



Commodifying Gender: A MatFem Perspective on "I Am For Sale, Who Will Buy Me?"

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ABSTRACT

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This research investigates the commodification of women in Afghanistan through an in-depth analysis of the anonymous Afghani-authored short story, "I Am For Sale, Who Will Buy Me" (2010). Employing a Materialist Feminist lens and drawing upon Silvia Federici's theoretical framework in *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), the study examines the influence of religious doctrines on women's social and economic status, culminating in their marginalization. The analysis dissects the exploitation of gender roles, objectification of female bodies, and the commodification of Afghan women, revealing the intricate interplay between patriarchal systems, religious ideologies, and gender disparity. Additionally, the study explores historical and contemporary challenges faced by Afghan women, encompassing barriers to education, economic opportunities, and social integration. Emphasizing the necessity for comprehensive approaches, this research advocates transformative change and gender justice, stressing its urgency. Positioned within the broader discourse on women's struggles, this study aims to contribute an understanding of women's oppression with a primary focus on fostering agency and societal transformation for Afghan women.

Keywords: objectification, patriarchy, Afghanistan, Taliban, commoditization

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I

This research explores the commodification of women in Afghanistan through a critical reading of the anonymous Afghani-authored short story “I Am For Sale, Who Will Buy Me” (2010)¹ from Silvia Federici's Materialist Feminist position. The selected narrative reveals intricate power dynamics within patriarchal structures, examining societal constraints on women's financial autonomy and educational pursuits under oppressive regimes. This scrutiny, drawing parallels between historical and contemporary constraints, echoes Federici's perspective, illustrating how patriarchal structures intersect with economic constraints to subjugate women. Furthermore, it highlights the historical commodification of women within oppressive structures, emphasizing the economic marginalization of Afghan women. This representation contributes significantly to discourse on women's resistance, empowerment, segregation, and identity issues, resonating with women's universal anti-patriarchal struggle beyond Afghanistan.

In this essay, I scrutinize the narrative of the young Afghan girl by employing Silvia Federici's conceptual framework expounded in *Caliban and the Witch*. The short story, “I Am for Sale, Who Will Buy Me?” (Elizabeth, 2011) is authored as part of the Free Women Writers (FWW) project (Imran, pp. 211-216) that serves as a potent narrative reflecting the challenges faced by Afghan women. Initiated by activists Noorjahan and Batul Moradi, the FWW project aims to advocate for justice, equality, and freedom of expression for Afghan women.

Moreover, the analysis highlights the oversight in recognizing the genuine and fundamental aspects of women's lives within social and cultural contexts. Materialist Feminists such as Chrys Ingraham and Rosemary Hennessy describe Materialist Feminism or MatFem as an approach to understanding how real-life factors such as wealth and resources influence the treatment of men and women in society. Rather than focusing exclusively on male dominance (patriarchy), it incorporates several factors that influence social and psychological relations in a given historical and cultural context (Gimenez, 2000, p. 19), thus affecting gender dynamics. By negating women's choice and autonomy, it highlights the pivotal role of reproduction in generating value and exploitation within society. By acknowledging the significance of reproductive labor—like child-rearing, caregiving, and domestic work—as sources of value creation and exploitation, it doesn't feel awkward to acknowledge that there are some real differences between men and women that matter in society. Materialist Feminism unveils the origins of power imbalances between women and men. This Matfem theoretical

¹ I have cited this short story across this article from Elizabeth Hoover's 2011 online compiled anthology of three stories. As this story was uploaded first in 2010, I use the same date when I mention it in Abstract and in Introductory paragraph. Since Hoover's is an online source, there are no page numbers. For complete reference, see Hoover, E. (2011, May 17) in References.

framework in connection with Federici's analysis of the control and exploitation of women's reproductive labor in the transition from feudalism to capitalism (2004, p. 11) has its contemporary relevance. Consequently, this study moves beyond stereotypical portrayals of Afghan women and men on a global scale. My discussion on research methodology and theoretical framework in the next section clarifies it further.

II

The research methodology employed in this article is qualitative, rooted in critical analysis and feminist scholarship. A detailed examination of the selected narrative, "I Am For Sale, Who Will Buy Me," is conducted using the principles of materialist feminism. An intricate intersection between materiality and gender roles is explored within the narrative through textual analysis and thematic coding as part of the methodology. By analyzing the text closely, this study aims to illuminate the power dynamics, the commodification of women's bodies, and the socioeconomic factors that influence gender constructs. A qualitative analysis aims to unravel the multifaceted layers of gender representation and societal structures embedded within the narrative through a materialist feminist lens. By using this approach, the analysis explores the interactions between material conditions and gender dynamics within the selected text, contributing to an understanding of how materiality and gender roles affect one another.

