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An Examination of Heba Al-Dubbagh's Just Five Minutes: Nine Years in the Prisons of Syria Through The Scope of Foucault's Theory of Power Relations

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ABSTRACT

The present study deals with Foucault's theory of Power Relations in Prison Literature. It focuses on Heba Al-Dabbagh's *Just Five Minutes: Nine Years in the Prisons of Syria*. The study argues that examining Power Relations in this novel shows how prison narratives can reflect and challenge hierarchies, authority, and resistance in such environments.

It also seeks to show how Al-Dabbagh represents the effect of power relation on prisoners and the prison guards in her novel by relying heavily upon the theoretical framework of Power Relation by Michael Foucault. Using a Foucauldian perspective, this research emphasizes how the Syrian regime's exertion of power was based on

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establishing an atmosphere of fear, in which the individual is reduced to a passive subject of the state.

Keywords: authority, Power Relation, prison, resistance, Foucault, Al-Dabbagh's *Just Five Minutes*

تحليل رواية هبة الدباغ خمس دقائق وحسب: تسع سنوات في السجون السورية من خلال

نظرية ميشيل فوكو علاقات السلطة

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المستخلص

هذه الدراسة الحالية تتناول نظرية فوكو حول علاقات القوة في أدب السجون. وترتكز على كتاب "خمس دقائق فقط: تسع سنوات في سجون سوريا" لهبة الدباغ. تجادل الدراسة بأن فحص علاقات القوة في هذه الرواية يُظهر كيف يمكن لسرديات السجن أن تعكس وتتحدى التسلسلات الهرمية والسلطة والمقاومة في مثل هذه البيئات.

كما تسعى إلى إظهار كيف مثلت الدباغ تأثير علاقات القوة على السجناء وحراس السجن في روايتها باستخدام بشكل كبير الإطار النظري لعلاقات القوة لميشيل فوكو. باستخدام منظور فوكوي، تؤكد هذه الدراسة على كيف كان قمع النظام السوري للسلطة مبنياً على إرساء جو من الخوف، والذي يُخفض الفرد إلى مجرد موضوع سلبي للدولة.

الكلمات الدالة: السلطة، علاقات القوة، السجن، المقاومة، فوكو، "خمس دقائق فقط" لهبة الدباغ.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature consistently encompasses the human values that are present in people's lives. Accordingly, literary works can be considered a reflection of society since they have an inherent significance for people, derived from the collective human experience. Literary works are considered human objects of value or social or cultural facts due to their origin as human creations. Literary works exploring the prison experience have been common throughout much of the world's literature, transcending cultural, political, and religious boundaries. Throughout human history, the prison experience has consistently provided an ideal platform for artistic expression (Muhammad, 2018).

Arabic prison literature is a substantial and diverse genre that emerged from the suffering of political prisoners in many Arab nations. This literature functions not only as an accurate account of the challenging circumstances experienced by prisoners but additionally as a kind of creative expression that delves into the essence of human existence under political repression and social seclusion (Esmaeil and Hadi, 2015). Syrian prison literature is a literary genre that originated from the accounts of political prisoners held in Syrian prisons under the rule of the Assad administration. Literary works authored by dissidents incarcerated for their resistance against the dictatorial regime, both during their imprisonment and after their release, comprise this genre (Taleghani, 2021). Syrian Prison Literature is a work created by those who have been imprisoned in Syria for political views. There are two main types of suffering in prison: physical suffering and psychological suffering. Isolation and imprisonment in jail is a pain in itself, both psychologically and physically (Mardan, 2023).

Heba Al Dabbagh, a Syrian writer, is well-known for her significant contributions to this genre, as she highlights the brutal truths of imprisonment in Syria. Her works provide a sensitive depiction of political prisoners' hardships, effectively portraying their resilience and the challenges faced in Syrian prisons. Al-Dabbagh's novel *"Just Five Minutes: Nine Years in Syrian Prisons"* is a prominent work that provides a detailed account of her own experiences during her time in prison.

Syrian prison literature has been influenced by the political atmosphere in Syria, where authoritarian regimes have often seen freedom of expression and the dissemination of independent works as a challenge to their power. Consequently, prison writing has emerged as a medium through which writers can spread their message while incarcerated and shed light on the human rights abuses that take place inside these facilities.

