

Project Screenplay : Shaheen

And

Exegesis: Methods of Feature Film Screenwriting for the Female Muslim Protagonist

A project and exegesis in fulfilment of the the requirement for the degree of
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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Description of Project.....	3
Description of research which supports the project.....	3
Research question.....	5
Methodology	5
Rationale.....	7
Conclusion.....	9
Literature Review.....	10
Screenwriting theory.....	11
Mythology.....	15
Representation of Muslim women.....	17
Post colonial theory	22
Problems of representation.....	26
Character Psychology.....	32
Protagonist.....	32
Character psychology of the protagonist.....	33
a) Protagonist's physical and psychological nature.....	35
b) Protagonist's history.....	37
c) Protagonist's immediate dramatic problem.....	38
d) Protagonist's character arc or journey.....	39
e) Premise	40
Conclusion.....	41
Case Study - <i>Erin Brockovich</i>	42
Why not a Muslim protagonist?	42
Pretty Persuasion and its female characters	43
Why Erin Brockovich?.....	51
Summary of the screenplay <i>Erin Brockovich</i>	52
Character psychology of the protagonist Erin	54
a) Erin's physical and psychological nature.....	54
b) Erin's history or back story	56
c) Erin's immediate dramatic problem	57

d) Erin’s character arc or journey	59
e) Premise of the screenplay Erin Brockovich.....	60
Conclusion.....	61
Project screenplay <i>Shaheen</i>	63
Why Shaheen?	63
Summary of screenplay Shaheen.....	64
Dethridge’s five features of protagonist psychology applied to my feature screenplay <i>Shaheen</i>	65
a) Shaheen’s physical and psychological nature	66
b) Shaheen’s back story or past history.....	67
c) Shaheen’s immediate dramatic problem.....	68
d) Shaheen’s character arc or journey	69
e) Premise of the screenplay Shaheen.....	71
Female Muslim stereotype in Hollywood and the process of writing my screenplay Shaheen.....	74
Male support characters in Shaheen.....	76
Conclusion	78
Directions for future research	80
Bibliography	82

Introduction

Description of Project

My project feature-length screenplay *Shaheen* is in the drama genre. It is about a Muslim woman from Pakistan. I am writing this screenplay using the classic three-act Hollywood style screenwriting structure.

The action of the screenplay is set in the rural village of Chak-Soma in Punjab Pakistan. The plot tells the story of a Pakistani Muslim woman called Shaheen. Shaheen's values are challenged first at home by her parents and then at the job that she takes up as a school teacher in the village. When Shaheen's parents try to force her to get married she leaves her parent's house and takes up a job to build a school in a remote village. Shaheen's ordeal starts when the village landlord, Jabbar, abducts one of her female students, Mahjabeen. Mahjabeen's family decides to give up trying to rescue her because, traditionally, bringing an abducted woman back to home brings shame upon the family. Shaheen tries to rescue the girl from the village landlord. In turn the village landlord files a false case of adultery against her, which puts Shaheen in jail. But Shaheen does not give up here and fight backs until she is able to rescue Mahjabeen.

My protagonist, Shaheen, is a strong female Muslim character who struggles for the betterment of her society. My objective is to create a female Muslim character who is strong and active in her struggle.

Description of research which supports the project

The role of the exegesis is to explore the techniques and structures that may be useful to write the screenplay *Shaheen* in the classic three-act structure used in Hollywood. This exegesis will also explore the importance of writing a screenplay with a strong female Muslim

protagonist. It will focus on my protagonist Shaheen's dramatic journey through her cultural experiences.

One strand of my research investigates how character psychology is understood and defined by the experts in the screenwriting theory and how it emerges in the three-act structure. Here I will study Syd Field's paradigm of three-act structure and explore the three-act structure with the help of writers like Robert McKee, Craig Batty, David Bordwell, Linda Seger and Lisa Dethridge, among others. Then I will discuss people who have a different approach to screenwriting than the classic three-act structure which include John Truby, Blake Snyder and Yves Lavender. In this strand I will also focus on character psychology of the protagonist for screenwriting with the help of screenwriting theorists Murray Smith, William Indick, Ken Dancyer and Lisa Dethridge. This will include understanding screenwriting theory associated with myth and Jungian psychology with the help of Christopher Vogler, Joseph Campbell and Stuart Voytilla. Here I will move into the study of the female protagonist in screenwriting theory, exploring the writings of Maureen Murdock and Helen Jacey.

The second strand of my research investigates how the study of character psychology may apply to my case study *Erin Brockovich*. *Erin Brockovich* (2000) is a movie about a strong female protagonist. Before I study the screenplay *Erin Brockovich* (2000), I will first explore an example of a female Muslim character in a Hollywood movie, then elaborate why I did not use a case study with a female Muslim protagonist and why I chose Erin Brockovich. Then I will move on to study in detail the character psychology of the protagonist Erin and how it has helped me in writing my protagonist Shaheen.

The third strand explores how the study of character psychology in classic three-act structure has helped or hindered me in writing my screenplay Shaheen with a female Muslim protagonist. Here I will study the character psychology of my protagonist Shaheen according to the screenwriting theorists Murray Smith, William Indick and Lisa Dethridge. I will also go

into detail about the process of writing my screen play and draw a comparison between the protagonist Erin and protagonist Shaheen. The most important part of this section will be to investigate how the study of Hollywood structures has helped me in writing a strong female Muslim protagonist. Has it helped me to create my Protagonist Shaheen? Or are these structures too strict to accommodate a story from a different culture? In understanding and answering these questions I will also look at how Hollywood has portrayed the Muslim woman and what types of stereotypes exist about the Muslim woman. I will explore these questions with the help of film critic Jack G Shaheen and post-colonial feminists Mohja Kahf and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, among others.

Research question

The key research questions are:

1. How may we understand character psychology in classic Hollywood style three-act structure for the female Muslim protagonist?
2. How may we observe character psychology of the protagonist in the case study Erin Brockovich?
3. How useful or not are these theories and techniques to the process of writing my screenplay *Shaheen*.

The theme that governs all of the three questions stated above is the examination of the process of writing the female Muslim protagonist in Hollywood screenwriting structures

Methodology

I am using a case study and a screenplay project for my research. According to Darke, Shanks and Broadbent (1998) the use of case studies allows one to combine rigour and pragmatism. As I am studying the structures of a particular screenplay, I am not performing any scientific analysis. The script under analysis provides a vehicle for discussion, a device by which we can

test out a few propositions about theory and practice in relation to screenwriting. Lisa Dethridge (2009) explains how the 'researchers in screenwriting organise their work into two components'. The screenplay represents 'creative imagination' and the exegesis describes 'the conceptual framework and the methodology through which the creative work is undertaken'. (Dethridge 2009, p. 97)

How may we understand character psychology in classic Hollywood style three-act structure ?

I will draw upon theories of screenwriting that advocate the three-act structure which include the writings of theorists like Syd Field, Linda Seger, Robert McKee and Lisa Dethridge, among others. I am studying character psychology in the three-act structure in order to understand if it can be used for a female Muslim protagonist. To understand the character psychology in depth I will explore each of the five features of the protagonist psychology in detail as explained by Dethridge. These five features are, 'their physical and psychological nature', 'their history', 'their immediate dramatic problem', 'their character arc or journey' and 'the premise' (Dethridge 2003, p. 47).

How may we observe character psychology of the protagonist in the case study Erin Brockovich?

The screenplay Erin Brockovich is written by Susannah Grant. The main reason behind selecting this screenplay as my case study is because it has a strong female protagonist who works against the odds to bring a huge powerful company to pay the affected people for contaminating their water supply. The choice of my case study may seem contradictory, but I am looking into ways how the same structures may be

used for my own screenplay. I will be investigating the character psychology of the protagonist Erin in reference to the 'five features of the protagonist' (Dethridge 2003, p. 47) I will also explore how these features come into play in Erin's character arc and how it serves to tell the story.

How useful or not are these theories and techniques to the process of writing my screenplay *Shaheen*.

My third research question is, 'How useful or not are these theories and techniques to my process of writing my screenplay *Shaheen*?' This research question deals with the process of writing my screenplay *Shaheen*. Here I document the process of developing my screenplay and how the Western screenwriting structures have helped me in developing my Muslim protagonist. This part explores how the theories that I have studied in relation to my research have helped or not helped in developing my project. For this purpose I will look into first the screenwriting theory and draw upon Dethridge's five features of the protagonist's character psychology to see if this study of character psychology has helped in developing my character Shaheen or not . I will also observe and document how the psychology of my protagonist has been developed in the frameworks of the three-act structure. I will find out whether the three-act structure complemented or hindered the development of my screenplay. I will then also mention the theories of representation and the study of comparisons of the Western and Muslim female characters.

Rationale

My main aim in writing the screenplay *Shaheen* was to explore the Hollywood style three-act structure and how it could help me to write a screenplay about a strong Muslim character. Film critic Jack G. Shaheen (2003) has studied 'more than nine hundred' Hollywood films from 'as early as 1912' to 2003. (Shaheen 2003, pp. 171,9) Among these nine hundred movies

Shaheen (2003) has observed that only fifty feature films have Muslim female characters and all these characters are minor characters. He notes that the female Muslim characters in Hollywood movies are used to 'humiliate, demonise and eroticise' Muslim women. (Shaheen 2003, p. 183) Shaheen (2008) also observes that female Muslim characters never seem to appear as protagonists in Hollywood movies.

Therefore I wanted to explore if it was the classic three-act structure which was the reason why I was unable to find a strong female character in Hollywood movies. Many Hollywood movies like Erin Brokovich (2000) have strong female characters; I endeavour to create a strong female character that was Muslim and worked for the improvement of her society.

In order to create my female Muslim character Shaheen I needed to explore the character psychology as used in Hollywood screenwriting theory and observe if the Hollywood understanding of character psychology would help me, a Muslim woman, to write a screenplay about the struggles women face in my culture and society. And therefore to show Hollywood audiences that Muslim women are not only 'victimised' and oppressed. (Kahf 1999, p. 1) As Shaheen asserts, 'you would never guess from Hollywood's portrayal' that Muslim women 'are as diverse and talented as any other' women. (Shaheen 2003, p. 184) I wanted to portray the struggle many Muslim women go through in their hope to improve their society, a society that would seem to be 'impervious to change' if one relied upon Hollywood representations of Muslims. (Lazreg 2000, p. 31)

Here I want to clarify that my exegesis is not about a political or ideological discussion about the representation of Muslim women in Hollywood. My exegesis is a technical discussion supporting my screenplay project *Shaheen* which explores the Hollywood style structure and how it could help me write a screenplay with a strong female Muslim character. My exegesis documents my study of character psychology and the process of writing my screenplay.

Conclusion

My research compliments my project screenplay *Shaheen*. My research uncovers techniques concerning character psychology of the protagonist that have helped me write the screenplay *Shaheen* using the classic Hollywood style three-act structure. A generous portion of my research also focuses on understanding the representation of Muslim women in Hollywood. This understanding also forms the rationale and reason behind my research.

Following my introduction in this exegesis, I will explore the theories and studies which have informed my study in the literature review. After the literature review I have a chapter on my first research question that explores the character psychology of the protagonist in classic Hollywood style three-act structure. Next I have a chapter that answers my second research question covering my case study Erin Brockovich. I also explore why I have chosen this case study and how it will help me in writing my project screenplay *Shaheen*. Next I have a chapter that explores the character psychology of my protagonist *Shaheen* and how the study of screenwriting theory and representation of Muslim women may have helped or obstructed my research. I round off my exegesis with a conclusion on my experience and understandings that have come from doing this project.

Literature Review

This chapter will examine the theories that have informed my project and research. I begin by categorising my literature review into five areas or clusters of research which have structured my area of inquiry.

The first section of my literature review deals with screenwriting theory and includes screenwriting theorists such as Syd Field, Linda Seger, Robert McKee and Lisa Dethridge, who agree that the progress of plot is defined by character development over three-acts. Additionally in this section I will also discuss the dramatist Lejos Egri, whose book *The Art of Dramatic Writing* is known as a seminal work in dramatic theory.

The second section of my literature review will discuss Jungian psychology as it relates to screenwriting theory. I will be discussing Joseph Campbell, Christopher Vogler, Willaim Indick, Helen Jacey, Maureen Murdock and Craig Batty. All of these theorists talk about character archetypes from a Jungian perspective. In order to help me in working on the character psychology of my protagonist I wanted to be able to understand mythic and archetypal patterns.

The third section of my literature review will be about the of representation of Muslims, particularly Muslim women, in the Western media. The theorists I will be discussing here are Jack G Shaheen, Mohja Kahf and Parvin Paidar. Jack G Shaheen studies the representation of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood. Mohja Kahf traces the representation of Muslim women in the Western media form the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century. Parvin Paidar analyses the implications of the representation of Muslim women, to conclude that the image of Muslim women is linked with the image of Islam.

The fourth section of my literature review will be about some of the most influential people in post colonial theory. In this section I will discuss three well-known theorists, Franz Fanon, Edward Said and Homi K Bhabha. Said and Fanon both talk about the concept of 'the other' which adds to our understanding of the representation of Muslims. I will also be discussing Homi K Bhabha in this section because I am studying the politics of representation, making his theory of the agency of colonised people very relevant to my study.

The fifth section of my literature review will discuss theorists who I will loosely categorize as post colonial feminists. This section will include Gayatri Chakrovarty Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Uma Narayan, who discuss the assumptions made by Western feminists about Third World women. In this section I will also discuss the difficulties of writing as it is experienced by Third World women, and the reception of Third World women writings, as explored by the writers Trinh T. Minh-h and Marnia Lazreg.

Screenwriting theory

In this section I will examine screenwriting theory that is used to understand the structure of Hollywood screenplays. I am using three-act structure to devise my project screen play Shaheen. This section traces the theories that cover the three-act structure, character psychology and the protagonist. I will start with the work of Lisa Dethridge who I closely follow in order to write my screen play.

Lisa Dethridge's book, *Writing your Screenplay*, is a concise and useful guide that offers solutions to writing a screen play,. According to Dethridge, a good screenplay consists of the four P's or the 'four main structures'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 47) These are 'the protagonist' 'the dramatic problem', 'the plot' and 'the premise'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 47) I will explain and explore each of these structures according to Dethridge and how they work together. Later in the chapter I will go into detail about the character psychology of the protagonist after discussing 'the four P's'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 47)

The protagonist is 'the central figure in' a 'screenplay' and is 'the most fully realised onscreen character that attracts audience attention in most scenes'. (Dethridge 2003, pp. 57, 8) 'The dramatic problem consists of an organised set of obstacles or dilemmas for the protagonist to solve.' (Dethridge 2003, p. 57) Dethridge defines plot as 'the organisation of events, action and dialogue within the time frame or chronology of the overall story.' (Dethridge 2003, p. 49) The premise is 'the overall concept that governs the story' (Dethridge 2003, p. 50)

According to Dethridge 'classic cinema structure is based on... simple linear narrative' which follows the 'three-acts' that 'represent the beginning, middle and end of the protagonist's story'. (Dethridge 2003, pp. 58, 9) Thus Dethridge supports the concept of the three-act structure, which was advocated by screenwriting theorists Syd Field and Linda Seger before her. Next I will discuss these two theorists.