The basic premise of MatFem approach is situated in the oppression of women in a capitalistic and patriarchal setup (Delphy, 2016, p. 140). In Silvia Federici's groundbreaking book, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*, a feminist-Marxist lens repositions women within historical analysis, challenging the historical dismissal of marginalized narratives, especially those concerning women. Published in 2004 by Autonomedia, Federici's work meticulously examines the transition from feudalism to capitalism (2004, p. 9), scrutinizing classical Marxist assumptions about corporeal transformations during this epoch, particularly women's bodies' rebellious nature.

This seminal work unveils the concealed role of women in history, probing the demise of feudalism (Federici, 2004, p. 12), the birth of capitalism (p. 20), and the trajectory of capitalist development at the expense of women's bodies. It challenges unidirectional historical narratives that endorse the emergence of capitalism as natural and emancipatory, arguing against the widely held perception of capitalism as a liberating force. Federici debunks Marx's notion in *Capital, Vol. I*, asserting that primitive accumulation persists in evolved forms over time. Her analysis highlights the creation of new divisions of labor based on sexuality, the construction of patriarchal hierarchies, and the mechanization of the proletarian body, with the witch-hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries central to her thesis.

Examining the transition, Federici emphasizes the struggles against feudalism in the Middle Ages, proposing alternatives not only to feudalism but also to capitalism. She contends that capitalism emerged as a reactionary counter-revolution against anti-feudal movements by feudal lords, merchants, and religious authorities. This “transition” (p. 9) waged a war against women, aiming to control reproduction, discipline labor, and perpetuate a patriarchal society rooted in Cartesian rationality.

Federici asserts that witch-hunts significantly shaped capitalist society, intensifying gender divides. Collaborating with the church, the state aimed to eradicate uncontrollable magic, disrupting labor rationalization. Accused women deviated from bourgeois ideals, vilified for their sexuality, akin to capitalist repression, criminalizing non-procreative sexual activities and conflating witches with prostitutes to denigrate women. Throughout the book, Federici meticulously connects capitalism, women's subjugation, witch-hunting, and colonialism (219). While her analysis predominantly focuses on reproductive roles, limiting a comprehensive exploration of women, her methodological fusion of feminism and Marxism invites critical examination. Adopting a Foucauldian genealogical approach to Middle Ages history, Federici's work stands as a robust historiography, making complex concepts accessible and historically grounded. This study employs Federici's theoretical concepts, providing a focused framework to comprehend the challenges faced by Afghan women, exemplified in a specific narrative.

Silvia Federici's book *Caliban and the Witch* can be understood in the context of women's lives today. It is important to note that despite the book's primary focus on historical contexts, it is also able to provide insights and frameworks that can be applied to understanding contemporary issues facing women. In order to understand and contextualize *Caliban and the Witch* to the present day, the analysis of "I Am For Sale, Who Will Buy Me?" (Hoover, 2011) delves into the commoditization and objectification of women through Silvia Federici's theoretical framework, which is based on historical materialism and feminist thought (Landry and Maclean, pp. ix-x.). Federici's framework highlights the historical exploitation and commodification of women's reproductive labor by capitalism and how it relates to the protagonist's objectification in the story. The framework also explores the patriarchal structures' control mechanisms and the role of religious ideologies in perpetuating gender inequality.

III

The trajectory of the young Afghan girl depicted in "I Am For Sale, Who Will Buy Me?" resonates with several key themes delineated in Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*, specifically addressing the commodification of women's autonomy and physicality within oppressive societal frameworks. The integration of Federici's materialist feminist perspective adds depth to the analysis, providing insights into the protagonist's socio-economic status, access to resources, and

systemic forces that shape her experiences. Federici's framework emphasizes the intersections of capitalism, patriarchy, and religious ideologies, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the story's themes.

The narrative opens with the poignant story of a young Afghani girl, navigating life's complexities as a promising student in the midst of a socially oppressive patriarchy. Her world, once stable during her father's lifetime, takes a drastic turn following his demise. The loss shatters her dreams of education, thrusting her into a realm of economic and social constraints, and heightening her precarious existential conditions. Faced with a financial crisis, her uncle assumes the family's caretaker role. This analysis establishes connections between materialist feminism, power dynamics, and the commodification of women's bodies, linking these themes to Silvia Federici's seminal work, *Caliban and the Witch*, which investigates the historical exploitation of women's labor and bodies.