A significant number of individuals choose to writing as a suitable means of catharsis to express their political, social, and ethical problems that are crucial to their period, location, and future generations (Ahsan and Farooq, 2022). Heba Dabbagh's novel *Just Five Minutes* serves as a cathartic outlet for her to express and reduce the emotions and suffering she faced while imprisoned. Additionally, it functions as an effective means to raise consciousness about the political and social difficulties encountered in Syria during that erratic era.

2. POWER RELATIONS THEORY

Michel Foucault, a prominent figure in critical theory, has garnered significant attention for his exploration of power, knowledge, and discourse. His impact is evident in post-structuralist, post-modernist, post-feminist, post-Marxist, and post-colonial views. The influence of Foucault's works has been evident in various disciplinary fields, including, the fields of sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and history (Balan, 2010). Foucault's theoretical works have sparked beneficial conversations since the 1960s due to their thought-provoking nature.

In his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* presents the historical background to "various studies of the power of normalization and the formation of knowledge in modern society" (Foucault, 1977, P. 308). He divides this book into four

parts in which he traces back the history of punishment, prison rules, and the abolishment of some of these punishments and rules till the modern age in the Western countries. As Foucault himself writes in the opening chapter to his book *Discipline and Punishment* “there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations”(Foucault, 1977, p. 27). He argues that power relations and the creation of knowledge are interconnected and mutually dependent.

He highlights the shift in punishment techniques from public death and torture to prison and the complete control of convicts. He emphasises the significance of discipline in shaping contemporary organisations and people, the rise of prisons as a primary method of punishment, and the transition from physical to psychological forms of punishment(Hoffman, 2014). Foucault examines the development of disciplinary power and its widespread impact on contemporary society.

Power Relation theory, also known as Relational Theory, is a theory of power that emphasizes the dispersed and pervasive nature of power, focusing on the relationships between individuals, groups, and institutions rather than on power as a distinct entity held by individuals or groups. According to Foucault’s theory, power is constructed and maintained through social relations and accepted forms of truth(Bhattarai, 2020). Power relation theory challenges the traditional understanding of power as a concentrated force and instead highlights the ways in which power is distributed unevenly among different spaces and groups.

The theory of power relations offers a conceptual framework for comprehending the functioning of power in social and political contexts. It investigates the ways in which power is possessed, dedicated, and challenged among those in authority, organizations, and institutions. It acknowledges that power is inherent in social institutions and interactions and has both positive and negative impacts on society.

The complicated relationship between power and knowledge is a key and recurring theme in Foucault's work. He sums it up with the phrase *Power /Knowledge*. Foucault's concept emphasises the inseparable connection and reciprocal influence between power and knowledge. Power and knowledge are not separate entities, but rather interdependent forces that influence and strengthen each other(Portschy, 2020). According to him, it is impossible to establish a clear distinction between power and knowledge; neither power nor knowledge can exist independently of each other “it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power(Foucault, 1980, p. 52).

The Panopticon is a concept originated by Jeremy Bentham in the last years of the 18th century, is an architectural and social arrangement that has generated significant scholarly attention and debate, notably in the research conducted by Michel Foucault. Foucault is best known for his analysis of the Panopticon or Panopticism(Mathiesen, 2017). It is ingeniously designed circular prison where prisoners in cells with transparent walls are subject to constant surveillance from a guard who sits at the center of the prison able to see everyone while remaining himself invisible

All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell... a worker or a schoolboy... One can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery(Foucault, 1977, p. 200).

He believed that the Panopticon could help us understand the effects of surveillance on our everyday lives. His study commences with a historical analysis of punishment.

The idea of discourse plays an essential part in Michel Foucault's philosophical and theoretical works. According to Foucault, discourse comprises not just communication and language use, but also the whole system of knowledge production, social practices, power relations, and means of forming subjectivity. These elements are closely connected to discourse and the creation of meaning. Weedon suggest that Foucault defines discourse in his way. He says:

Discourse, as defined by Foucault, refers to: ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern(Weedon, 1987, p. 108)

In every community, the creation of discourse is simultaneously controlled, determined, structured, and redistributed by a set of processes whose purpose is to ward off its powers and risks acquire control over its random happenings, and avoid its ponderous, complicated materiality (Foucault, 1970)

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study is qualitative, and it follows a critical and analytical approach. The study applies Michel Foucault's theoretical framework of Power Relations to analyse and investigate the representation of Power Relations in Heba Dabbagh's novel *Just Five Minutes: Nine Years in Syrian Prisons*. It relies heavily on the theoretical framework of Power Relations by Michael Foucault. It draws upon Foucault's theoretical perspective to examine and investigate the representation of power relations in prison literature. It involves an examination of power relations in these novels and aims to provide a comprehensive analysis.