Syd Field explains the importance of structure by saying that 'structure is the foundation of all screenwriting – it is the spine, the skeleton that holds it all together' (Field 1994, p. xvi). Syd Field is best known for his theory of the three-act structure where he proposes that a screenplay must have three acts. 'Act 1' is used to 'set up the story; introduce the main character, state the dramatic premise and establish the situation, visually and dramatically' (Field 1994, p. 158). In Act II 'the dramatic context is confrontation and your character will encounter obstacles that keep him from reaching his goal' (Field 1994, p. 159). And 'Act III is the end or resolution of your screen play' (Field 1994, p. 159). He further goes into the details of the each of these three acts and how they should be structured (Field 1994, p. 157). Syd Field believes that 'the action and character defines the subject of the story and are fundamental in its development' (Field 1994, p. 18). He also believes that character is the 'essential foundation' for the screen play and 'is the heart, soul and nervous system' of the story (Field 1994, p. 26)

Like Field, Linda Seger provides a 'logical and sturdy template for the understanding of the three-act structure' (Dethridge 2003, p. 5). Her book *Creating Unforgettable Characters* is relevant to my research because it explores the creation of the character in detail. She believes that 'great characters are essential' to a great script. 'If the characters don't work, the story and the theme will not be enough to involve the audience' (Seger 1990, p. xii). Seger believes that characters have 'the depth of an ice berg'. The audience may only see the tip but the writer goes through the ordeal of exploring each and every detail of every character's personality, background, environment, family, culture, values, religion, education, which gives rise to the situations in their lives and the way they confront them. In her book *Writing Subtext: What Lies Beneath*, Linda Seger (2011) explores how to write effective dialogue that represents more than what it actually says and in which we can 'sense that much lies beneath' the character in the inner world (Seger 2011, p. 45)

Craig Batty also advocates the three-act structure. In his book *Screenplays: how to write and sell them* Batty (2012) explains the developing of characters in ways that are very similar to Dethridge's and Seger's model.

Robert McKee is another popular screenwriting theorist who examines the three-act structure. In his book, *Story, Substance Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*; McKee gives an outline and a step by step tour into the process of screenwriting and what is required to come up with a successful screenplay. His theory is relevant for my research because he understands the limitations of 'stereotypes', 'formulas', 'shortcuts', 'mysteries of writing', 'second-guessing the market place', 'disdain about the audience' and 'duplication' and warns writers to be wary of them. (McKee 1999, pp. 3-8) He insists that the writer should have 'self knowledge' and 'deep reflection on our reactions to life'. (McKee 1999, p. 15) He also understands the importance of stories in our lives and their relationship to life and suggests that story is a 'metaphor for life' (McKee 1999, p. 25)

Next I will discuss Lejos Egri's book *The Art of Dramatic writing*. Although this book is on playwriting and not on screenwriting, I will be referring to it liberally for two reasons. One reason is that many of the screenwriting theorists that I am using refer to Egri at one point or the other. The second is because of his legendary focus on character. Egri disagreed with Aristotle and stated that 'character creates plot not vice versa' (Egri 2004, p. 98). As my research focuses on character and character psychology, Egri's insight will help me understand more about my project screenplay Shaheen.

He bases his theory of dramatic writing on 'the natural law of dialectics'. (Egri 2004, p. xviii). He argues that the three basic elements of any dramatic form of writing are the premise, character and conflict. The character drives the action which leads to conflict and proves the premise. Egri explains the importance of well-defined characters. He calls characters 'the bone structure of a story' and explains that the writer must know the 'three dimensions' of his character's 'physiology, sociology and psychology' because 'these three dimensions can provide the reason for every phase of human conduct'. (Egri 2004, pp. 34, 6) He further elaborates that the character should be sketched with a simple dialectical approach in mind. Which means that the character attributes should be logical in reasoning. He moreover adds that character growth is also a necessity and the characters should be strong enough to knit the plot and move the story to a conclusive premise-proving end.

Although Egri urges that the character is pivotal, he believes that without a premise the act of writing cannot be justified. Without a premise Egri states that the character has nothing worthwhile to act upon. Moreover, Egri does not fail to emphasise the presence of conflict in a story and its characters, he explains in detail the quality of conflict and its necessity in a story.

In his book *Engaging Characters, Fiction Emotion and the Cinema* Murray Smith (1995) 'counteracts research that has devalued the role of character' (Batty 2011, p. 6). He argues that 'our entry into the narrative structure is mediated by character' (Smith 1995, p. 18)

Mythology

This section of the literature review discusses how screenwriting theory makes use of Jungian mythology. Jung's concept of 'the collective unconscious of the human race' informs theorists such as Joseph Campbell, Christopher Vogler and Maureen Murdock who I will be studying in this section. 'Jung's great insight is that archetypal characters and images reflect different aspects of human psychology' (Dethridge 2003, p. 180)

Joseph Campbell is an American anthropologist who studies the archetypal heroes within mythologies. Campbell's observance of the archetypal hero may help me in constructing a strong protagonist. In his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell examines the myth cycles of the hero, a character type that appears consistently over the centuries on different continents and in different epochs'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 180). According to Campbell (1993) all heroes in these mythologies tend to follow the same path, which he calls the 'monomyth'. (Campbell 1993) Campbell notes that 'that these well worn legends', 'character types' and stages 'have been reappearing in plays, games, legends and theatrical works consistently throughout history'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 180)

Contemporary screen theorist Christopher Vogler 'refers to both Jung and Campbell to describe the classic character archetypes which are most useful to the writer' (Dethridge 2003, p. 181) In his book, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structures for Storytellers and Screenwriters* he proposes that many action adventure modern movies follow the same mythic pattern observed by Campbell. However Vogler adds to and defines the stages in detail. Vogler agrees with Campbell and explains that 'all stories consist of a few common structural elements found universally in myths, fairy tales dreams and movies'. (Vogler 2007, p. xxvii)

Campbell's and Vogler's study will be useful to understand archetypal figures and their journey in the story world. These theories will also help me in understanding the differences

between archetypes and stereotypes. In his book *Myth and the Movies*, Stuart Voytilla (1999) also studies the mythic structures in popular Hollywood films in reference to their genre. He discusses the drama genre among others and describes the drama genre 'to be driven by character' (Voytilla 1999, p. 156)

Maureen Murdock's study of the journey of the female protagonist also influences and informs my research. Maureen Murdock is also a Jungian psychoanalyst who states that Campbell's hero's journey is too masculine to be able to encompass the journey of a female protagonist.

Murdock (1990) understands that for a woman the path and the journey may be different. She gives a detailed outline of a woman's Journey in her book *The Heroine's Journey*. Murdock's (1990) focus is mainly on how the heroine defines her identity and goes through transformation between the feminine and the masculine within a lifetime. According to Murdock (1990) the female protagonist deals with the issues of identity, self-realisation, transformation and acceptance. Murdock (1990) further elaborates that the heroine's journey involves more than what a hero achieves, that the masculine achievements and success may lead to dissatisfaction for a female character. This dissatisfaction may lead to a continued struggle until the female protagonist reconnects with her feminine self. (Murdock 1990, pp. 6-11)

In his book *Psychology for Screenwriters* William Indick (2004) 'applies the work of various psychological theorists to screenwriting' (Batty 2012) He discusses the theories of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell and Maureen Murdock among others. He studies these theories in terms of Hollywood films and how these psychological theories have come into play in successful screenplays. While discussing Maureen Murdock's *The Heroine's Journey* , Indick uses the movie *Erin Brockovich* as an example of how the heroine's journey plays out in that movie.

Maureen Murdock has written another book called *The Hero's Daughters*. Maureen Murdock studies the relationship between fathers and daughters and how this affects many women in the journey of their lives. She describes how some women 'over identify' with their fathers; she calls such women 'father's daughters' (Murdock 1994, p. xi). Not only does such a woman 'over identify with her father', such a woman 'imitates men in her pursuit of success' (Murdock 1994, p. xii). In this book she has approached 'the father-daughter relationship from many different vantage points: psychological, mythological and spiritual'. (Murdock 1994, p. xiii)

Although I do not use Maureen Murdock's steps of the heroine's journey, my screenplay Shaheen has a female protagonist who struggles with her identity and has a desire to be like her father and brother. *The Hero's Daughters* may also be useful to understand the hint of father-daughter issues in *Shaheen*.

The book *Breathing Life into Your Characters* by Rachel Ballon (2003) describes techniques for writers to create 'believable and unique characters'. (Ballon 2003, p. 6) The most interesting part of this book is that Ballon discusses the relationship of the writer to his/her characters and how it affects the writing process.

Representation of Muslim women

In order to study the issue of representation I will discuss various theorists like Jack G Shaheen, Mohja Kahf and Parvin Paidar. I will study the concept of the other in accordance to each of these theorists.

Jack G Shaheen has written various books and articles focusing on the image of Arab and Muslim characters in the American media. Shaheen understands that Muslims and Arabs are seen as the 'demonic other' in Hollywood portrayals (Shaheen 2008, p. xii)

One of his earlier books '*Arab and Muslim Stereotyping in American Popular Culture*' describes how Arabs and Muslims are portrayed in the American media. The beauty of the

book lies in the fact that Shaheen notes the diversity of the Muslim people and points out that they belong to a variety of ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds, which reflects in the Islamic practices and ideologies being different across regions and communities, however American media fails to represent that diversity and sticks to the stereotypical images of the Arabs and Muslims. (Shaheen 1997, pp. 4-5) This comparison allows us to see how Hollywood ignores the diversity of Muslims and how stereotypical their representation is. Shaheen also observes that plots and characters in American film fail to distinguish between Muslims and Arabs, they portray them as one. (Shaheen 1997, p. 4).

In *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, Shaheen focuses on the images of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood. He has studied 'over nine hundred films' from 'as early as 1912' and has found a consistent portrayal of images that show Arabs as 'heartless, brutal, uncivilised religious fanatics' (Shaheen 2003, p. 171)

He claims that the repetitive images have also conjured general feelings of distrust and hatred for Arabs and Muslims among the American moviegoers. He also claims that these images are 'ingrained in the American cinema'. (Shaheen 2003, p. 172) They are depicted as 'brute murderers, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil-rich dimwits and abusers of women' and 'also anti-American'. (Shaheen 2003, p. 172) Shaheen believes that this depiction is constant and invariable, and it generalises and dehumanises Arabs and Muslims. He does not say that Arabs should never be portrayed as villains but what he means to criticise is that almost all depictions of Arabs are villainous ones. (Shaheen 2003, p. 176)

Interestingly Shaheen also focuses on the image of Arab women in Hollywood movies and notes that they are 'humiliated, demonised and eroticised in more than 50 feature films' he has studied. (Shaheen 2003, p. 183) Shaheen asserts that all representations of Muslim characters in these 50 feature films can be neatly divided into five categories. These five categories of female Muslim characters include images of a 'scantly dressed belly dancer',

images of Muslim women 'subject to labor exploitation', images of Muslim women clad from head to toe in black and silently following an Arab male, the character of Muslim women as a witch and the character of a female Arab terrorist. (Shaheen 2003, pp. 183-4). What is unique about Shaheen's study is that he focuses on what Hollywood movies visually depict while representing female Muslim characters.

Shaheen also takes into account the positive representations of Arabs. He explains that there have also been a few positive images of Arabs in Hollywood but they only account for 'five percent' of the movies Shaheen has studied. These images portray Muslim characters as 'brave and moral' human beings. (Shaheen 2003, p. 192)

To continue his research on the depiction of Muslim characters after the event of 9/11, Shaheen wrote the book *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs after 9/11*. In this book he has evaluated more Hollywood movies and compares the image of Muslims/Arabs before and after 9/11. Here again his focus remains on Hollywood movies, however he also discusses television portrayals. This book like his previous books focuses on largely summarising the way Muslim characters are portrayed in a huge number of Hollywood movies. He observes that although the 'majority of the post 9/11 movies continue denigrating the Arabs yet the strength and sharpness of some movies... have in fact, projected the human Arab in complex shades of gray, not in evil black silhouette'. (Shaheen 2008, p. 92) However, as reflected by the title, post 9/11 movies do declare Arabs/ Muslims to be guilty of being terrorists, rapists, anti-democratic and anti-American.

Shaheen's study is useful to my project because it helps me understand how Muslim characters and especially how female Muslim characters are depicted in Hollywood movies, which is key to helping me create a female Muslim protagonist.

Mohja Kahf is an Arab-American scholar and her book *Western representations of Muslim Women* she explores the 'genealogy and logic' of the Muslim female character within the Western narratives 'from the medieval time to the period of romanticism in the early nineteenth century'. (Kahf 1999, p. 2)

Kahf (1999) asserts that the Western narrative has always situated Muslim women as the 'other' or the different one in order to justify its own position about 'gender, self, and foreign'. According to Kahf (1999) in medieval times Muslim women were portrayed as 'aggressive' and 'exuberant termagants and queens' (Kahf 1999, p. 5). But despite portraying them as strong headed and defiant this 'rhetorical move' of these medieval literary texts aims at 'subduing the Muslim woman not to liberate her'. (Kahf 1999, p. 4) Gradually in the seventeenth century 'but not before' 'the veil and the harem' becomes a part of Western representations of Muslim women. Kahf (1999) explains that the image of Muslim women in Western representations as a wanton gradually disappears and a new image slowly appears. Eventually by the 'eighteenth century - but not before' the Muslim woman is portrayed as an 'oppressed creature'. She 'may be a willing accomplice, or she may be escaping her victimisation'. 'But the Muslim woman is being victimised is the common axis under girding a wide variety of Western representations'. (Kahf 1999, p. 1)

The book *Western Representations of Muslim Women* is useful to my research because it gives us a historical understanding of the representation of the Muslim woman in the Western media. Kahf (1999) explains that the aim of representing the Muslim woman was and has been to depict 'the negative female ideal' (Kahf 1999, p. 7). This is why the Muslim woman is always represented as the opposite of the representation of Western women. Hence Kahf (1999) elaborates that when the Western ideal for Western women was to be submissive, the female Muslim characters in that era in Western literature were represented as 'aggressive and exuberant'. (Kahf 1999, pp. 5,6). But when the ideal for the Western woman slowly changed in

Europe and the ideal Western woman within European culture and literature became the independent confident character, Muslim women started to appear as 'Victimised' and oppressed characters. (Kahf 1999, p. 1). Kahf concludes that this 'distinct narrative' of the Muslim woman as 'victimised' characters 'abides in Western' literature 'today'. (Kahf 1999, p. 1)

Mohja Kahf in her article *Huda: Sha'wari's Memoirs in the United States Reception Environment* explains that all representation of Muslim women presented to the United States reading public are stereotypical images of women facing gender oppression. According to her all such representations can be easily grouped into three categories which are, 'Victim's of gender oppression', 'escapee of her intrinsically oppressive culture' and 'the pawn of male power'. (Kahf 2000, p. 149) These categories are very interesting and informative for my project as they define how any writings about Muslim women or by Muslim women would be perceived in the west.