The selected narrative reveals intricate power dynamics entwined with financial control. This facet is vividly portrayed through the writer's uncle who thinks that "money provides him power" (Hoover, 2011). The protagonist is depicted as a symbol of commodification and is assigned a value of \$20,000 to cover familial household expenses. The negotiated agreement between the protagonist's family and her uncle underscores the pivotal role money plays in sustaining the family's livelihood (Hoover, 2011). Consequently, the protagonist considers seeking alternative employment to secure a monthly income of at least \$1,000, shedding light on the economic pressures and limited opportunities she faces. Pitts-Taylor's *Mattering: Feminism, Science, and Materialism* delves into this nexus of power and its correlation with the material body (2016). The exchange of money for the protagonist's well-being resonates with Federici's exploration of how capitalism historically exploited women's labor and bodies for financial purposes (Gimenez, 1998, p. 19).

Additionally, the analysis delves into the constraints imposed on women within patriarchal structures in the narrative, one of which is the generalized societal perception associated with empowering women through financial autonomy. The protagonist's brother equates financial autonomy, represented by possessing a bank account or a mobile phone, with derogatory labels such as "prostitute" (Hoover, 2011). That is why she hides her phone or switches it to a silent mode after she reaches home (Hoover, 2011). She cannot think of leaving home to work and making a sound living for herself. Away from home is not an "option" too because, according to societal norms, girls who leave home or run away "are raped by men and spend years in jail (Hoover, 2011). And if she opts for leaving home, her brothers may believe that if the protagonist goes against the social rules, which is considered "wrong", they will hold her mother responsible for her act and therefore kill her as a punishment (Hoover, 2011).

Also, the narrative underlines the importance of education and the obstacles faced by the narrator seeking knowledge under oppressive regimes. The

story opens with the writer's high proclamation of "thinking big" (Hoover, 2011) since childhood. By raising money for her own studies, the female protagonist is attempting to overcome the economic barriers that limit her educational opportunities. Her desire for education is evident from a young age. Despite the Taliban's restrictions, she remains committed to her educational pursuits. She risks her life to continue her studies in secret and tries to find a plausible solution to sustain herself. She is "thinking about graduating, seeking [her] masters' degree and a PhD, getting a better job, making an independent life, standing on [her] own feet" (Hoover, 2011). She pleads with her mother, "Please afford me the opportunity (Hoover, 2011)". She states: "These days I am thinking of possible solutions." She adds that she has two months to find a solution and how to "get another job, earn at least \$1,000 a month in salary" other than "running away" (Hoover, 2011). By drawing parallels between the Afghan girl's plight and Federici's analysis in *Caliban and the Witch*, one can discern how the commodification of women's agency and bodies remains a poignant reflection of the enduring exploitation perpetuated by capitalist systems across different cultural contexts. The protagonist's story serves as a reminder to never give up in the face of adversity. It also emphasizes the power of education and how it can help individuals break out of oppressive systems. Materialist feminism would recognize that unequal access to resources, such as education, perpetuates gender disparities and reinforces the patriarchal structures that devalue women's potential.

The story suggests a comparison between historical methods used for curtailing women's freedom and autonomy. The narrative traces the societal regression of Afghanistan, highlighting a significant shift from a period of progressive women's rights advancements, such as education and political engagement, to the oppressive regime of the Taliban. Specifically, it draws a parallel between historical practices, like referencing past societal restrictions or limitations imposed on women's autonomy, and the actions taken by the Taliban. Under the Taliban's governance, her brothers were able to attend school, while she was unable to do so. After her father's death, the domestic control falls into her brothers' hands who have grown accustomed to the prevalent divisive attitudes of men for women. The author explains that she "lives with three Talibs and [she] must obey what they say." She claims that she is not "like a girl in the house, but a slave" (Hoover, 2011). The story shows how the Taliban regime imposed their version of Islamic Sharia Law that banned Afghan women. She, like all women in Afghanistan, is not allowed to work, study, or leave the house without a male escort (Hoover, 2011). As mentioned above, she dismisses the option to run away because in the line of Islamic Sharia imposed by the Taliban in Afghanistan, "girls who run away are raped by men and spend years in jail" (Hoover, 2011). It should be kept in mind that these Islamic laws are dogmatic and subjective without little or no connection with true Islamic laws. A similar historical method of restricting women's autonomy by the Taliban's enactment of

strict laws can be traced in an Afghani novelist, Nadia Hashimi's, *Sparks Like Stars* (Almanac, 2021).