4. LITRATURE REVIEW

The examining of Power Relations in prison literature provides a deep understanding of the complex dynamics of power, control, and resistance in restricted, often repressive environments. Michel Foucault, a significant pioneer in critical theory, established a framework for observing power as a complex and pervasive influence that affects both societal institutions and individual lives. Prison literature, as a unique literary genre, has fascinated writers for years by offering insight into the lives of those who live on the margins of society.

Among these writers Diana Obeid, in her dissertation titled “Political Prison Discourse in the Arab World: Selected Writings from Egypt and Syria” sheds light on some Arab women writers who experienced the harsh realities of Arab prisons, especially in Egypt and Syria(Obeid, 2022). She selects some works by Arab women, like Nawal al-Saadawi’s *Memoirs from the Women's Prison* (2019), Zaynab al-Ghazali’s *The Prison Memoirs of a Muslim Sister* (1999), and Hiba al-Dabbagh’s *Just Five Minutes: Nine Years in the Prison of Syria* (2007).

Obeid's analysis of Heba al-Dabbagh's *Just Five Minutes: Nine Years in the Prison of Syria* explores the role of discourse in sustaining state power and the strategies of resistance employed by prisoners. The dissertation highlights the significance of Al-Dabbagh's work, along with works by Nawal al-Saadawi and Zaynab al-Ghazali, in documenting the experiences of women prisoners and the strategies they employed to resist dehumanising practices.

As Lamiaa Ahmed claimed in her published research “*The Portrayal of Human Chaotic Behaviors as Exemplified in Chuck Palahniuk’s Choke*” on how chaotic individuals, particularly the protagonist Victor Mancini, navigate their unpredictable and disordered lives as a response to past traumas and societal norms(Ahmed, 2024). She analyzes human behavior through the lens of chaos theory as it is exemplified in Chuck Palahniuk's novel "Choke.In "Choke," Palahniuk uses Victor's chaotic behavior as a way to explore the complexities of human nature and the ways in which individuals can resist societal constraints. Through Victor's journey, readers are invited to question their own assumptions about what it means to be "normal" and to embrace the power of chaos as a means of self-expression and liberation Chaotic individuals often act in ways that defy societal norms, which can be seen as a form of resistance against established power structures. Foucault posits that power is pervasive and exists within relationships rather than being held by a specific authority. He emphasizes that "where there is power, there is resistance,"(Foucault, 1978: 95-96)suggesting that chaotic behavior can be a response to the constraints imposed by societal norms and disciplinary mechanisms

Another writer, professor Rebecca Shareah Taleghani, in her book titled *Readings in Syrian Prison Literature*, highlights the significance of Syrian prison literature. Taleghani suggests that exploring Syrian prison literature provides a valuable and overlooked opportunity to comprehend the intricate relationship between political opposition, creative imaginative thinking, and the development of Arabic literature and discourse on human rights. .

Her primary focus appears to be on emphasizing the significance and influence of Dabbagh's narrative as a unique and powerful piece of Syrian prison literature. She believes that Heba Al Dabbagh, one of the few translated instances of this genre, has played a significant role in increasing the visibility and focus on the hardships faced by political prisoners under the Assad government. She regards Dabbagh's *Just Five Minutes* as an important contribution to the recording and dissemination of these crucial stories.

Said's Orientalism theory and the power relations framework of Self and Other provide a critical lens through which to examine the dynamics of representation, identity, and authority. Rasheed, L. A., & Hamad, R. A. in their research “*The Representation of Refugees’ Crisis through the Lenses of Edward Said’s Orientalism: A Post-Colonial Study of Khaled Hosseini’s The Kite Runner*” explore how Khaled Hosseini's novel "The Kite Runner" engages with and challenges the Orientalist depictions of Afghanistan in

the West, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11, drawing on Edward Said's influential theory of Orientalism (Rasheed and Hamad, 2021).