Parvin Paidar is an Iranian feminist. According to Paidar, orientalism regarded Islam as the 'distinguishing factor' and 'sole designator' of Muslim societies and thus the sole reason' for Women's position in the society. (Paidar 1995, p. 5) Roksana Baharmitasha (2005) elaborates Paidar's points and identifies three characteristics of feminist orientalism. The first is that the 'West is the best place for women as compared to the Muslim orient which is the worst, the second characteristic is that it regards women 'only as victims' and fails to see 'them as agents of social transformation' thus the need for the Europeans to rescue them. (Bahramitash 2005, p. 221) The third and equally important aspect is that they view all Muslim societies as similar and thus conclude that all Muslim women live in the same oppressive and dreadful conditions. (Bahramitash 2005, p. 222) These representations also foster the image of Islam as an aggressive religion and the Muslim woman in need of saviors thus justifying the imperialistic agendas of Western countries in the Middle East (Bahramitash 2005, p. 221)

The theories of Jack G Shaheen, Mohja Kahf and Parvin Paidar help me in understanding how Hollywood movies and Western literature has represented the female Muslim character. This understanding helps me rationalise my research and highlights the importance of writing my project screenplay Shaheen which is based on a Muslim woman

Post colonial theory

In this section I will study major post colonial theorists such as Edward Said, Franz Fanon and Homi Bhabha. I am referring to these theorists because their theories have contributed to the understanding of the concept of the other which is a central theme in the study of representation of Muslim women, which is the previous section of my literature review

Edward Said is a seminal figure in the field of post colonial theory. He uses the term orientalism to describe a whole phenomenon of the Western intellectual tradition of studying and defining the 'other' people of the world. In order to learn about these oriental people, the Europeans or the imperialists 'accepted the basic distinction between the East and the West' upon which they based their studies of these peoples, their cultures, religions etc. (Said 2003, p. 2) This basic distinction allowed to see people outside European culture as 'others'

According to Said 'The underlying theme of orientalism is the affiliation of knowledge with power' (Said 1981, p. ix). By this he means that every endeavour to understand or define or study 'the other' is done with the aim to be able to rule these people and claim superiority or power over them. Said further elaborates that in order to study these cultural others the imperialists 'accepted the basic distinction between the East and the West' (Said 2003, p. 2). However the main significance of orientalism is not only how the West constructs the Orient but how it perceives the Orient as its opposite and negative other 'Its contrasting image, idea and personality'. This negative other has helped Europe in its self-affirmation of superiority over the Orient. (Said 2003, p. 2)

Said elaborates that the concept of the Oriental is more about the superiority of the European culture itself rather than the representation of the Orient. Such a representation of the Orient as lesser beings is necessary to develop such a superior ideology. By placing the Orient as the opposite other, the distinguished lesser race with limited knowledge and limited ability to rule itself, inevitably constructs 'the Occident' the superior of the two entities both created by the discourse or orientalism. In other words the construction of the Orient allows the European to allocate himself as the superior race among all the others. (Said 2003)

Said insists on our attention to the magnitude of this discourse; the immense power and authority such a discourse accomplished that resulted in the 'formidable structure of cultural domination' and how it translates into the military, economical and political capacity of Europe. (Said 2003, p. 25)

Said based his theory of orientalism upon Foucault's concept of the interrelationships and interdependencies between power and knowledge. Foucault believes that knowledge gives rise to power and sustains it. Drawing on this Foucauldian perspective, Said examines a diverse selection of Western texts like linguistics, ethnography, geography, history, parliamentary papers and even journals of imperial administrators to prove how the European knowledge described and dealt with the concept of 'the Orient'. (Said 2003)

According to Said such production of knowledge was only possible because the Europeans had power over the east and had the ability to examine study and travel to these parts mainly with the aim of extending Imperial rule over these areas. So the success of these colonial pursuits justified the further production of such knowledge. By doing this Said highlights the significance of orientalism as an 'authority'. Hence the power of the Europeans allowed knowledge to be obtained and constructed and this knowledge in turn sustained the power. (Said 2003, p. 20).

Said implies that the concept of orientalism may be functional to all the colonial administrations and colonised peoples, but the main focus of his study remains the Muslim world 'the Anglo-French-American experience of the Arabs and Islam' (Said 2003, p. 17). Moreover Said extends his study of the discourse of orientalism across centuries and links it to the contemporary world where the European colonial mission has been replaced by the United States' imperial pursuits. (Said 1981). As I am studying the representation of Muslim women in Hollywood, Said's book *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine how we see the Rest of the World* is very relevant because it discusses how American media covers Islam, Muslim countries and its people.

In his book *Covering Islam* Edward Said talks about how the Western popular media represent Muslim culture. This is how Edward Said traces and pinpoints that orientalism is still practiced in contemporary times. He states that the representation of Muslim people comes across in all the media such as television news reports, television documentaries, newspapers, movies etc. These media representations effectively reinforce the idea that Muslims are essentially 'barbaric, backward and primitive'; in contrast to the Westerners, mainly American and Europeans, who are represented by the same media as 'sophisticated, knowledgeable and modern' Said further analyzes the cultural images of Islam and elaborates that the portrayal of Islam is marked with inaccurate clichés and 'paradoxically free floating hostility'. Said concludes that Islam has been represented as a 'particular menace to the West generating nostalgia for the European colonial era'. (Said 1981, pp. xi-xii)

Said goes as far as asserting 'all discourse on Islam has an interest in some authority or power' thus the knowledge about Islam in the present day is 'relative to who produces it'. By saying this Said wants readers and students of Islam to be wary of the orientalist category 'Islam',

which in the Western narrative takes a stable and pertinent meaning; this categorising has resulted in the 'gross simplification of Islam'. (Said: 1981, xvii-xviii)

Edward Said (2003) focused on the study of the discourse of 'colonialism' and its ownership by the Europeans and its relationship to the political and economic power and hegemony of the West. Thus his study focuses more upon forms of knowledge mainly produced by the Western societies. In contrast to this Franz Fanon mainly concentrated on the reaction of the colonised to colonisation, along with the relationship between the two at a human interpersonal and psychological manner.

Franz Fanon mainly deals with the question of identity and self definition in his book *Black Skin White Masks*, which is a psychological study about the affects of colonialism and racism on the black people. His main concern is the study of the relationship between the 'coloniser' and the 'colonised'. He observes that 'what is called the black soul is a construction by white folk'. (Fanon & Markmann 2008, p. xviii) The colonisers defined the 'native' world as 'the opposite of everything European', hence the native is childlike, feminine and lacks the power to rule himself. 'He has no culture, no historical monuments and no history'. (Fanon & Philcox 2004) Then Fanon further explores how the 'colonisers' react to such a construction by the 'colonised'. He observes that either the colonised accept their inferiority or they try to prove themselves as intellectually equivalent to the white race, by intellectually achieving as high as the white man. However by doing this he is also accepting the white man's terms of judgment of equivalence of intellect and thus also giving him the right to judge.

Fanon further explores the affects of the European colonising gaze on the colonised person, how the colonised person internalises the effects of being judged, defined and stereotyped by a race that views itself superior to him. By asking such questions Fanon tries to understand how to deal with the effects of racism and colonialism. He further explores how colonialism and racism affects the coloniser; how the system of colonialism is marked by political power

relations and is inhumane. Thus Fanon comes to the conclusion that colonialism has negative affects on both the coloniser and colonised, and such a system should be completely discarded in order to stimulate good relations in all humans.

Both Said and Fanon are relevant to my research because they both talk about the concept of 'the other'. And how this concept leads into stereotyping these cultural others and its relation to power over these 'other' people.

Said's and Fanon's study is offering a perspective on of how the Western society perceives its cultural others. As my research explores the representation of Muslim women in Hollywood movies, it is important to understand the background of orientalism and its history of representation.

Problems of representation

In my following chapters I will go into details of how Western screenwriting structure has helped me in writing my screenplay. I will discuss the problems that I faced as a Muslim woman writing in the Western structure. To understand this aspect of my research I will examine post colonial feminist theorists who address these issues. Gayatri Chakrovarty Spivak, Trinh T Minha, Uma Naryan, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Lisa Suhair Majaj, talk about how the politics of knowledge and language that affected the self-representation attempted by the third world women writers in the 1980's.

Gayatri Chakrovarty Spivak is known for her engagement with post colonial feminism. Spivak significantly adds to our understanding of the representation and agency of women in the international context. Although 'Spivak denies titles', her engagement with post colonial theory along with feminist perspectives has been seen as a part of feminist post colonial theory, (Morton 2002, p. 6). Spivak along with other theorists like Mohanty find the Western feminists to be guilty of imperialistic gestures.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak aims to understand and portray the struggles of women, the underclass, tribal communities and peasantry in India; she employs the useful term subaltern to describe such people. Critic Stephen Morton observes that although Spivak's writing may seem confusing and unsystematic Spivak's style is 'a conscious rhetorical strategy that aims at pushing the reader to' investigate the limitations of literary texts'.(Morton 2002, p. 6)

Spivak believes that the lives of the 'Third world women' are so 'complex and unsystematic' that they cannot be represented and understood by the 'vocabularies of Western critical theory'. Spivak further argues that when Western literature attempts to write for these women, they end up 'silencing' the voices of these poor peasant women. (Morton 2002, p. 7) Thus she emphasises 'the limitations of linguistic and philosophical representation, and their potential to mask real social and political inequalities in the contemporary world'. (Morton 2002, p. 5)

Moreover Spivak is constantly extremely critical of 'any explanation including her own' given by any outsider to speak about and write about the experiences of the subaltern disempowered groups. (Morton 2002, p. 47) In her popular essay *Can the Subaltern Speak*, she claims that the subaltern woman lacks the 'agency' to speak. And even when she makes an 'effort to death to speak', she is not even heard. (Spivak 1988, pp. 27, 46)

Spivak has also translated novels of Mahasweta Devi who is a Bengali writer and activist who writes about the struggle of rural peasant women in India. By translating Devi's work Spivak makes a point to portray 'singular histories and lives' of 'subaltern women in order to disrupt the codes and conventions of Western knowledge' and in order provide an alternative to the Western representations. (Morton 2002, p. 7) By writing about and translating Devi's works Spivak is suggesting that 'literary texts can provide an alternative rhetorical site for articulating the histories of subaltern women'. (Morton 2002, p. 35)

Chandra Talpade Mohanty is another Indian post colonial feminist who critiques the Western feminist discourses about third world women and who suggests how that may cause misrepresentation of third world women. Mohanty (2003) suggests that Western feminism does not take into account the reality of third world women and represents these women as Western feminists perceive them to be.

Mohanty points out 'three analytical presuppositions' that 'freeze the existence of third world women in time and space', which according to her is an imperialistic move of Western feminists towards the third world women to represent them as the constituted 'other'. The first analytic presupposition is the notion that all women have universal interests and desires regardless of race class and culture. The second is the way the uncritical justification of universality is given. The third results in the assumption of women as a homogeneous group of the oppressed. Thus before entering any social relations the third world women is already defined, constituted, read and understood. (Mohanty 2003 a, p. 53)

Mohanty moreover elaborates that such presuppositions and constitutions result in self presentation of Western feminists as 'educated and having control of their lives' in comparison to the third world women as 'oppressed, traditional, uneducated and backward'. (Mohanty 2003 a, p. 53) Such a move in Spivak's words 'silences' the voices of third world women and speaks for and represents them instead of letting them speak and represent themselves. (Spivak 1988, p. 29) Mohanty explains that the need to represent third world women is backed by the belief that women from the third world lack the ability to represent themselves. Consequently what happens in this silencing move is that the concerns, the issues and dilemmas of the women from the third world do not come across; what comes across is the concerns of the third world women as perceived by the Western feminists. Thus third world women are not given the authority to speak for themselves. (Mohanty 2003 a, pp. 53-7)

Mohanty concludes that the concerns of third world women should be allowed to be expressed by these women themselves.

Uma Narayan is another post colonial feminist theorist who criticises the contemporary Western feminists for promoting orientalist perceptions about the third world cultures and third world women. She points out that 'colonial history is the terrain where the project of Western culture self-definition became a project heavily dependent upon its difference from its others'. (Narayan 1997, p. 80) By saying this she means to point out the fact that the ways with which the Western feminists portray the third world woman or the 'other woman' is similar to the orientalist perception of the 'other cultures'. And like the orientalist perception the portrayal of the 'other woman' helps to define the self-perception of the Western woman, because it is in comparison to the third world woman that the Western woman defines herself.

Although Narayan focuses on Western feminists' writings to validate her claim, she is well aware that such perceptions are not 'exclusive to academic feminist writing but perhaps even more common in general Western public understandings of third world cultures, third world tradition and third world women's problems.' (Narayan 1997, p. 44)

Uma Narayan further talks about the roles third world women are expected to play within the Western academic feminists' context. She has duly noted the expectations that affect the writings of third world women in the Western academy. Thus she concludes that representations of Western female characters and Western perspectives 'emerge with polyphonous richness, while representations of third world woman 'appear seamless and monolithic'. (Narayan 1997, p. 143)

Now I will move on to discussing Trinh T. Minh-ha who is a third world feminist writer, theorist and film maker. She particularly focuses upon the act of writing itself and the dilemmas, anxieties and apprehensions associated with it, when the third world woman chooses to write.

She understands that a third world woman does not go through the process of creativity without forming a political perspective. What she means by this is that the third world women writers always end up having the burden of explaining themselves as either 'writer of color, women writer, or women of color'. (Trinh 1989, p. 6)

While speaking of those anxieties Trinh also gives cautionary advice on the realities of literature. She notes that third world women 'know' their condition even if they fail to say it. And if they fail to say it they should and must try again and again because if they do not do that they will be represented and be spoken for by someone else, in this case the dominating Western media. (Trinh 1989, pp. 6-8) So she implies that it is the responsibility of the third world woman writer to take up a stance despite her understanding that this might make the literary production process more full of anxieties about identity and self-definition. I am referring here to Minh-ha due to the anxieties of a third world writer she has managed to explain.