Nadia, through her novel, shares a similar story of how the Taliban regime limited women's education, employment, and freedom. She asserts that her goal is "always to show as much as possible the spectrum of Afghanistan history" during the 1970s "when Afghanistan experienced "a time of remarkable promise" (Almanac, 2021). Like the author, Nadia's protagonist Sitara Zamani lived "a life in Afghanistan's thriving cosmopolitan capital, but her world was shattered when communists stage a coup, assassinating the president and her family, and Sitara's entire family. BBC report records Afghan women were given the right to vote in 1919 the following year after the UK (BBC, 2014) and a year before the U.S.A. provided voting rights to women. She describes in this story that when her father was alive, everything was going smoothly and she finished high school and was dreaming about something big to get a higher qualification. It is visible that the father is a very progressive and firm character.

The depiction of the Taliban regime's impact on Afghanistan's political and social fabric links the narrative of war-torn Afghanistan with Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*. The narrative illustrates Afghanistan's political and social decline against a backdrop of conflict. As a result, the socio-political landscape of the country has been shaped by the Taliban's fundamental ideologies. Originally formed in 1996, the Taliban aligned themselves with former Mujahideen fighters from the 1980s and 1990's civil war (UK Amnesty International, 2014). During the early 20th century, Afghanistan made significant strides in women's rights, granting women the right to vote before nations such as the United Kingdom and the United States. During this period, the female protagonist's father's progressive beliefs and support (in the selected short story) contributed to the protagonist's pursuit of education and aspirations for higher degrees. Following the abolition of Purdah (gendered separation) in the 1950s, the narrative also refers to the 1960s (BBC 2014) when women became active participants in politics and society. Since 1996, Afghanistan has witnessed a dramatic decline in its political and social landscape as a result of the Taliban regime's collaboration with former Mujahideen fighters. To restore order following the Soviet occupation, the Taliban imposed strict interpretations of Islamic Sharia law which led to widespread human rights violations. A researcher at Amnesty International, Horia Mosadiq, notes that the transition from relative peace to oppressive rule contrasts greatly with that which preceded the Soviet invasion in 1979.

"I Am for Sale, Who Will Buy Me?" also debunks global myths around all Afghan men as maliciously patriarchal. Furthermore, the narrative emphasizes the intersectional nature of oppression and the importance of solidarity and resistance. This recollects the fact that Afghanistan viewed as a backward country today was not the same in the 20th Century. In providing his daughter with educational resources and encouragement against societal norms imposed by the

Taliban, her father's support symbolizes resistance within the patriarchal system. The author hopes for a bright and successful future despite living under "Talib's black government" (Hoover, 2011). She states an incident when she earns 200 Afs as her first income from "teaching English" in her ninth grade. In her excitement, she gives her salary to her father. The author nostalgically writes about her father's response:

He kissed me and laughed and told me, "Dear, keep your salary for yourself. I don't need it." I said, "Dad, it is for you." He smiled and told me, "It is just the cost of ink for your shoes," and he gave me another 1000 Afs. (Hoover, 2011).

He was her supporter in all aspects. Education is restricted for girls in a patriarchal society, but her father provides her with complete financial and emotional support. In addition to receiving books and school supplies, she is encouraged to work hard to stay at the top of her class. She stresses that "with the encouragement of my father, I was a superstar in my classes. He was my first English teacher and he always called me "my scholar daughter" (Hoover, 2011). As the author remembers, her father stood by her in the face of all the religious and cultural constraints imposed on women by the Talibs. Traditionally, Afghan girls are expected to marry at an early age. It is in line with Federici's examination of resistance against oppressive patriarchal structures, which illustrates how individuals like the Afghan girl's father challenge societal constraints to empower their daughters. It is important to note the importance of communal forms of organization as well as the resistance of women to oppressive economic and patriarchal systems. The young girl's loss of educational opportunities following her father's demise and subsequent commodification exemplifies the entanglement of patriarchal oppression and economic exigencies, resonating with Federici's examination of these intersecting forces.