While, the present study endeavors to investigate and analyze the representation of power relations within the context of prison literature. It argues that examining power relations in Heba Al-Dabbagh's *Just Five Minutes: Nine Years in the Prisons of Syria* shows how prison narratives can reflect and challenge hierarchies, authority, and resistance in such environments.

5. JUST FIVE MINUTES : AN OVERVIEW

The novel refers to a period in Syria's recent past that was very dangerous and filled with risk. President Asad's secret service operatives, referred to as the Mukhabarat (intelligence agency), were widely known for their harsh actions during this time. The Mukhabarat constantly targeted and arrested anyone who had even the slightest connection to political opposition activities.

The cover image of the novel features dark colors and a shady effect that seems to evoke a sense of incarceration and struggle. Al-Dabbagh divides her novel into six parts. Each part is further divided into sections. She gives titles for every part and section. The novelist describes her and other prisoners' suffering in prison as well as the suffering of other prisoners. She describes her journey through the prisons of Syria, Kafar Suseh Prison, Katana Prison, and Dooma Prison. The main setting of the novel is mostly the Syrian prisons, particularly the establishments managed by the Syrian Mukhabarat (secret agency) during the rule of President Hafiz al-Assad. The narrative unfolds in the late 1980s and early 1990s, during a time of heightened political oppression in Syria.

She uses first-person narration; she describes her personal and other prisoners experiences in Syrian prisons. The use of first-person narration establishes a feeling of immediacy and intimacy, engaging the reader and enabling them to metaphorically experience the author's world, observing the events of the novel from the author's perspective (Faulds, 2003). The novel considered as a bibliographical novel as it describes the author experiences

In part one (The Arrest: Just Five Minutes), Heba Dabbagh's experience started when Mukhabarat officers forcefully went into her flat and demanded her time. Despite only asking for five minutes of her time, "Come on, get dressed. You're coming with us - just five minutes" (Dabbagh, 2007, p. 15) the police officers ultimately sentenced her to nine years in prison. Her story is a chilling testament to the brutality and injustice that characterized recent history of Syria.

Heba, the protagonist of the novel, symbolises the characteristics of perseverance and resistance in the face of false accusations and cruel torment. Regardless of experiencing outstanding mistreatment, she strongly refuses to admit fabrications or compromise their convictions. She establishes strong connections with other prisoners, such as Majida and Malak, demonstrating real concern for their well-being

I lost awareness for the next while. Then, an officer walked into the room with Majida and Malak. "Aren't you girls hungry?" "No. We are not

hungry,” I answered. “Well, we are going to feed you some barbecued chicken anyways.” He means torture. I know it (Dabbagh, 2007, p.24)

The author maintains honesty and truthfulness throughout interrogations, “When the officer finished interrogating me, my only desire in the world was to find anything, a tile, a slab of concrete, anything I could collapse upon and sleep”(Dabbagh, 2007, p. 23) persistently refusing fake admissions even under severe force. Heba's fortitude and inherent power enable her to endure complicated torment, loss of sleep, and severe prison circumstances.

Arrested on December 31, 1980, under the pretense of a five-minute questioning session, she was subjected to nine years of imprisonment, becoming a victim of the regime's ruthless crackdown on dissent

That December 31st, the silence of the cold night seemed deafeningly loud and I could not read another word...I heard violent knocking at the front door. I looked out the window. Mukhabarat vehicles occupied the entire street. “Open the door now or we’ll break the lock with gunfire, a man shouted from behind our apartment door(Dabbagh, 2007, p. 13).

The First part starts with Hebas arrest in January 1981 for being associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, a prohibited political group in Syria. At the conclusion of this part, the officers send Heba to Kafar Suseh Prison, where she endures appalling conditions and further abuse. The officers compel her to participate in collective torture sessions, where they subject prisoners to physical abuse and beatings to extract confessions.

In Part Two (Kafar Suseh Prison: A Journey beyond Time) Heba and her friends Malak and Majida. “The three cars transporting us from the Mukhabarat branch to Kafar Suseh Prison passed through the entrance gates and sped to the main building. The building had three floors” (Dabbagh,2007, p. 26).The author portrays Majida as an adoring friend and cohabitant of the author, fostering a profound relationship throughout the narrative. She offers emotional comfort, supporting the author in times of sorrow or terror. Majida's bond with the author transcends ordinary company, representing friendship and solidarity during hard circumstances.