Marnia Lazreg is an Arab post colonial Feminist who agrees with Mohanty and Spivak that Western feminism plays its role in stereotyping the third world woman and reinforces the power structure between the west and the third world. In her Essay *The Triumphant Discourse of Global Feminism*, Marnia Lazreg discusses the reception of the third world women's writing in the Western context. She observes that translations, presentations and selection processes ensure what is already believed in the Western societies about the Muslim women. She however believes that this does not discourage the third world women from writing and they do write; however she believes that such writings and readings must 'consider the layers of inert-mediations, or the geographical contexts' that frame them. (Lazreg 2000, p. 37)

Lazreg also emphasizes the fact that the Western representations also imply that the third world woman is in need of rescue from the Western society; and that 'change' cannot come in these societies 'from within'; however she also observes that when Muslim women are

represented as struggling for their rights they are shown to be struggling 'against not for' their cultures. (Lazreg 2000, pp. 31, 8) At the end she suggests that 'what we need is the expression of reality by those who live it and on their terms.' (Lazreg 2000, p. 38)

The study of theories of Lazreg, Trinh and Naryan help me to understand the problems third world women can face when writing for Western audiences. This study may help me in understanding the limitations of writing from my perspective as a Muslim woman.

Character Psychology

In this chapter I will focus on my first research question which is: How may we understand the character psychology for a protagonist in Hollywood style three act structure? In order to understand this research question I will also go into depth about the basic screenwriting structures. These screenwriting structures inform the analysis of both my case study and the writing of my project script. I will highlight the importance of the three act structure and how it helps to uncover the character psychology of the protagonist and the support roles. For this purpose I will focus on the book 'Writing your Screenplay' by Lisa Dethridge as it draws in the three act structure and gives us neatly plotted points to understand and create protagonist psychology. I will also draw upon various other theorists such as the playwright theorist Lejos Egri, Christopher Vogler whose structure for theories draws upon myths and Jungian analysis, the creative writing mentor Robert McKee, and the screenwriting theorists Linda Seger and Syd Field.

Protagonist

'In classical' Hollywood 'narrative the story is based around one central character' (Batty & Waldeback 2008, p. 22) According to Dethridge the Protagonist is 'the central figure in' a 'screenplay' and is 'the most fully realized onscreen character that attracts audience attention in most scenes'.(Dethridge 2003, pp. 57-8). Lejos Egri's book *The art of dramatic writing* is a well regarded guide for play-writing. Egri would agree with Dethridge on the importance of a protagonist. In his book 'The art of dramatic writing' Egri also refers to the protagonist as the 'pivotal character' (Egri 2004, p. 110). Egri states that 'The pivotal character is the one who creates conflict and makes the play move forward'(Egri 2004, p. 110).

Egri believes that without the protagonist 'the story flounders', and he goes as far as saying that 'without a pivotal character there is no story' (Egri 2004, p. 110). From this statement it is

obvious that according to Egri the pivotal character or the protagonist needs to exist in order for a play to be able to work and also for the action to take place.

Christopher Vogler is another respected screenwriting theorist who has based his work mainly on the anthropologist Joseph Campbell and has derived steps for a protagonist journey inspired by mythical patterns explained in detail by Campbell. Vogler derives the basic archetypes, plot lines and steps that make a story work. This technique is usually used in Disney movies and is derived from the mythic structures. Christopher Vogler states that 'the protagonist of every story is the hero of a journey, even if the path leads only into his own mind or into the realm of relationships.' (Vogler 2007, p. 7). Hence in his book *The Writer's Journey* he refers to the protagonist as 'the hero of a journey', a journey the hero takes in the realm of the film, storybook or play (Vogler 2007, p. 7).

Like Egri, Vogler understands the need of audience to be able to relate to the hero. He understands that heroes are characters who represent human struggles, which is why audiences can relate to them. Vogler states that 'Heroes are the symbols of the souls in transformation and of the journey each person takes through life'. (Vogler 2007, p. 37). Robert McKee explains this phenomenon, calling it the 'audience bond'. (McKee 1999, p. 141). He believes that 'the audience's emotional involvement is held by the glue of empathy'. (McKee 1999, p. 141). He believes that the protagonist of the story 'must be empathetic'. (McKee 1999, p. 141)

Character psychology of the protagonist

Dethridge asserts that the 'central dramatic problem comes out of character psychology' (Dethridge 2003, p. 57). Field put this thought into a profound statement suggesting that if you 'create a character' 'you will create a story' (Field 1994, p. 44). Egri also suggest exactly the same thing by saying that if we create strong 'characters' they will be 'plotting their own play' (Egri 2004, p. 104)

McKee describes character psychology as the sum of two parts which he calls the 'characterisation' and 'true character' (McKee 1999, p. 101) For McKee characterisation 'is the singular assemblage' of visible and obvious 'traits' of a character. (McKee 1999, p. 101) What they look like, their age, their gender, their education, where they live, what they do, where they come from. However true character is more interesting and important according to McKee, 'a true character is revealed in the choices a human being makes under pressure'. (McKee 1999, p. 101) Consequently he ends up agreeing with Dethridge, Egri, and Field about the importance of character psychology and how it is the true essence of the storyline. Hence McKee asserts that 'the revelation of the true character' 'is fundamental to all fine storytelling'. (McKee 1999, p. 103)

Linda Seger also highlights the importance of knowing 'what makes people tick' and 'why people do what they do and want what they want' (Seger 1990, p. 63). Seger devotes a whole chapter to understanding the character psychology, and asserts that 'underlying motives and unconscious forces are important with any character you create'. (Seger 1990, p. 64)

Seger also looks at the multi dimensional layers of a character and highlights the importance of various aspects of a personality that need to be reflected in a screenplay. According to Seger 'a multi-layered character is made of the following four elements' which are 'who is the character', 'what does the character want', 'why does the character want it' and 'how does the character get it'. (Seger 2003, p. 137)

In his book *The Screenwriter's Problem Solver* Field asks the rhetorical question of 'what makes a good character?' He believes that four things make a good character 'dramatic need, point of view, attitude and change' (Field 1998, p. 171) Dethridge points out five features of the protagonist's psychology that are important to understand the character psychology of your protagonist in depth, these are 'their physical and psychological nature', 'character history',

'immediate dramatic problem' 'their character arc or journey' and 'the premise'. (Dethridge 2003, pp. 47-8).

I will discuss each of these features in detail in my next section of this chapter, but before that would like to quote the rules that Dethridge suggest that we need to follow 'regards to the protagonist'. The first one is that 'the protagonist needs to be the central focus of the story'. The second one is that 'it is recommended to have just one protagonist'. The third one is that 'the protagonist's journey should prove the premise' and the last one is that 'it is the protagonist that leads the story into the central dramatic problem and out of it'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 60)

In order to understand the protagonist psychology in depth Dethridge has neatly divided the protagonist into five main features, which are

- a) Protagonist's 'physical and psychological nature'
- b) Protagonist's 'history'
- c) Protagonist's 'immediate dramatic problem'
- d) Protagonist's 'character arc or journey'
- e) 'The premise or view point of the writer'

(Dethridge 2003, pp. 47,8)

a) Protagonist's physical and psychological nature

In her book *Writing your Screenplay* Lisa Dethridge asserts that for a screenplay a writer should focus on two realms; the first is 'the outer world - the realm of action' and the second is 'the inner world - the realm of psychology'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 67). Hence Dethridge is saying that a screenplay should uncover mainly two things: the action that the character takes and the psychological growth the character goes through. 'The realm of action' or the physical realm 'represents the tangible, outer 'real' world of the protagonist'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 67).

In a movie the outer world represents what we see on screen; where the protagonist lives, where he works and where the movie and the actions of the movie take place. Throughout the screenplay the writer has to project the physical world of the protagonist but it is mainly evident in the first of 'the seven main structural points' called 'the setup'; where the writer has to establish 'the protagonist's world'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 133) 'This world represents the 'status quo' or 'the situation normal for the protagonist and their world'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 133). Not only does the setup allow the writer to describe or introduce the physical or the outer world of the protagonist 'the setup' also allows the writer to give an insight into the 'psychological realm' or the 'inner world' of the protagonist (Dethridge 2003, p. 67). Here the writer introduces us to the protagonist's 'main strengths, weaknesses, beliefs, cultural and social influences - and their desires' (Dethridge 2003, p. 133)

Lajos Egri also talks about the realms of the character, but he explains that 'human beings have ... three dimensions' which are 'physiology, sociology and psychology'. (Egri 2004, p. 34). He believes that these factors affect and make the character that they really are. Egri (2004) explains that the physiology of the character deals with his physical make up and outlook, how they look and such. Sociology deals with the social background of where the character comes from, where he was born, what class, the bringing up, what neighborhood the character belongs to. The third, which according to Egri 'is the product of other two' is the psychology of the character, his 'ambition, frustration, temperament, attitudes beliefs and complexes'. (Egri 2004, p. 35)

While Lejos Egri talks about three dimensions of a character, Dethridge talks about the two realms. Dethridge simplifies the same concept that Lejos Egri has explained in his three dimensions of the human character. Dethridge's outer world is the combination of Egri's physiology and sociology. And Dethridge's inner world is Egri's psychology.

Field also divides the psychological realm of the protagonist into three parts. He suggests that the writer 'separate' the 'professional, personal and private world' of the protagonist (Field 1994, p. 29). Field believes that this will help the writer to define the 'need of your character', thus agreeing with Egri that the psychological realm will lead into the realm of action.

b) Protagonist's history

According to Dethridge, "in order to appear fully fleshed out, the protagonist must have a history or back story, which helps to explain or colour their current actions on screen". (Dethridge 2003, p. 62). Dethridge stresses that it is important for a writer to develop 'a total history that occurred in the character's life before the action begins onscreen'; although this back story may never come into the screenplay it helps the writer to understand the characters. (Dethridge 2003, p. 63) Character histories or back story will help the writer opt for the choice that a character makes, because character history determines the choices these characters make in the present or onscreen time. Having a deep understanding of such histories also allows the writer to get a deep understanding of this character and helps him to create an amazing protagonist.

Screen theorist Linda Seger agrees with Dethridge that the character history is very important and the writer should work on this history and back story extensively in order to have success. Hence Seger asserts that 'the depth of the character has been compared to an iceberg, the audience only sees the tip of the writer's work.' (Seger 1990, p. 2). Seger further elaborates that it is important to work on the back story because it may help 'us understand why characters behave as they do', 'it also gives us information about the past that help us understand the psychology of the character'. (Seger 1990, p. 52).

Syd Field similarly says that 'it's essential to go back into your character and rebuild the foundations of his or her life'. (Field 1998, p. 171) Field further explains this phenomenon in a very interesting way. 'The interior life of your character takes place from birth until the

moment your film begins. It is a process that forms character. The exterior life of your character takes place from the moment your film begins to the conclusion of the story. It is a process that reveals character' (Field 1994, p. 26) By this Field means that the writer knows the interior life of the character from its birth to the moment which is going to be on the screen, this knowledge helps us in building the character psychology. And the exterior life is the one comes on the script and takes the character through the journey which results in character 'revelation' (Field 1994, p. 41)

The importance of working on the character back story is evident from the descriptions of the screenwriting theorists I have discussed. My case study selected and my project screenplay deals a lot with character history and back story and its revelation within the screenplay. Hence this section will help me in developing the character back story for my protagonist Shaheen.

c) Protagonist's immediate dramatic problem

'The dramatic problem consists of an organised set of obstacles or dilemmas for the protagonist to solve.' (Dethridge 2003, p. 57) This dramatic problem is the issue that shapes the incidents within the plot. The central dramatic problem can be a series of problems that arise from one main challenge that the character has to face. This problem not only drives the story but also gives insight into the protagonist and their value system. According to Dethridge 'the writer creates a special story mechanism to lure an audience into the story, which is called the 'central dramatic problem'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 48)

Syd Field understands the concept of the central dramatic problem. He would agree with Dethridge about conflict and says that 'all drama is conflict and without conflict there is no drama'. (Field 1994, p. 24) Field states that 'if you know the need of your character, you can create obstacles to fulfill that need.' Hence the story is plotted around the 'conflict struggle

and overcoming' these 'obstacles'. (Field 1994, p. 24) Both Field and Dethridge discuss the concept of how the central dramatic problem 'keeps the plot moving'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 48)

Egri approaches the theme of central dramatic problem in a different way. Egri calls it 'orchestration' but he agrees with Dethridge and Field and understands 'that a good pivotal character must have something very vital at stake'. (Egri 2004, p. 111) He talks about conflict in terms of 'orchestration' between the protagonist and the antagonist. (Egri 2004, p. 118) He sees the central dramatic problem not only as a set of obstacles but specifically as a set of conflicts between two characters. According to Egri 'orchestration demands well-defined and uncompromising characters in opposition, moving from one pole toward another through conflict.' (Egri 2004, p. 119)

In general the central dramatic problem is the event or incident that creates action in the story. According to Dethridge the central dramatic problem is the third of 'the five features of a protagonist. (Dethridge 2003, p. 47)

d) Protagonist's character arc or journey

According to Dethridge the character arc refers to 'How and why they end up in a different state from where they began' (Dethridge 2003, p. 47). The character arc is eminent over the three acts of the screenplay. In his book *Screenplay, the foundations of screenwriting* Syd Field explains that 'structure is what holds the entire screenplay, the whole, together' (Field 1994, p. 9). Syd Field further explains that the 'paradigm of dramatic structure' is 'broken down' into three acts 'Act I' being the 'setup', 'Act II' being 'confrontation' and 'Act III' being the 'resolution' (Field 1994, p. 9). Although screenwriting critics such as John Truby (2008) have been critical of the three-act structure, most theorists, like Linda Seger, Linda Aronson and Lisa Dethridge to name a few; identify it as the basic pattern in most screenplays. Lisa Dethridge further explains that the three-act structure helps the writer 'to manage the complex plotting

requirements of the protagonist's arc or journey as it unfolds over time'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 129) Dethridge goes on to explain each of these three acts in detail.

