuralist feminist thesis about the construction of identity as a process that is constantly negotiated, depending on the discursive context, which in turn means that even in the formally oppressive arenas such as work, women can still perform certain forms of subversive activism. The third objective, which looks at power rotation in the society is also prevalent within the daughter's picture of the family and also the political system as depicted by Zakaria in the memoir. The research highlights the concept of power as being present not only at inter-organizational and government levels but also at interpersonal and societal levels. Despite the political subordination of women in the domestic sphere, Aunt Amina and Chila's experience within her marriage shows that power is not fixed, but was being negotiated. With regards to the social power relations, the power relationship between males and females is established showing how women's roles are defined by changes in the political context.

Besides, Zakaria's memoir reinstates how the Pakistani micro and macro cultural practices and political tendencies affect individual lives and especially, Pakistani females, pointing to the existent Pakistani power relations. For instance, during General Zia ul-Haq rule in Pakistan, patriarchal laws emerged being a norm which further weakened a already struggling force inside as well as outside the family home – the force of women's subordination. This is the political backdrop against which one seeks to understand the limitations within which Aunt Amina and all like her, lived and fought against patriarchal oppression. The intimate relation with the effacing forces of the state: the personal and the political are intertwined in Zakaria's narrative.

The memoir therefore serves the dual purpose of being a critique of the Pakistani society and an examination of how women fit into the changing landscape within that society. Drawing on post-structuralist feminist critique, the idea of power can be mobilised about women but at the same time be manoeuvred and fought over. The book is quite a commentary on how personal freedom today, gender and power are still open and not only in the case of Pakistan but also when studied within the framework of any society that is strongly patriarchal.

CONCLUSION

The *Upstairs Wife* (2015) Zakaria had provided a deep analysis in unraveling the construction of gender, power and relations within the social fabric of Pakistan. Evaluating the method of the post-structuralist feminism, this work explored how the play of power transcends various planes and make connection crossing over familial structures, cultural expectations, and political institutions. The memoir echoed the patriarchal dictation familiar to the colonial male dominant self, but at the same time, that of self-restrained Aunt Amina. Even in the legal assertions of polygamy this did not amount to providing any other form of freedom. That enslavement was not absolute but with elements of rebellion: Amina leaving her husband was one silent rebellion against oppression of individuality for conformity to societal standards. This act of resistance was in harmony with the post-structuralist feminist constructing fantasy of free-floating signifier of gender identification on power to which such women challenged and negotiate their destinies and lives in ways not always extrapolated in most rigid societal structures.

This memoir presentation of female subjugation is also situated within the political background of General Zia ul-Haq's regime to an extent because state policies nourished cultural and family oppressive dynamics. By means of conjoining the spheres of private and political, Zakaria introduced an idea that the

former is as much a part of the latter as the latter is a part of the former, and, therefore, the health of both family relations and national politics cannot be conceived of as independent processes. *The Upstairs Wife* (2015) was more than hegemonic gaze but a very important discourse of the strength of women even in the presence of pre-programmed systems of dominance. People were therefore encouraged to learn HOW gender, power and resistance relations emerged first and foremost, but also in the private and political spheres more broadly as they refined their understanding of these relations. The perspective that I had with Zakaria meant looking into current processes of negotiating autonomy and identity, into the battles against oppression where the victim and the oppressor do not simply are two individuals or a person and a system but a person and a society.

Contributions of the Study

This study contributes about different aspects of post structuralism in terms of power, gender, family relations by subjective approach. *The Upstairs Wife* (2015) reflects on all above-mentioned themes in textual analysis. It further contributes to feminist approach in novel. Various political moments have been discussed in these studies considering post structuralist feminist approach. We have viewed this theoretical approach by different famine theorists like Foucault, (1987) Butler (1992), Scott (1992) and Weedon (1987). Subjectivity is also discussing as it is method of self-perception. How reader perceived the novel text in his own mindset. Major contributions are post structuralist feminist theorists. Micheal Foucault, (1987) power rational theory, is a key contributor in this study.

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