Part Three (Katana Prison: A Slow Death) highlights the author's and her fellow prisoners' experiences of manipulation, emotional distress, and terrible results as they deal with the difficulties of being imprisoned and the oppressive atmosphere of the prison system

A police officer approached the car, opened the back door and peered in. I thought he’d ask us to step out, but the officer quickly shut the door and the driver took off again. I caught a glimpse of the metal sign that arched over the police checkpoint. The sign read, “Katana Prison”(Dabbagh, 2007, p.135).

Fadya, a former prisoner with the author, has been released and plans to visit the author and other prisoners in Katana Prison. The prisoners were informed of a new

Palestinian woman, who was covertly placed among them to gather information. Fadya was placed in solitary confinement, providing guards with information about her personality and mental health.

In Part Four (Military Interrogation Prison: In the Depth of the Unknown) Heba recounts the brutal and inhumane torture she and other prisoners endured in the Military Interrogation Prison

The vehicles screeched and stopped in front of the entrance of the building. An officer approached me, blindfolded me and handcuffed my arms behind my back. He led me into the building. "Even for my first interrogation, they didn't blindfold me or handcuff me," I said. "The rules are different here." The officer grabbed my shoulders and shoved me forward (Dabbagh, 2007, p. 197).

The author describes the physical and psychological torment inflicted by the interrogators, which create a climate of terror and despair within the prison. The callousness and cruelty of the interrogators are exposed, highlighting the profound impact of state-sanctioned violence on the prisoners' physical and mental well-being.

In Part Five (Dooma Prison: The Battle against Time) the author's ongoing incarceration and torment by the Syrian government are described

One cold November morning, the warden and a group of officers barged into our cell and told us to get ready for transfer on the following day. The first question that sprung to our minds was, "where to?" "To Dooma Prison," they said. (Dabbagh, 2007, p. 217).

She is sent to Dooma Prison, where she suffers both physical and psychological mistreatment, accusing her connection with the Ikhwan, an illegitimate political group. Heba is compelled to admit guilt but steadfastly resists, resulting in increased torture. A newly appointed officer named Khairbek threatens to forcibly remove her clothing and continue the act of torture. In this Part, She receives a Quran and instructions on how to make dough providing comfort to her.

In last Part of the novel (Release) Heba Heba describes her nine-year confinement and eventual return to society

They had promised us pardon and release many times, but never kept their word. The news didn't move us. Majida and I were sitting in a corner reciting from the Quran when the officer shouted at us to get up and get a move on. We sat still. "Stop lying to us. We don't need more lies," we told him. The guard swore to us that he was telling the truth today and showed us the list of names printed on an official document. (Dabbagh, 2007, p. 230-231).

The part six portrays the immediate aftermath, in which the whole neighbourhood gathers to warmly welcome and congratulate Heba and Majida. The people in the neighborhood show pleasure and comfort at the safe release of Heba and

Majida, but their distressed faces suggest that the experience of incarceration may have had a lasting impact on the two women. Heba experienced the greatest harm when she discovered that the Syrian regime had killed all of her family and left her alone.

Heba Dabbagh's novel offers a profound examination of the resilient determination of the human spirit in difficult circumstances. The narrative sheds light on the ruthless nature of the Syrian administration, its oppressive prison system, and the ongoing struggle for justice. Dabbagh's nine-year incarceration, characterised by torture, overpopulation, and horrible conditions, stands as an example of the enduring resilience inherent in individuals, even in the most terrible situations.

6.THE ANALYSIS OF JUST FIVE MINUTES

Heba Dabbagh's novel, titled *Just Five Minutes Nine Years in the Prisons of Syria* provides a remarkable analysis of the enduring strength of the human spirit when confronted with immense suffering.

Prison literature bears witness to the long history of the regime's use of torture and detention to suppress political dissent and to many of the state's human rights abuses, which have also been documented in numerous reports by human rights organizations over the past four decades(Taleghani, 2021, p. 3).

AL Dabbaghs novel illuminates the brutal reality of the Syrian regime, its dictatorial prison system, and its continuing struggle for justice.

Foucault delves into the concept of torture, not just as a tool for power exercise, but also as a manifestation of power that surpasses mere physical control. He believes that torture functions as a means for people in positions of authority to assert their dominance in a cruel and sadistic way, with the intention of not only manipulating physical bodies but also breaking the determination and spirit of the people who experience such extreme violence (Slack, 2008).