Field states that the 'entire first act is designed to reveal the dramatic premise and situation'. (Field 1994, p. 11). Dethridge further simplifies that 'in Act one the writer establishes a protagonist and world, and then they create a disturbance or problem in the world'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 129)

Act two according to Field is a 'unit of dramatic action' which 'is held together with the dramatic context known as confrontation'. (Field 1994, p. 11). Here the protagonist faces the obstacles that make him/her take action towards achieving their dramatic goal. Dethridge explains that in act two the dramatic 'problem leads to further conflict, complications and struggle' (Dethridge 2003, p. 129)

Act three is also known as the resolution but Field explains that 'resolution does not mean ending; resolution means solution' (Field 1994, p. 11). Dethridge adds to our understanding of act three by stating that 'in act three the protagonist acts to solve the problem that was established back in act one'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 129)

e) Premise

According to Dethridge the premise is 'the overall concept that governs the story'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 50) Premise is the reason or the basic rationale behind the screenplay. This does not have to be clearly stated within the script but it is the basic theme from which the writer develops the story. Dethridge elaborates that 'this central statement or theme' is 'expressed through the unfolding of character and plot'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 50)

Lejos Egri insists on the importance of having a premise by saying that 'every good play must have a well-formulated premise'. (Egri 2004, p. 6) A 'well constructed premise' according to

Egri consists of all the elements of the play that define the starting, the issue at hand and the ending of the play which are the 'character, conflict and conclusion'. (Egri 2004, p. 9)

Other screen theorists have referred to the premise with different terms, such as, the subject Field (1994), the theme Seger(1990) or the substance McKee(1999). All of them agree on the importance of a premise and knowing what it is in order to write a good screenplay. Dethridge has stated the premise as the fourth of 'the four main structures'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 47) Dethridge believes that the premise 'comes out of the moral, philosophical, spiritual or intellectual idea that drives the writer to write in the first place.' (Dethridge 2003, p. 50) (Egri 2004) Premise is the last of the four P's defined by Dethridge. Next I will focus of the character psychology of the protagonist. The four inform the creation and the integration of character psychology.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have covered how different screenwriting theorists define and add to our understanding of character psychology for the protagonist. I have explained the five features of the protagonist according to Dethridge and elaborated upon the five features with the help of other screenwriting theorists. This understanding of the five features of the protagonist will help me in evaluating these features in terms of my case study and my project screenplay in the forthcoming chapters.

Case Study - *Erin Brockovich*

In this chapter I attempt to understand how a strong female protagonist is written using the Hollywood screenwriting structure, which is why I analyse the movie *Erin Brockovich* (2000). I also attempt to understand the representational differences in Western and Muslim characters by studying the movie *Pretty Persuasion* (2005). Here, I explore the second research question, which is; how may we observe character psychology of the protagonist in the case study *Erin Brockovich*?

Why not a Muslim protagonist?

When I started this project, I started looking for examples of movies made in Hollywood that had a female Muslim protagonist, to be my case study. I could hardly find a female Muslim woman with a significant role in a movie from Hollywood. As Shaheen (2008) notes that female Muslim characters rarely appear as protagonists. Shaheen observes female Muslim characters in Hollywood movies are used to 'humiliate, demonise and eroticise' Muslim women. (Shaheen 2003, p. 183).

I could have looked into movies from other cultures like Iran, India and the Middle East, but I was focusing on understanding the structures of Hollywood screenwriting and why Muslim characters only seem to be victims in these movies.

Mohja Kahf (1999) studies the history of how Muslim women became 'the other' woman. She studies 'the literary representations of Muslim women' in European texts 'from the medieval times to the period of Romanticism'. (Kahf 1999, p. 2) Kahf (1999) explains that the representation of Muslim women is linked to the representation of European women. Muslim women serve to be 'sort of a negative female ideal' to what the Europeans considered to be ideal for European women in specific eras. As a result when the Western ideal for Western

women was to be submissive, the Muslim characters in that era in the Western literary representations were 'aggressive and exuberant'. (Kahf 1999, pp. 5,6) And when the ideal for the Western woman in Europe is to be independent, Muslim women are portrayed as 'victimised' and oppressed. (Kahf 1999, p. 1) Kahf (1999) has added to our knowledge that exposes the history and reasons behind why the Muslim woman is consistently portrayed as 'being victimised' in the 'Western culture today' (Kahf 1999, p. 1)

Pretty Persuasion and its female characters

'There is a lot of resentment in this country towards the Middle East and there's a lot of stereotypes floating around which I don't think are true because in the short amount of time I've known you, you haven't tried to bomb anybody and you currently smell okay to me. But people will laugh at you and probably make fun of that thing you wear on your head. But people are ignorant" Kimberley in *Pretty Persuasion* (2005) (Siega 2005)

The Movie *Pretty Persuasion* (2005) is directed by Marcos Siega and written by Skander Halim. This movie is about three teenage American school girls who file a false sexual allegation charge against their teacher. The protagonist, Kimberley Joyce, is a very intelligent, malicious and revengeful girl, who plots to take revenge on her best friend Brittany and to get famous. Kimberley is also very sexually active and aware of other people's sexual desires, which she uses to manipulate people into doing what she wants. The movie begins with Kimberley giving an audition for a film which doesn't go too well. At school a newly migrated Muslim girl Randa joins Kimberley's class; Kimberley instantly offers friendship to Randa. Next we are introduced to Brittany who describes how her boyfriend Troy is all over her, in this conversation we also realise that Troy is Kimberley's ex-boyfriend.

At this point in the film Kimberley and Brittany are looking forward to being selected for the school play based on *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Being an excellent actress Kimberley is successful in getting the main part and Brittany gets the support role. At a multicultural festival at school Kimberley says a racist comment to her Jewish classmate. Due to which the principal instructs Mr Anderson to strip Kimberley off from the role of Anne Frank. The principal is afraid of the negative publicity this could have for the school while the reporter Emily Klein is around school doing a small news report for the local TV station. The role of Anne Frank is then given to Brittany who struggles as an actress. In order to get her to perform, Mr Anderson asks her to do something private in front of the whole class. This makes Brittany very upset. On the other hand Randa is struggling with her English and Mr Anderson tells her that if she doesn't improve she would fail.

Kimberley then convinces Randa and Brittany to file a false sexual allegation against their teacher Mr Anderson for revenge. Both Randa and Kimberley confidently give their statements in court. While the reporter Emily Klein spins the story into a media fiesta, all the while keeping Kimberley as a focus of her new reports due to her sexual attraction and encounters with Kimberley. But when it comes to the point of Brittany giving her statement, a famous lawyer takes up Mr Anderson's case. This distresses Brittany so much that she spits out the truth and the case is dismissed.

The three girls are expelled from school. Troy leaves Brittany. Randa commits suicide, and Kimberley blackmails Emily Klein to keep her focus on Kimberley in the news reports, thus resulting in her getting a role in the movie she originally auditioned for.

Brittany soon finds out that Kimberley had orchestrated the whole thing, even had forced Brittany to spill the truth by requesting her friend Josh to ask his father who is a successful

lawyer to take up Mr Anderson's case. At the end of the movie we get an insight into Kimberley when she switches through the channels and the reason for her behavior is implied as being her upbringing and parenting.

The movie has been classified as black comedy or satire but fails to clearly portray the message intended. It tries to deal with too many issues at once and fails to convey the satire; instead it leaves the audience shocked at some of the things said in the movie without any justification given. In *Pretty Persuasion* Kimberly says a lot of racist things about Arabs, which at some points in the movie show how simplistic and racist her thinking is. However this is done at the expense of Randa, who is portrayed as a fool who does not even understand what Kimberley is saying.

Film critic Jack G Shaheen (2008) profusely criticizes the movie and states that the portrayal of Randa in *Pretty Persuasion* 'is the most offensive' of all the portrayals of Muslim women in Hollywood. (Shaheen 2008, p. 30) He notes that Muslim women in Hollywood movies are 'humiliated, demonised and eroticised'. One concurrent image of the Muslim woman in Hollywood is that of Muslim women dressed from head to toe in black and silently following the Arab male. (Shaheen 2003, pp. 183-4)

Post colonial feminist theorist Mohja Kahf states that the 'core narrative' of the western media about the Muslim woman 'in one sentence' is that they are being 'victimised'. She explores the 'genealogy and logic' of the female Muslim character within Western narratives. Kahf (1999) asserts that the western narrative has always situated Muslim women as the 'other' or the different one in order to justify its own position about 'gender, self and foreign'. (Kahf 1999, pp. 1-2)

According to Kahf (1999) in the medieval times the Muslim woman was portrayed as 'aggressive' and 'exuberant termagants and queens' But despite portraying them as strong headed and defiant this 'rhetorical move' of these medieval literary texts aims at 'subduing the Muslim woman not to liberate her'. Gradually in the seventeenth century 'but not before' 'the veil and the harem' becomes a part of western representations of Muslim women. Kahf (1999) explains that the image of Muslim women in the Western representations as a wanton gradually disappears and a new image slowly appears. Eventually by the 'eighteenth century-but not before' the Muslim woman is portrayed as the 'oppressed creature'. She 'may be a willing accomplice, or she may be escaping her victimisation'. 'But the Muslim woman is being victimised is the common axis under girding a wide variety of western representations'. (Kahf 1999, pp. 1-4)

Kahf (1999) explains that the aim of representing the Muslim woman was and has been to depict 'the negative female ideal'. This is why the Muslim woman is always represented as the opposite of the representation of Western women. Hence Kahf (1999) elaborates that when the western ideal for Western woman was to be submissive, the female Muslim characters in that era in the Western literature were represented as 'aggressive and exuberant'. But when the ideal for the western woman slowly changed in Europe and the ideal western woman within the European culture and literature became the independent confident character, Muslim women started to appear as 'victimised' and oppressed characters. Kahf concludes that this 'distinct narrative' of the Muslim woman as 'victimised' characters 'abides in western' literature 'today'.(Kahf 1999, pp. 5-7,1)

Mohja Kahf in her book article *Huda: Sha'wari's Memoirs in the United States Reception Environment* explains that all representation of Muslim women presented to the United States' reading public are stereotypical images of women facing gender oppression. According to her

all such representations can be easily grouped into three categories which are, 'victim's of gender oppression', 'escapee of her intrinsically oppressive culture' and 'the pawn of male power'. (Kahf 2000, pp. 148-9)The portrayal of Randa in the movie *Pretty Persuasion* falls in all three categories, but because Randa is already in the West, the dynamics of her being a victim, an escapee and a pawn are at the hands of Kimberley. She is the victim of a vengeful plan of a teenage girl. She escapes the humiliation of the outcome of the false allegation by committing suicide, and she also becomes the pawn of Kimberley's power in the school when she agrees to take part in the false allegation against Mr. Anderson. Hence Randa's character is a group of stereotypes coupled together into one.

Kimberley is the lead role in the movie *Pretty Persuasion*, with her extraordinary intelligence and planning she manages to manipulate everyone around her. Here I will keep my focus on the Muslim character Randa and comparison to the character Brittany and their reactions to the protagonist Kimberley's actions. The representations of Randa and Brittany are intertwined as the suicide of Randa allows Brittany to become the hero of the movie. As I have mentioned earlier Kahf (1999) explains the Muslim woman represents the opposite of the ideal for the Western woman. (Kahf 1999, p. 42) I believe that the movie *Pretty Persuasion* is a good example for such a comparison. Here the character of Brittany and the character of Randa allow each other's representations to flourish.

The character of Randa is introduced when her Middle Eastern parents drop her off in a car. She is shy, plain, wears a headscarf, and quietly steps out of the car. Randa keeps her head down in most of the movie and it's mostly noticeable in this scene. So as compared to her peers she is different and unusual.

At this point in the movie Kimberly is upset about her audition. Kimberley is also seen looking at Brittany and her boyfriend. So she approaches Randa and offers Randa her friendship. She does that in a rather ridiculing manner, which Randa does not question, or protest to. Kimberley also very eloquently explains how their relationship would work in terms of power 'symbiotic' she says 'the whale and the little fish that sticks on it'. (Siega 2005) Randa has no objection to this, as she seems to be a mindless, shallow person, with no ability to judge and understand her condition on her own and help herself. Marnia Lazreg has pointed out that the Western representations of third world women imply that these women are in need of rescue from the western society because they are seen to not be able to understand and know their condition.

So from here on Randa is subjected to the protagonist Kimberley Joyce's ridicule. Randa not only puts up with the ridicule but also fails to understand that she has been subjected to such treatment. Although it's understandable that Kimberley is portrayed as a very manipulative mean girl who tends to be able to get away with saying rather offensive things in a very polite tone. But at no time does Randa have the slightest objection or understanding of what Kimberly is up to; as compared to Brittany who at least once in the movie shows signs of being shocked at what Kimberley is saying. Additionally Kimberley's step mother also realises and protests to Kimberley's offensive slurs but it is only Randa that is not smart enough to have the slightest idea or understanding.

The satire of the movie is evident when Kimberley explains to Randa that 'although she has respect for all races' she is happy that 'she was born white' and of all the races in the world 'her last choice would be Arab'. (Siega 2005) In saying these things and the way she says them she ends up portraying the hypocritical side of her personality. This is one of the few

moments when the script is able to satirically uncover the anxieties Kimberley has about other cultures.

When the three girls are together for a girl's night Kimberley suggests that they should put a false sexual harassment case against Mr. Anderson. In this way all three could get revenge from him. Kimberly also reminds her friends that the reporter Klein is at the school at this time, which would also help to get media attention and get famous. Brittany despite hating Mr. Anderson the most shows hesitancy in taking revenge and ruining Mr. Anderson's career, but Randa does not show any kind of remorse and immediately agrees to go along with the false allegations that Kimberly is planning. Ironically this is the only time when Randa strongly asserts her opinion. Again this portrays that Randa is easy to be led or manipulated.

Kimberly has already planned for this allegation to be uncovered, because she wants Brittany to spill the truth about them in the court, Kimberley wants to make Brittany suffer and Kimberley manages to make that happen. When this happens Brittany's boyfriend Troy dumps her. However it has grim repercussions for Randa, her father is mad at her and shouts at her. When Randa comes back to pick up her books from the school, she goes into her class room and takes off her scarf, the only scene when we see her without it. She writes 'We are all sinners' in Arabic on the blackboard and shoots herself in the head. (Siega 2005)

This ending for Randa is a stereotypical take on the portrayal of Muslim women. Randa is portrayed as a victim of her culture and is so oppressed that the only way out for her is to kill her. Interestingly Randa takes off her scarf before shooting herself, which is the only scene in which we see her with it. This scene may be interpreted as a reflection of the Western culture's 'desire to lift the veil of' the Muslim woman 'in the name of liberating her'. (Yeegenoglu 1998, p. 12)

Thus the act of Randa taking off her headscarf and then killing herself maybe seen as the act of liberation from the stand point of a Western viewer, yet it's tragic that the Muslim girl Randa's liberation comes only with the act of killing herself. This scene may also illicit the viewers feeling that Muslim women are in 'need of liberation' from the West. (Lazreg 2000, p. 308) Therefore when all hell breaks loose, Brittany despite being broken has the strength to move on. But Randa has no other option but to take her life

I assert that Brittany becomes the hero of the movie because Randa is the victim. Randa's act of committing suicide makes Brittany the survivor. Brittany is the one who is strong enough to fight back and intelligent enough to be able to eventually figure out Kimberley's plan. Also Brittany's character has more depth than Randa's character. Not only is Randa's character in the movie stereotypical, it has not been given much depth. Is she a shy girl who is afraid of Kimberley? Or is she the girl who just wants to fit in and ends up doing what the group members do? Or is she so afraid of failing her English exam that she goes along with the plan of filing the false sexual allegation?