Just Five Minutes provides horrifying and undeniable evidence of the Asad regime's systematic practice of torture and incarceration. Heba described a young man in the prison when he was tortured by an officer. She said that she was never able to identify the young prisoner or the reason for their torture, but he repeatedly yelled the same thing throughout the session

I swear to God it wasn't me. It wasn't me." But in the end, he gave in. He confessed to the murder of an officer, probably thinking his confession would end the torture. But the torture did not end. The torture not only continued, but became even more brutal(Dabbagh, 2007, p. 28).

The speech underscores the intricate interplay of power and admission. In this speech the Power dynamics extend beyond mere physical torture, establishing a Panopticon inside the prisoner's psyche, where the constant fear of more torment forces the internalisation of control, thereby revealing the hidden and harmful nature of power.

According to Michel Foucault's analysis of power relations, power is not a tangible possession that certain individuals possess, but rather a framework of interconnected relations that influence and determine people's behaviors (Balan, 2010). The analysis of the Syrian prison system, which exercises power through information control and knowledge manipulation, highlights the significance of this viewpoint. Dabbagh's story of her nine-year confinement in Syrian prisons provides a direct and personal perspective on the exertion of power inside the prison system.

The author portrays police officers with great clarity as being ruthless and lacking in humanity. She recounts her experiences of physical and psychological torture, false accusations, and forced labor. A culture of fear and intimidation motivated the officers' behaviour, as they used their power to undermine the spirits of political prisoners. One of the officers said to Heba:

Your first friend gave us a definitive confession about your activities and your other friend Majida has just admitted to the same accusations against you. They both said that you are a member of the Ikhwan, that you are armed, that you have helped the Ikhwan with many of their activities and that you distribute the Natheer magazine. (Dabbagh, 2007, p. 21).

The officer's speech demonstrates the exertion of power through the regulation of information and manipulation of knowledge, which is a fundamental element in Foucault's examination of power dynamics. The words said by the officer possess the ability to shape Heba's view of her circumstances and have an impact on her behaviour. Her close friends' declarations, portrayed as definitive and supporting proof, reinforce the officer's control and deepen the existing power structure.

In his book *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault emphasizes the crucial role of the body in the exercise of power. According to him, power functions by imposing control over the body and shaping and regulating behavior through different mechanisms, including routines, surveillance, and physical punishment

as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection (in which need is also a political instrument meticulously prepared, calculated and used); the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. (Foucault, 1977, p. 26).

Dabbagh's novel exemplifies Foucault's perspective on the body as a hub of power and the creation of labor power in numerous ways. She recounts experiencing physical and psychological torture, including prolonged standing, beatings, and psychological manipulation.

The purpose of these disciplinary actions was to lower her sense of pride and transform her into a submissive and passive prisoner

The officer grabbed me, forced me down onto a wooden board, and strapped my neck, wrists, stomach, legs, knees and ankles onto the board. He checked the straps to make sure they were secure. He lifted the bottom of the board up into the air. The board created a right angle with the floor. He strapped me so tight that I couldn't move a single joint. My legs hung in the air. My coat fell to my waist revealing the long underwear that I always wore in winter and tucked into my thick knee highs. (Dabbagh, 2007, p. 30)

The officer's actions exemplify the exertion of power by means of physical confinement, which is an essential component of Foucault's idea of power. He use of physical force to restrain the prisoners, which included strapping them to a wooden board, exemplifies how manipulation of the body can exercise power. This physical constraint not only limits the individual's action but also strengthens the officer's control and confirms the existing power dynamic.

7.COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE THROUGH DISCOURSE IN *Just Five Minutes*

The prison serves as a symbolic platform where the state exposes and exercises its power. Power exists throughout every aspect of the prison. Discourse can challenge current narratives and structures of power by offering different perspectives and alternate narratives. This might include redefining the topic to centre on marginalised or oppressed social groups, emphasising their lived experiences and challenges, and establishing a platform for raising their voices (McKenzie and Lafrance, 2014). Discourse can serve as a powerful tool for resistance, challenging dominant narratives, reversing power dynamics, and empowering individuals and groups to challenge oppressive systems.

People who have experienced silence or marginalisation can use discourse to voice their opposition against repressive institutions, thereby subverting power relations. This might include using reverse discourse, when the object of a conversation speaks freely, questioning the dominant narrative and power hierarchies. Foucault's view on power and trauma underscores that the manner in which we identify trauma, the organisations and methods that address it, and the techniques by which we are encouraged to recover and regain our well-being are all influenced by greater dynamics of power and knowledge(Borg, 2020).

Heba Dabbagh's *Just Five Minutes* shows the ability of discourse to challenge power relations by offering an opportunity for marginalised individuals to voice their opposition to oppressive regimes “ Al-Dabbagh also talks about her fellow male detainees who were subjected to unspeakable torture and many of whom died as a result. Al-Dabbagh was a victim and a witness at the same time”(Obeid, 2022, p. 198). Heba undermines the dominant narratives and power dynamics that enabled the regime's cruel strategies by recounting her experiences as a victim and witness to torture and death in Syrian prisons.

Hanadi Al-Samman explores the idea that people might suffer the consequences of a traumatic incident even if they were not directly affected by it. She contends that belonging to the same marginalised group or possessing

knowledge of trauma is enough to cause similar painful responses in both the narrator and the reader. (Al-Samman, 2015). The use of discourse to challenge power dynamics by providing a platform for individuals who have been silenced or marginalised to voice their opposition against oppressive systems is intricately linked to the notion that one does not necessarily have to be the actual victim of a traumatic event to bear its effects.

By sharing her experience, she not only challenges the regime's established narrative of power and dominance, but also creates a platform for the voices of the marginalised and oppressed to gain recognition and voice. Dabbagh witnesses the brutal mistreatment of her female friends, including physical violence, forced nudity, hanging by their legs, and sexual abuse. One prisoner had their tongue cut with scissors, while another had their ears and nose broken.

Her narrative illustrates the potential of discourse to reverse power relations by offering an opportunity for marginalised people to voice their opposition to repressive regimes.

Foucault's notions of power and trauma intricately connect to this concept, highlighting the significant influence of social, cultural, and historical contexts on our perception and interpretation of traumatic experiences (Borg, 2019).

guards brought a man out from a cell and sat him down in front of our door. Torture marks covered his face and body. The guards handcuffed his hands and legs to a chair. They gathered around him and attempted to apply cosmetic products to cover up cuts and bruises (Dabbagh, 2007, p. 113-114)

The guards' acts are probably driven by their desire to enforce the regime's power and dominance while avoiding responsibility for their behaviour. Power shapes and governs our encounters with trauma, underscoring the intricate connection between power and trauma.

Also, Al-Dabbagh mentions the story of giving birth to a baby inside prison:

When she arrived at Katana Prison, Aysha was nine months pregnant and by some miracle, her baby had survived the torture sessions. When Aysha's labour pains began, we begged the warden to allow a midwife from the other joint cell to spend the night in our cell. He agreed without knowing the reason for our request. Aysha suffered through the pains of labour until dawn, when she gave birth to a girl. She named her Tasneem. (Dabbagh, 2007, p. 177-178).

Aysha's experience of giving birth to a baby while incarcerated serves as a compelling illustration of the resilience and will of the human spirit when confronted with great challenges. The story of Aysha's childbirth and the naming of her baby girl, Tasneem, functions as a representation of optimism and rebirth. Aysha and her fellow inmates managed to keep their sense of worth and humanity, even during the oppressive and horrible circumstances that enveloped them.

Storytelling serves as an effective tool to challenge existing narratives and power dynamics, highlighting the difficulties faced by marginalised groups and establishing a more inclusive and empathic community (Cooper, 2021). Heba Al-Dabbagh uses the technique of storytelling to enhance the voices of marginalised individuals and critique the current narratives in her novel.

Abu Khalid, Yusra's husband's friend, who was paralysed in more than half his body was shot and killed. Khalid's wife, Laila, was also shot during the fire exchange, and so was their three-week old daughter. After the ambush, the soldiers captured Yusra and Laila. They tore the newborn out of Laila's arms, dragged Laila away and left the wounded baby to take her last breaths alone. (Dabbagh, 2007, p. 179).

The story of Yusra and her family highlights the voices of marginalized individuals, challenges prejudices, acknowledges oppression's interconnectedness, and promotes collective resistance, solidarity, and support. It emphasizes shared humanity and exposes instances of human rights violations. The story is intricately connected to Michel Foucault's concepts on discourse and the dynamics of power relations. Foucault's discourse theory highlights the role of power in shaping our understanding of reality through the use of language, institutions, and practices. He believes that discourse serves not only as a mirror of reality, but also as a mechanism for shaping and controlling reality (Pitsoe and Letseka, 2013).