The audiences never really see the back story of Randa. Who is this girl? Why does she commit suicide? Is her home life so miserable that she finds no other way but to end her life? In *Pretty Persuasion* we only see Randa once with her family after she is expelled from school. Her father tells her how she has 'brought shame upon the family' and 'today is as if I have no daughter'. (Siega 2005) The audience is expected to understand what these words mean to Randa because the words honor and shame are thrown into the conversation. But this really is just an angry, and much deserved scolding of a father whose daughter has lied in court. Her parents do not practically disavow her; they come with her to pick up her things from school. Are we expected to understand as an audience without any back story of why Randa's father's

scolding drives her to commit suicide? Does Randa feel a sense of responsibility to keep the family's honor?

Conclusively I ask again, why did Randa commit suicide in the movie *Pretty Persuasion*? After analysing the movie, only one answer is evident, Randa committed suicide because she was a Muslim woman. The only real explanation or character motivation given to Randa for her suicide is the fact that she is a Muslim woman.

Why Erin Brockovich?

The movie *Erin Brockovich* is a popular film which was a 'critical and financial success'. (Roth 2004, p. 52) Helen Jacey (2010) says that Erin's 'gutsy tenacity' makes her a memorable heroine (Jacey 2010, p. 23). It has been considered to be an eco-feminist movie by some authors (Richardson & Vanderford 2005, p. 169) and a melodrama by others (Roth 2004, p. 51), while it is generally considered a 'biopic, drama and romantic comedy'. (Kartikasari 2011, p. 1)

I chose *Erin Brockovich* (2000) due to its success in the popular American culture. The movie is about a strong woman whose persistence and hard work help her do something that is deemed impossible. When I was looking for a film that would be suitable for taking as my case study, I was looking at Hollywood movies that have a female protagonist who works against the odds to achieve something big. Erin is a strong and independent person who brings down a huge company, PG&E, to its knees by her persistence, courage and hard work. Erin also does not allow others to rule her life.

The choice of my case study may seem contradictory, but I have chosen *Erin Brockovich* because I wanted to apply the same techniques used by screenwriters to represent a Western female protagonist. It may be argued that using a mainstream Hollywood film for a model for

a female Muslim protagonist may not be the ideal example however the fact that most depictions of Muslim women in Hollywood are less than satisfactory I believe Erin Brockovich provides a great example to be used for my project.

William Indick (2004) has used Maureen Murdock's paradigm of the heroine's journey to analyse Erin's journey in the movie *Erin Brockovich* which addresses 'the particular needs, struggles and desires of modern women in a modern age'. (Indick 2004, p. 165)

Summary of the screenplay Erin Brockovich

The script of *Erin Brockovich* is based on the true story of the woman with the same name. The protagonist of the film is a strong independent woman who does not give up easily and has the courage to fight back despite the odds against her. At the beginning of the script Erin is jobless and penniless and her second husband has just walked out on her. To make matters worse she has a car accident which is not her fault. So she approaches a lawyer called Ed Masry to help her sue the person who is responsible. But they lose the case and Erin becomes even more desperate. She convinces a reluctant Ed to give her a job in his office.

While looking for paper work about a real estate matter she stumbles on some medical bills. Erin smells something fishy and buries herself into finding out what happened to these people and the correlation of the property with the medical bills. She finds out that the company PG&E has been involved in polluting the local water supply. To add to it PG&E have been covering it up and been telling the locals how good it is for their health. Erin's friendly and warm personality persuades the locals to confide in her and tell her stories about their illnesses. Most of these illnesses are very severe and life threatening. Interestingly PG& E have been paying for some of their medical bills and most locals see them as their saviours as they have employed most of the community members.

Erin investigates this matter further and finds out that the PG&E plant has been using Hexavalent Chromium which has polluted the ground water. She also goes up to the Hinkley

water board to find documents that support the existence of Hexavalent Chromium in the water.

Gradually more and more people who have been affected by the Chromium turn up to Erin. Erin also drives up to Hinkley to seek others who haven't contacted her yet. Erin persuades Ed to take on all the clients, but he is concerned about his small struggling company not being able to fight against someone as powerful as PG&E. Ed is worried about cost and he is also worried about lack of evidence.

Ed has to ask another law firm owned by Kurt Potter to join in this venture to cover the costs which upsets Erin very much. When Kurt Potter and Theresa get involved in the suit, the locals in Hinkley get disturbed and let Ed know that they only want to talk to Erin. Not only that, they try to convince the locals to file for arbitration instead of a trial. This makes the residents of Hinkley very suspicious and rumors start flying around in the town of Hinkley about Masry and Vitote.

One of the Hinkley residents, Pamela, also publishes an article in the local newspapers about how the lawyers at Masry and Vitote lied about this case to the residents of Hinkley. Pamela also suggests that the residents change their lawyers. This confusion has been caused by the involvement of Kurt Potter's company, who has failed to be able to successfully explain to the residents about arbitration.

Because of these rumors it seems impossible at the moment to convince the residents to go to arbitration instead of the trial. Also to be able to go to arbitration instead of trial they need 90% of the plaintiffs to sign the agreement.

Erin and Ed hold an information session about this for the locals of Hinkley, which goes quite well and they are able to convince most of the people. But they still have to go from door to door to the rest of them to get their signatures.

Erin, with the help of Ed, works tirelessly to get those signatures in just a few days. But while she is going from door to door a guy named Charles Embry approaches her with interesting evidence. Charles tells Erin that he thought that it would be easy to talk to her and he opens up to her about his job at PG&E and how he has documents that he was asked to destroy in the plant. The documents are proof that PG&E headquarters knew about the contaminated water and decide to cover it up.

After this breakthrough evidence Ed with the help of Erin wins this lawsuit. PG&E end up paying a total amount of three hundred and thirty three million to the plaintiff's from Hinkley. This settlement became 'the largest in a direct-action lawsuit in the United States history'. (Grant 2000, p. 113)

Character psychology of the protagonist Erin

- a) 'Physical and psychological nature' of the protagonist Erin
- b) 'History and back story' of the protagonist Erin
- c) The protagonist Erin's 'immediate dramatic problem'
- d) The protagonist Erin's 'character arc or journey'
- e) 'the premise or view point of the writer'

a) Erin's physical and psychological nature

Here I will explore the physical and psychological nature of Erin according to Dethridge's definition of the inner and outer realms.

Erin's outer realm consists of her young family. She is a single parent and is struggling to make ends meet at the start of the movie. So she convinces her lawyer to give her a job. He clearly does not have an opening but she convinces him by 'backing him into a corner'. (Grant 2000, p. 14) Sympathising with her situation Ed gives in and hires her. So she enters the workforce with commitment

Her inner realm consists of her hopes, dreams and goals. Her status as a single mother gives her the aim of trying to be 'a good mom, a nice person, a decent citizen'. (Grant 2000, p. 6) Her objective to succeed in life also comes from her need to be a good mother 'to take good care' of her kids (Grant 2000, p. 6)

When Erin finds out that a large organisation may have knowingly contaminated the water making Donna a young mother like herself seriously ill, Erin takes it up on herself to find a way for Ed to take this case and others like it and provide the victims with justice.

Erin has the compassion to feel Donna's pain which reflects the pain she goes through in the beginning of the screenplay when her neck is broken in a car accident. She is further 'wounded when the legal system refuses to validate her version of events about the car'. (Roth 2004, p. 54) This experience makes her even more motivated and consistent with Ed, making him realise his failing as an advocate for these unsuspecting people.

She also seems to be the only one realising the pain the residents of Hinkley are going through and the price they are paying for their illnesses, which is demonstrated in the following dialogue

Erin
So before you come back with another
lame ass offer, I want you to think
real hard about what your spine is
worth, Mr. Walker—or what your uterus
is, Ms. Sanchez—then you take out your
calculator and multiply that number by
a hundred. Anything less than that is a
waste of our time
(Grant 2000, p. 78)

In the town of Hinkley people respect Erin because she is compassionate and she cares about what has happened to the residents of Hinkley. She listens to people and empathizes with them. This is why she is able to go from door to door to each of their houses and get papers

signed for arbitration. This also the reason why Charles Embry spots her and volunteers information that he has taken when he used to work at the PG&E plant.

Erin cannot be easily scared off and knows how to stand her ground. By the act two turning point Erin receives a creepy phone call threatening her to stop snooping in the water board she does not care and goes up to the water board again and tells Scott off about it. Erin is witty and intelligent; she figures out that it is Scott who has told her off. Scott also finds it difficult to stop Erin from copying the files because when he tries to she tells him that they are a 'matter of public record' and goes back to doing what she is doing. This shows how persistent and daring the character Erin is. (Grant 2000, p. 44)

b) Erin's history or back story

Erin's Background surfaces gradually throughout the screenplay justifying and motivating her to move on. Her status as a working class person seems to work against her at the beginning of the movie but with the Hinkley clients it seems to favor her.

Her background as a single mother and her ongoing struggle to survive emerges in the screenplay at various points.

ERIN
Look, I am doing a lot better for those
kids now than I did living with my
parents, one day they will understand
that
(Grant 2000, p. 80)

Her background as a working class single mom makes her need to prove herself even more desperate. Her past experiences with men have also hardened her and she has learnt not to give in so when George gives her an ultimatum she flatly refuses him and asks him to stay and help her out.

ERIN
What about you? You think either one of
the men who gave me those children
asked what I wanted before they walked
away?! All I've ever done is bend my

life around what men decided they need!
Well not now. I m sorry, I won't do it
(Grant 2000, p. 80)

Erin has a background of being a beauty queen, which reflects in the way she dresses. This back story is reflected in humor several times in the play. However the fact that she was a former beauty queen and has looks to favour her makes her act of proving her intelligence and worth become even more powerful

c) Erin's immediate dramatic problem

Dethridge reminds us that 'the writer creates a special story mechanism to lure an audience into the story, which is called the 'central dramatic problem'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 48) The central dramatic problem in this movie is the law suit against PG&E. The whole screenplay revolves around this lawsuit.

At the beginning of the screenplay Erin is desperate to get a job, but she soon gets herself a job in a law firm. One day when the other secretary Anna is not available Ed asks Erin to look into the files of a pro-bono case. The case is about an offer made to the local resident Donna and her husband about selling their house from the company PG&E. What catches Erin's eye are the medical bills that are inside it. So she drives up to Donna's house and finds out that their bills were being paid by PG&E. She also finds out that the plant managers had told the local residents that there is Chromium III in their water. This type of chromium is good for health and will benefit the residents.

Erin digs up more information and finds out that there are many types of Chromium and the Hexavalent Chromium or Chromium VI could have caused the diseases that Donna and her husband have. To investigate the matter further she goes up to the water board and finds evidence that there is actually Chromium VI in the ground water at Hinkley.

Erin finds out that there are more than six hundred people who have been affected. This case starts costing the law firm too much, so Ed has to bring in another law firm which agrees to share the costs. But the lawyers from the new firm are unable to explain themselves to the residents of Hinkley and thus many residents decide to withdraw from their claims

This brings Erin back on the case where she has to go to everyone's house and explain the situation to them and get their signatures. Ed tells Erin that despite the evidence they have they cannot charge PG&E headquarters, because they need proof that the headquarters knew what was going on at the Hinkley plant. Amazingly Charles Embry who used to work in the plant decides to open up about the evidence he has against PG&E

Due to this evidence they win the case and make PG&E pay a sum of three hundred and thirty three million dollars to the plaintiffs. But if Erin had not intervened the people of Hinkley would have never even found out about this contamination.

So the immediate dramatic problem for Erin at the beginning of the film is to get a job. She is able to get the job in as early as act I. After that she has to prove that she is capable of doing this job. The immediate dramatic problem that surfaces in Act II is her fight to get the Hinkley residents a fair payback for the suffering PG&E has caused. Other than the immediate dramatic problem the protagonist Erin struggles to divide her time between work and family, which also lead to conflicts with her kids and her boyfriend. Erin is able to convince her older son Mathew about the importance of her work and demonstrates to her boyfriend George how he has enabled her to help people like Donna get some payback for their suffering.

Mathew
The girls' the same age as me

Erin gently takes the form away from Mathew, wanting to shield him from the harsh realities of this case

ERIN
That's right sweetheart

She replaces the form on the top of the stack

Mathew
She's one of the sick people?

ERIN
Yeah, she is
(beat)
But you know what? That's why I am
helping her. So she can get some
medicine to make her feel better

Mathew mulls this over a bit

Mathew
How come her own mom isn't helping her

ERIN
Cause her own mom is real sick too
Mathew thinks real hard about this, and then heads over to the door,
where George, Beth and Katie are waiting for him. Before he leaves,
though he turns back to Erin

Mathew
Maybe we will bring you back some
breakfast? You want eggs?

She looks at Mathew and her eyes fill with tears. She is so proud of
her son in this moment. As if his understanding is what she needed
all along.

(Grant 2000, p. 99)

d) Erin's character arc or journey

The Character arc of Erin through the three acts uncovers 'how and why' Erin 'ends up in a
different state from where' she 'began'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 47)

We met Erin as a penniless, jobless single mom who has been injured in a car accident. Her
lawyer Ed Masry fails to get her a settlement, and Erin has to almost beg him to give her a job.
She then stumbles upon a real estate pro-bono case and discovers that there is more to it.
Almost all Hinkley residents are suffering from severe illnesses which Erin suspects to be due
to contamination of water by the PG&E plant. She hunts down proof of the contamination
and convinces Hinkley residents to hire Ed.

During Act Two the story progresses into the lawsuit. Ed's law firm struggles with expenses
and has to let another firm come in for financial support. This new firm sends their lawyer to

talk to the residents of Hinkley but ends up scaring the residents who start to withdraw from the case. Rumors also begin to fly around in the Hinkley community.

In Act Three Erin has to step back in to convince the residents to file arbitration. Erin and Ed manage to get 634 signatures in five days. When the residents file the arbitration they win their lawsuit and get a 333 million dollar settlement. Erin also gets a two million dollar bonus for her hard work on the case.