By depicting the cruel treatment of Yusra and her family, Al-Dabbagh reveals the underlying injustices experienced by oppressed people and emphasises the need for reform. This rejects the dominant beliefs that maintain subjugation and calls for collective resistance, support, and solidarity. The story is connected to Michel Foucault's discourse theory, which emphasizes the role of power in shaping reality and the need for reform. It calls for collective resistance, solidarity, and support.

The Arab authoritarian discourse primarily focused on undermining these writers by portraying their connection with foreign entities, making accusations of their involvement in terrorist groups, and implementing censorship, imprisonment, and torture (Obeid, 2022). *Just Five Minutes* exposes the regime's use of surveillance and censorship to control information and silence dissent, with prisoners subjected to brutal force for resistance. It also delves into propaganda and manipulation to create fear and uncertainty among the people.

They proceed from being “docile bodies” to being “active agents of resistance” in acts of defiance. It is in accordance with Foucault's perspective, asserts that power is a commodity in its application, and no entity alone holds power (Liaqat and Akhtar, 2019). The novel shows the transformation of Heba from being “docile body” to being “active agent of resistance” by challenging and interrupting the dominant systems of power and the narratives that influence their existence.

Foucault's concept of resistance is intricately linked to his understanding of power dynamics. He posits that resistance is inherent in any power relationship (Husian, 2023).

Heba Dabbagh, a political prisoner who is tortured and abused by the regime. Despite these attempts to break her spirit, Heba remains defiant and resists the regime's power through her writing.

Nine years were long enough to kill every last one of my dreams and any hope I had in any human being. During those nine years, I had but one ray of light in my heart, my hope in God. No matter how much that hope dimmed, it never died. My hope in God knew no limits, although pains did obscure it for short periods of time. My pleas to God were my only comfort. They saved me. (Dabbagh, 2007, p. 6).

In this speech Heba highlights the resilience and faith of the human spirit in the face of extreme adversity. Despite the pains and suffering she endured as a political prisoner, she found solace in her faith and hope in Allah. Her pleas to Allah were her only comfort and saved her. The speech emphasizes the importance of faith and hope in times of crisis, as it helped her maintain her dignity and resist oppressive forces that sought to break her spirit. Her faith in Allah was a constant source of comfort and strength.

8. CONCLUSION

Prison literature serves as a profound exploration of self, a critical examination of societal problems, and a vivid portrayal of the harsh realities of incarceration often hidden from the public eye. For writers who have personally experienced incarceration, creating prison literature can be a form of catharsis and personal healing. It allows them to make sense of their own experiences and traumas, such as in Heba Dabbagh's *Just Five Minutes: Nine Years in the Prisons of Syria*.

Al-Dabbagh shows how the guards isolate the convicts and deal with them in a savage way torturing them psychologically. In her novel the prisoners are abused in a different way and even after they get out of the prison the anguish and tribulation go on. It is only the regime's desire to overpower the Syrian people. Heba Al-Dabbagh uses her pen as a weapon to resist the Syrian regime, *Just Five Minutes* serves as both documentation against Syrian authority and human rights abuse.

Just Five Minutes is a novel that highlights the resilience and determination of the human spirit in adversity, emphasizing the role of discourse in resistance and empowerment. The novel is analyzed through Michel Foucault's theory of power relations, emphasizing the dynamic nature of power. Discourse is central to the narrative, providing a platform for marginalized individuals to voice their opposition to oppressive systems. *Just Five Minutes* condemns the Syrian regime's cruelty and calls for action to acknowledge human rights abuses within the Syrian military dictatorship.

Prison literature exposes the harsh realities of incarceration, including systemic abuse, torture, and the psychological impact of imprisonment. By sharing these experiences, authors can illuminate the often-hidden injustices within prison systems, prompting public discourse and awareness. This increased visibility can mobilize

communities and advocate for reforms in criminal justice policies, as readers gain insight into the human cost of these systems.

The insights gained from prison literature can effectively contribute to solving social problems by raising awareness, fostering empathy, inspiring activism, challenging power structures, and building solidarity. By engaging with these narratives, society can begin to address the injustices within the prison system and work towards more humane and equitable solutions.

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