Erin's progression from rags to riches comes about during the course of the three acts. The movie uses moral questions as a backdrop for Erin's motivation and at the end she gets reward for her sincerity and hard work.

e) Premise of the screenplay Erin Brockovich

The film *Erin Brockovich* (2000) works on different levels to project the struggle of a single working class mother to achieve success in the workforce through her hard work and tenacity. The film's theme revolves around an environmental issue which projects how large organisations may exploit unsuspecting locals.

Erin is an untrained legal secretary who gets hired by the sheer force of her will power is convincing because she is desperate to support her three kids. Her status as a single mother makes it all the more difficult to prove her success in the work force. But through her tenacity she overcomes all her obstacles and becomes instrumental in getting justice for the Hinkley clients.

Erin's personality and friendly nature allows the Hinkley residents to trust her. They trust her more than they trust the lawyers in the film, who are cold, professional and detached from their world. Here Erin's background as a working class person works in her favour.

The premise of the screenplay starts to unfold when we see Erin in the court describing her experience in the car accident. She explains that her goal in life is to be 'a good mom, a nice person and a decent citizen' (Grant 2000, p. 6) Soon enough she is out to attain her goal.

She secures a job with her lawyer and stumbles upon a case that raises her suspicions. She sets out to uncover this matter of real estate which turns out to be an issue of water contamination that has resulted in severe illnesses for the whole community.

At first her boss Ed doesn't understand her style of work but soon he comes to acknowledge that she is hardworking, intelligent and can get things done. She is so passionate about this case that she takes her work to her home leaving her kids and her boyfriend feeling ignored. She struggles to balance home life and work, but soldiers on until she convinces Ed to file this seemingly impossible lawsuit.

Ed is afraid that the case may cost too much for his law firm and they are up against a giant firm with limitless resources. To which Erin responds by the simple moral question of being 'right or wrong'. (Grant 2000, p. 61) The movie ends with the residents of Hinkely getting the 'largest settlement in a direct action lawsuit in United States history' (Grant 2000, p. 113)

Conclusion

In this chapter I have studied the screenplay *Erin Brockovich* by Susannah Grant to understand the character psychology of a strong female protagonist. Although my protagonist Shaheen is not a single mother, she struggles against the norms of the society like Erin and achieves her goal through persistence and hard work. Like *Erin Brockovich* the moral theme of right and wrong is also a very strong theme in *Shaheen*. And Shaheen like Erin has to convince the magistrate to do the right thing.

The study of character psychology of Erin, according to the five features of character psychology by Dethridge, gave me an understanding of how to use character psychology in my screenplay Shaheen.

Project screenplay *Shaheen*

In this chapter I will explore the character psychology of the protagonist in Hollywood style three-act structure in relation to my screenplay *Shaheen*. The screenplay represents a Muslim female character from Pakistan whose struggle and efforts to achieve success in her culture are undermined by both her parents and the society. She challenges the notions of freedom and the notions of honor within the traditional Pakistani family for a woman. Shaheen is a woman who is not victimised by the traditional values but who fights against them. Shaheen like the protagonist Erin from *Erin Brockovich* becomes the hero of her story.

This chapter will first give the rationale of why I am writing this screenplay and why it is important to write a screenplay with a female Muslim protagonist. Next I will give a brief summary of the screenplay *Shaheen*. Then I will study the character psychology of the protagonist Shaheen in accordance to the 'five features' of protagonist psychology explained by Dethridge in her book *Writing your Screenplay*. (Dethridge 2003, p. 47) Later I will explore the nature of the two support roles and their significance for the character Shaheen

Why Shaheen?

I wanted to write a screenplay about a Muslim woman who is strong and independent. I chose the name Shaheen for my protagonist because Shaheen means eagle in the Urdu language. This bird, eagle or Shaheen, is seen as a symbol of freedom and free thought. In Urdu poetry it can also refer to a person who has very high hopes.

I also wanted to explore the Western conventions of screenwriting and how they can help me create a protagonist that reflects issues and attitudes from my culture. I have referred to the work of Trinh T Minha in order to understand the process and difficulties I might face while

writing a screenplay using English language. I also refer to the theories of Mohja Kahf and Jack G. Shaheen which help me articulate how Muslim characters appear in Hollywood today.

The aim of writing this screenplay was to show a Muslim woman struggling to achieve high goals, and understand why such depictions seem to be missing from Hollywood movies

Summary of screenplay Shaheen

The protagonist of my screenplay is a Pakistani Muslim woman named Shaheen. We meet Shaheen at her parents' home when her parents are trying to put a lot of pressure on her to get married to a guy they deem suitable for her. Shaheen becomes sick of the emotional blackmail and walks out of her parents' house. In doing so she challenges the traditional cultural values of her community. It is not socially accepted for unmarried Pakistani women to move out of their parent's house. She gets a job in a village far away as a school teacher. The school has been closed for almost a year and the council gives her the task of re-establishing the girls' school.

When she arrives at the village Chak-soma she instantly becomes friends with siblings Omar and Mahjabeen. Shaheen is instantly attracted to Omar and the fifteen year old Mahjabeen is eager to help Shaheen in setting up the school. One day after a hard day at school Shaheen witnesses the abduction of Mahjabeen by the village landlord Jabbar. Mahjabeen's family is shocked and distressed but as tradition dictates they decide that they will accept Jabbar's marriage with Mahjabeen despite being forced and let Mahjabeen stay with Jabbar. An abducted girl coming back to her parents' house brings shame upon the family.

But Mahjabeen keeps on writing to Shaheen for help and Shaheen has to take matters into her own hands. When Shaheen tries to file a case against Jabbar and get police help, she

starts getting warnings from Jabbar to back off. But she does not back off and approaches the Magistrate to look into Mahjabeen's case of abduction.

To stop Shaheen from doing further damage to his reputation, Jabbar files a false sexual allegation against Shaheen and Omar for adultery. This puts both Shaheen and Omar in jail.

With fears of the death penalty looming against Shaheen and Omar, Omar's parents ask their daughter Mahjabeen to give a false statement to the police in exchange for Shaheen's and Omar's freedom. Shaheen is forced to leave the village and go back to her parent's home

Shaheen fails to find peace with herself after the deal and makes a plan to rescue Mahjabeen from Jabbar's house and run to a woman's shelter. But there is an unexpected change in the plan and Shaheen, Mahjabeen and Omar end up confronting Jabbar in front of the whole village during the spring festival.

Dethridge's five features of protagonist psychology applied to my feature screenplay *Shaheen*

My screenplay *Shaheen* is based on the story of a female Muslim character called Shaheen. She is the central figure in the story and the screenplay revolves around her dramatic problem. Dethridge states the 'central dramatic problem comes out of character psychology'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 57) In order to understand how the study of the classic Hollywood style three-act structure has helped me write my screenplay *Shaheen*, I will relate in detail the process through which I develop the character psychology of my protagonist Shaheen. Next I will discuss Shaheen's character psychology in terms of Dethridge's five features which are as follows

- a) Shaheen's 'physical and psychological nature'
- b) Shaheen's 'history and back story'
- c) Shaheen 'immediate dramatic problem'

- d) Shaheen's 'character arc or journey'
- e) My 'premise or view point'

a) Shaheen's physical and psychological nature

According to Dethridge, the writer has to show , 'how events and action in the external realm are reflected and motivated by the conflict in the protagonists's inner realm'(Dethridge 2003, p. 67)

Shaheen's inner conflict is represented by her fears of losing her independence and fear of not being accepted in the village and the need for her to prove to her parents that she can do something impossible. But her core value that is at stake in the screenplay is her frustration with the traditional belief that we are helpless and cannot challenge fate

SHAHEEN
I am so sick of people telling me that
we can't really do anything about this
or that. You can do something about it.
You choose not to

Her need for freedom is reflected in the external world by the choice she makes when she leaves her congested city dwelling with her parents to live in the countryside. The congestion of the rooftops crammed into each other in the central Rawalpindi district reflects her feeling of suffocation and her need to free herself from this place. So she chooses to work in a village.

Her sense of relief and freedom are depicted in the following scene

EXT. CHAK-SOMA LOCAL BUS STOP - SUN SETTING

Chak-Soma is a beautiful village surrounded by mustard fields. When they enter the central village area Shaheen looks around at the green fields and takes in the fresh air, the central square is full of girls playing stapoo (a local game played mostly by girls on the streets)

In act three when Shaheen goes back to her parents house after being released from jail and after being unable to get her school back, her father thinks she is back to agree to marry the man they have chosen for her. Listening to this motivates her to go back and try once again

to rescue Mahjabeen. Her inner conflict is reflected by the outer world in the following scene where she realises she cannot give up on Mahjabeen

EXT. ROOF TOP - SAME DAY

Shaheen climbs up the roof top with Mahjabeen's unopened letter

It is the spring season so the sky is full of kites

She looks up she sees a kite that has been cut off from its owner it flies freely swirling close to her.

Shaheen opens up Mahjabeen's letter and sees that she has written nothing, Mahjabeen has only sent her a copy of the poem Shaheen gave the school girls on her first day

Shaheen reads it out aloud with tears in her eyes

SHAHEEN

An eagle flies across the skies
The sun will shine tomorrow
The rain will come and we will run
And there will be no sorrow

Shaheen smiles

b) Shaheen's back story or past history

Dethridge stresses that it is important for a writer to develop 'a total history that occurred in the characters' life before the action begins onscreen' although this back story may never come into the screenplay it helps the writer to understand the characters. (Dethridge 2003, p. 63)

In my screenplay when Shaheen witnesses Mahjabeen being abducted she feels the need to rescue her. Nothing people in the village tell her about Jabbar changes her mind because she hates the feeling of being helpless against tradition And when Mahjabeen's family decide to give up fighting for Mahjabeen against Jabbar's power and atrocity, Shaheen realises that she has to help. She looks at the family and realises that all families in her culture feel helpless against tradition and power. Mahjabeen's mother on finding out about the abduction cries and wails as if she has died, because they believe that being abducted means she is lost to

them and cannot respectably be returned. This annoys Shaheen who is confused as to whether to console the wailing parents or argue with them about their conclusion. Even her own uncle tries to convince her to let this go, to which she says

SHAHEEN
I can't see things? I am the only one
who seems to see what's right and
what's wrong.
Mahjabeen is still writing to me, her
parents aren't going to help her, you
aren't going to help her, so I guess
it's me then

Shaheen comes from a lower middle class family who lives in a closed neighborhood where everybody keeps an eye on everybody else. Her family is seen to be a respected and well to do family. Her parents pride themselves on their status in their neighborhood. That is why they are embarrassed about Shaheen leaving their house and going far away for work. They have made up stories about her to cover this up and have told their neighbors that Shaheen has gone to live with her grandmother in Gujranwala. So when Shaheen is in jail and she needs them to help her get out on bail, they do not help her. Because they think that word will get out and their neighbors would know and it will affect their respectability in their community.

c) Shaheen's immediate dramatic problem

'The writer creates a special story mechanism to lure an audience into the story, which is called the 'central dramatic problem' (Dethridge 2003, p. 48)

Shaheen faces a few problems, one is that her parents are forcing her to get married. When she leaves their house to set up a girls school in the village, her father tells her that she will fail.

MURTAZA
You think you will be able to survive
on your own in a remote village and
build a school there?

You have never even been on your own,
how do you think you will survive in a
remote village, Allah knows how they
live!

The immediate dramatic problem for Shaheen is that she wants to set up this new school in Chak-Soma and be accepted as a part of the village. But when Jabbar abducts Mahjabeen the immediate problem for Shaheen becomes that she has to find Mahjabeen and free her from Jabbar. Mahjabeen's parents decide to let Mahjabeen stay with Jabbar because it has become a matter of honor for the family. But Shaheen keeps on receiving letters from her for help and cannot let this be. When her uncle asks her why she cannot give up on Mahjabeen, she says

SHAHEEN
Because Mahjabeen hasn't accepted it!
Everyone talks about her parents
accepting the marriage the society
accepting the marriage, but no one even
thinks about what Mahjabeen is telling
us.

d) Shaheen's character arc or journey

Here I will study the character arc of my protagonist Shaheen through the three-act structure. According to Dethridge the character arc refers to 'How and why' the protagonists end up in a different state from where they began'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 47)

Although the three-act structure maybe seen as 'rigid and formulaic' by some, most popular screenwriting theorists find it 'flexible and expandable'. (Batty 2012, pp. 78-9)

Through the first act of screenplay I introduce my character Shaheen and her ideological issues with her family about her future. For Shaheen it becomes obvious that her independence is very vital and she would be completely unhappy if that was taken away from her.

SHAHEEN
I won't find peace locked up in a home
cooking chapatti

When Shaheen's parents make it clear that she has to accept the proposal, it incites her into taking a drastic step to walk out of her parents' house and take up a job in a far away village. In Pakistan it is a huge step for a woman to live alone and be independent before getting married. She risks her family's and her own reputation by doing this, but she has to do this to achieve her independence.

In act two Shaheen faces the challenges of adjusting into the rural life of Chak-soma, the school she has been hired to teach in has been closed for over a year. Not only does she have to reorganise the school, she also has the challenge of convincing the villagers to send their girls to her school. She makes friends with a local girl, Mahjabeen, who helps her reach the village people. When Mahjabeen is abducted and taken against her will by the village landlord, Shaheen cannot sit back and accept fate as Mahjabeen's family does. She and Omar attempt to try to get her back through legal means and find that Jabbar's influence extends to the police too. To force them into backing off, Jabbar conspires to put Shaheen and Omar in jail on false adultery charges. These charges can have drastic penalties, like the death penalty or life imprisonment. At the end of act two it seems that all is lost for Shaheen. She loses her school, her job and her reputation in the society, her family don't want to see her again but worst of all she has lost her freedom and is in jail with her love interest Omar.

In act three Shaheen and Omar get out of jail and she goes back to her parents' home. But soon she realises that she cannot live with herself and goes to rescue Mahjabeen and arranges a women's refuge for Mahjabeen and herself. But while rescuing Mahjabeen she confronts Jabbar, and because this happens in front of the village people Jabbar has to let them go. The police officer Ahsan convinces Jabbar to divorce Mahjabeen. Shaheen gets her school back and they get to stay in Chak-Soma but 'things will never be the same again' for them. (Batty 2012, p. 80)

e) Premise of the screenplay Shaheen

My aim in writing this screenplay was to represent a strong Muslim woman using the Hollywood style screenwriting structure, but the premise of the screenplay *Shaheen* is different from my reasons for writing this screenplay. My screenplay *Shaheen* is critical of many cultural assumptions of Pakistani society. But mainly *Shaheen* focuses on the assumption many people feel that they are helpless in the hands of fate. That there is nothing one can do to save themselves in a situation that seems impossible. With this assumption many people will give up before they even try. But beneath the feeling of helplessness is the intense pressure of the society, what people will think and how one will look in the eyes of the society.

The pressure of the society and what other people think is also the root of the concept of honor or 'Izzat' in the Urdu language. Honor is the respect of a person or a family in the society, at many times associated with what the women of the family do. Losing honor or losing face in the society can be very traumatic for men especially male heads and at times the restoration of honor may have a high price for the women of the family. While I discuss the matters of honor my main focus has been on the feeling of helplessness and how my protagonist *Shaheen* deals with these complex issues. Hence the premise of my screenplay *Shaheen* is that, contrary to the common belief in Pakistan, we are not helpless against social tradition and power.

I had to 'express' my premise 'through the unfolding of character and plot'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 50) . From the beginning of the screenplay the protagonist *Shaheen* expresses her views

about helplessness in the hands of fate when she has an argument with her mother about a neighbor's daughter who throws a tantrum after her parents arrange her marriage.

SHAHEEN

Do you seriously believe that we cannot change our kismet?

RUKHSANA

Of course I do! We are here because Allah wanted us to be here. And we follow what has been written for us

SHAHEEN

And if we don't?

RUKHSANA

What do you mean if we don't, we have to; we are helpless in the hands of our kismet

SHAHEEN

We don't have to, Robina and her husband can reject the proposal for Amana.

RUKHSANA

But they really want to marry Amana off to this person; there is also a lot of family pressure for this proposal.

So while Shaheen's mother Rukhsana is saying that they are all helpless in the hands of fate or kismet she has to admit that their neighbors are facing family and societal pressure for the proposal.

In the beginning of the screenplay I establish the viewpoint that my protagonist holds but my plot slowly uncovers my premise. Shaheen challenges her fate by walking out of the proposal her parents arrange for her. By declaring her independence Shaheen takes the first step towards challenging her fate. When Shaheen is leaving her parents' house her mother reminds Shaheen what disobeying her parents will bring upon Shaheen. Her father also predicts what her independence might bring upon them.

RUKHSANA (teary voice)
A girl who disobeys her parents never
finds peace.

RUKHSANA
Don't leave your old mother alone, what
will I tell the family, what will I
tell the neighbors?

MURTAZA (loudly so Shaheen
can hear)
This girl will bring shame upon us

Soon Shaheen settles in the new village Chak-Soma and becomes friends with siblings Omar and the fifteen year old Mahjabeen, who have a progressive father Haider, who also happens to be the school master of the boy's school in the village.

Shaheen and Mahjabeen together open up the girl's primary school. One day Mahjabeen is abducted by the village landlord Jabbar who forcefully marries her and keeps her in his house. When Mahjabeen's family find out all the relatives gather at Haider's place and make a decision. The meeting is overseen by Haider's older brother Hussein who voices the concerns of family honor and societal pressure. Haider remains exceptionally quiet in this scene because Hussein blames the abduction of Mahjabeen on Haider's ideas and dreams for his daughter. In this situation Hussein has the say by the virtue of being the eldest in the family and thus decides not to report Mahjabeen's Abduction, he says;

HUSSEIN
We can't bring an abducted girl back
home. This will bring shame upon the
whole family. Who will marry her? Who
will accept her? She will live a life
of misery, it is better we accept what
fate had bought upon us.

Mahjabeen's abduction, and the fact that her family chooses to let her stay with her kidnapper, troubles and challenges Shaheen. Shaheen does not believe that there is no way out, so she struggles to rescue Mahjabeen despite the risks involved. By being able to successfully rescue Mahjabeen she proves that we are not helpless in the hands of fate. The underlying issue of honor is dealt with in a more subtle way. Shaheen transcends her

boundaries of honor by walking out of her parent's house and rejecting the proposal. Mahjabeen comes back to her parents' house after being kidnapped. Both the characters challenge the norms of honor and survive

Female Muslim stereotype in Hollywood and the process of writing my screenplay Shaheen

To write the screenplay Shaheen, I had to not only understand the tenets of screenwriting but also understand the stereotypes of the female Muslim characters present in Hollywood.

Mohja Kahf describes three stereotypes that are commonly used for female Muslim characters in the Western narrative, these stereotypes are 'victims of gender oppression', 'escapee of her intrinsically oppressive culture' and 'the pawn of male power'. (Kahf 2000, p. 149) Kahf(1999) warns that even a Muslim woman could use such stereotypes in her writings. Trinh (1989) has explored the pressure a woman from a diverse background may face while writing, how expectations and the desire to explain ones perspective conflicts with writing just as a form of expression or art. Amireh and Majaj (2000) explains the dilemma many Arab feminist face. If they criticised their culture they were saying what was already known about the oppressive nature of the Arab society. But if they tended to challenge the 'ready-made' stereotypes that exist about Arab woman, they 'were accused of defensiveness'. (Amireh & Majaj 2000, p. 23)

When I started writing the screenplay, I got caught up many times in these questions. Obviously I feel that the representation of Muslim woman currently in Hollywood is fraught with problems. But I didn't realise that there was expectation from me as a Muslim writer that will affect my writing. Trinh (1989) explains the burdens of these anxieties and suggests that women from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds should keep on trying to say or 'unsay' their stories. She also notes that the culturally diverse female writer is bound to go through

'praises and criticism that either ignore dispense with or over emphasise her racial' or religious background. (Trinh 1989, p. 6)

Shaheen is a strong motivated young girl, who aspires to do better than her traditional role defines her to do. She challenges these roles and expectations within her culture; the following exchange with her brother demonstrates this

INT. HOME - RAWALPINDI, PAKISTAN -DAY

Shaheen's brother SHAHBAZ enters Shaheen's room

Shaheen is at her desk scribbling something, she ignores Shahbaz

Shahbaz looks at Benazir Bhutto's poster and picks up a pen from Shaheen's desk.

He raises the pen to draw a moustache on Bhutto's face

Shaheen snatches the pen and pushes Shahbaz on to the bed

SHAHEEN

No messing around with my new poster

Shahbaz drops on the bed and casually puts his hands beneath his head, looks up first at the poster and then at Shaheen

SHAHBAZ

I think that a moustache will suit

Shaheen lightly throws the pen at Shahbaz

SHAHEEN

She doesn't have to be like a man to rule the country

Shahbaz catches the pen

SHAHBAZ

She certainly wants to be like a man

SHAHEEN

She wants to be a prime minister and rule the country

SHAHBAZ

So she is trying to be a man

SHAHEEN

She is trying to be the best she can be for her country and for her self

Male support characters in Shaheen

The main challenge I faced in writing Shaheen was exploring the 'victimised' stereotype of the female Muslim character and how to avoid such a narrative. (Kahf 1999, p. 1) Supporting this stereotype of the female Muslim character is the stereotype of the Muslim male character who 'perpetuates' this violence, resulting in 'the simple opposition between the powerless (read: women) and the powerful (read: men) groups of people' (Mohanty 2003 a, pp. 54-5)

While the antagonist of my screenplay is a Muslim male, I have portrayed a variety of Muslim men in the screenplay. The following scene shows the variety of perspectives male characters have on the issue of the abduction of Mahjabeen

HUSSEIN

What will we do with her once she comes back? People will point fingers at her and no one will agree to marry her

OMAR

I think we shouldn't care about that, we should get her back because she has been abducted against her will. Allah knows how he is keeping her.

HUSSEIN

That is not our concern anymore; he has taken her so it's Jabbar's responsibility to keep her the way he wishes. I think he must have married her by now

HAIDER

Why did this have to happen to us?

HUSSEIN

Well you should have kept your beautiful daughter out of people's sights. You gave her too much freedom, let her go anywhere on her own; someone was going to go for her

Thus the scene has three males who have different values. Omar being the youngest does not care what happens after his sister Mahjabeen is brought back and what people say about it.

Haider, the father of the abducted girl, feels guilty for all this, feeling the burden of the blame the society will put on him for not being able to protect his daughter. Hussein however being the head of the family is concerned about the family honor, and thus, being the eldest, decides to let Mahjabeen stay with Jabbar.

I have also shown different father figures in the screenplay. Where Shaheen's father is forceful and abusive, Mahjabeen's father is supportive and has big dreams for his daughter. His son Omar shares the same values and endeavours to rescue Mahjabeen. The antagonist Jabbar and the police officer Ahsan are both responsible for offences against Mahjabeen and Shaheen. But they both find redemption in the screenplay. Jabbar's back story also gives us an insight into the helplessness he has faced in terms of his own forced marriage at the age of eighteen to an older woman and the unhappiness that it has created in his life. His redemption becomes conceivable when Ahsan tells Shaheen how Jabbar raised him after his father died. This also reveals why Ahsan despite admiring Shaheen sides with Jabbar and wants to protect him.

Conclusion

The aim of my project was to write a screenplay using the classic Hollywood style three-act structure, for a strong female Muslim character. The reason for using the Hollywood structure to write a screenplay about a Muslim woman was to explore whether the use of Hollywood structure will help or hinder me in writing my screenplay Shaheen.

One problem for me has been to identify case studies in which screenwriters depict Muslim woman as strong intelligent characters that are capable of initiating social change. My initial research on films about Muslim women indicated that Hollywood's representation of Muslim women is 'stereotypical'. (Shaheen 2003, p. 183)

So I wanted to explore whether the Hollywood screenwriting structure itself was the problem. Could the three-act structure help me write a Muslim character which did not fall into the three stereotypical characters that Mohja Kahf (2000) has defined?

The choice of the three-act structure may seem paradoxical; why would a Muslim woman knowingly use a structure that has a large number of stereotypical portrayals of Muslim women? The answer may be that there is a lack of Muslims especially female Muslim screenwriters in Hollywood. (Shaheen 2008, pp. 55-64) My research explores the challenges of writing as a Muslim woman within the Hollywood screenwriting structures, so if Hollywood screenwriting structures can be used to write a strong female Muslim protagonist, then why does Hollywood not have such characters? Many Muslim women write but positive representations amongst those writings seem to be missing from Hollywood. Amireh and Majaj (2000) discuss how the layers of mediation, reception, and selection processes affect what literature is available to the American public about the Muslim woman. However Kahf

warns that 'even a Muslim woman writer could conceivably author such representations, since the issue is not the identity of the author but the mobilisation of the core Western narrative'. (Kahf 1999, p. 3) Kahf (1999) explains that the 'Western narrative' situates the Muslim woman as the 'negative female ideal' (Kahf 1999, p. 7). She also observes that 'the paradigm of the oppressed Muslim female', 'is a very rigid and narrow paradigm'. (Kahf 1999, p. 179)

So what happens as a result of such a paradigm that represents a very rigid stereotype? While the 'Western perspectives' for the representations of Western women would 'emerge with polyphonous richness', 'with internal divergences', 'differences and tensions evident' the representation of Muslim women would seem to 'appear as seamless and monolithic'. (Narayan 1997, p. 143)

My aim in writing this screenplay was to author a diverse representation of Muslim women within Hollywood structures. Therefore I used the study of character psychology to help me understand how to use the three-act structure for my protagonist Shaheen. So the main question emerging from my research is whether the study of character psychology in Hollywood style three-act structure has helped me write my screenplay Shaheen or not? The answer to that question is yes, the study of the three-act structure and the study of the five features of character psychology have helped me write my screenplay Shaheen.

The five features of protagonist psychology as defined by Dethridge are, 'their physical and psychological nature', 'their history', 'their immediate dramatic problem', 'their character arc or journey' and 'the premise' (Dethridge 2003, p. 47) Over the period of my research I studied these five features. I wrote and rewrote my character Shaheen, I have at times authored a 'colonialist' 'representation' of Muslim women. (Narayan 1997, p. 45) I also faced the anxieties of writing as a Muslim woman. Like many third world woman writers I also went through the

dilemma of deciding where to 'place my loyalties'. (Trinh 1989, p. 9) 'Writer of colour? Woman writer? Or woman of colour' and in my case Muslim woman of colour, 'which comes first' where do I place my loyalties?'(Trinh 1989, p. 9)

In this exegesis I have also explored how I felt about this writing process, what I thought I was expected to write and what I understood from this process. My writing was personal and was important to me, but it kept on either reflecting what the Western audiences expect from a story of the Muslim woman or I ended up defending my society, culture and religion. My process of writing hence not only consisted of writing, but to unwrite or 'unsay', what I wanted to express through my screenplay (Trinh 1989, p. 80)

What kept me focused through the process of unwriting the dilemmas of identity and self explanation; was the focus on the tenets of screenwriting, the in-depth study of the psychology of character that I was trying to write. The first step was to define the premise, the reason why I was really writing this screenplay. Next I focused on understanding Shaheen's 'back story' and generate her 'inner and outer realms'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 47) In understanding my protagonist Shaheen's 'physical and psychological nature' I was able to identify the 'immediate dramatic problem' from which I was able to define the 'character arc or journey'. (Dethridge 2003, p. 47)

Directions for future research

I have explored how the Hollywood style screenwriting structure can be used to portray a strong Muslim woman in a positive light. So these Hollywood screenwriting principles can be used not only to represent Muslim women, but women belonging to other cultures.

The writing processes for other culturally diverse women for the screen may be explored further in future researches. This could further investigate the limitations, receptions and

expectations that women from diverse backgrounds may face when trying to write in the English language. Another area that can be looked into for further research is the limitations of using the English language as a language of dialogue for diverse women in screenwriting.

In terms of screenwriting theory I discovered that there were many books on screenwriting helping new screenwriters explore specific genres. Books like *Genre Screenwriting* by Duncan (2008), *The Soul of Screen-writing* by Cunningham (2008) and *Alternative Scriptwriting* by Dancyger and Rush (1995) have sections dedicated to guide writers to write movies in genres like romantic comedy, thriller, action adventure and melodrama. However it was hard to find any book dedicated to write screenplays in the drama genre. There is a section dedicated to the mythic structure of drama in the book *Myth and the Movie* by Stuart Voytilla (1999). It may be due to the vastness of the genre and also because the drama genre can be subdivided into many sub-genres. McKee (1999) classifies the drama genre as a 'social drama' dividing it into six sub-genres which are 'domestic drama', 'woman's film', 'political drama', 'eco-drama', 'medical drama' and 'psycho-drama'. (McKee 1999, p. 82) McKee also mentions 'maturation plot', 'education plot' and 'redemption plots' that could be classified as sub-genres of drama. (McKee 1999, p. 81) So there is an opportunity for researchers to investigate the techniques of the drama genre for screenwriters.

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