This connection also aligns with Federici's analysis rooted in historical materialism and feminist thought, shedding light on how patriarchal structures intersect with economic constraints to subjugate and dehumanize women. In her scrutiny of primitive accumulation, enclosure movements, and witch hunts, Federici sheds light on the mechanisms used for suppressing women's agency in historical contexts. Examining historical transitions from feudalism to capitalism, Federici explores how the Taliban enforced rigid gender roles and restricted women's autonomy. According to Federici in *Caliban and the Witch*, oppressive regimes exploit and subjugate women. Although she concentrates on Europe's 16th and 17th centuries, the parallels between oppressive structures back then and the Taliban's strict societal control today are striking.

Furthermore, there is a deep exploration of the relationship between capitalism and commodification in the narrative. The protagonist's labor is monetized by her brothers. Following her father's death, her mother's salary is insufficient to cover the house expenses, she starts teaching classes at a private

school. She states: "Half my salary was for my studies and half went for house expenses" (Hoover, 2011). During these years, she is the poorest student in her class. Throughout this period, she is the least affluent student among her peers, often enduring days without breakfast or lunch. Despite the hardships, her pursuit of education brings her contentment. Sacrificing her transportation allowance to assist with house rent, she commutes to the university on foot. Her physical labor serves as a means of financial gain for her brothers, supporting both her studies and her family's needs. This is a reflection of how capitalism operates. Labor is used for generating income and sustaining livelihoods. In response to their perception of her financial strain or perhaps she is "tired of working so hard", one brother asserts, "It's time for you to get married" (Hoover, 2011). As a consequence, an arrangement is made between her and her first cousin, an uneducated man in his forties from an affluent family with a business and a large residence in a region that adheres to Taliban beliefs. Her uncle, her cousin's father, offers a significant amount of \$20,000 to her family, which could potentially be vital for their survival in anticipation of the forthcoming marriage (Hoover, 2011).

Although this situation commodifies the protagonist, she is offered as a bride for \$20,000, and her brothers assume that "her uncle's money will convince [her] to accept this golden bracelet" (Hoover, 2011). As a result of this symbolic gesture, the bride is assumed to be influenced by the financial ability, status, and wealth of the groom's family. Despite the groom's lack of formal education, his father's financial power and sway are evident, demonstrating how economic power shapes decisions, affecting his life choices and future. The commodification of marriage is evident in this scenario, in which financial concerns override personal well-being or choice. This disturbing portrayal of the protagonist's loss of agency and the commodification of her body echoes themes found in Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*. Materialist feminism asserts the significance of material conditions in shaping gender dynamics (Ferguson 1994). This portrayal aligns with Federici's exploration of power dynamics and the control exerted over women's bodies in capitalist systems (2004, p. 18). The protagonist's situation, assessed as a commodity for a specified monetary sum (Ingraham, 1118/1024), echoes Federici's analysis of women's bodies being exploited and commodified for economic gains, reflecting the objectification and devaluation of women based on material possessions. Here, Federici explores how emerging capitalism exploits and commodifies women's labor through historical materialism and feminist thinking. Multiple instances of economic factors and capitalist ideologies are depicted in the story, emphasizing how financial considerations and the commodification of education, labor, and marriage significantly restrict the protagonist's agency, choices, and future prospects.

In "I Am For Sale, Who Will Buy Me," the narrative powerfully underscores women's subordination, emphasizing the weight of their unpaid domestic labor and caregiving duties. The author states that women are forcefully confined to

their houses to cook, do the house chores, and look after the animals”(Hoover, 2011). As the protagonist writes, during the “last four years” after her father’s passing, she declines “several marriage proposals” because most of them insist that she ceases her studies and never seek employment outside the home (Hoover, 2011). She highlights the common practice of early marriage among Afghan women, emphasizing their expectation to start a family at a young age. Reflecting on her uncle’s household, she mentions that women there “have eight or nine children. They’re confined indoors—even when unwell, they’re not permitted to see a doctor” (Hoover, 2011). According to CIA World Factbook, Afghanistan has the tenth highest birth rate in the world (BBC, 2014). The girl is married off at a young age and an Afghan family on average bears five children. Federici claims that her work here is only a sketch of the research that would be necessary to clarify the connections. She draws a relation between the witch-hunt and the contemporary development of a new sexual division of labor, confining women to reproductive work (2004, p. 10). Sara Ahmed argues that

not just the body, but that which makes it possible and which limits its actions: the precarious, accidental, contingent, expedient, striving, dynamic status of life in a messy, complicated, resistant, brute world of materiality, a world regulated by the exigencies, the forces, of space and time. We have forgotten the nature, the ontology, of the body, the conditions under which bodies are encultured, psychologized, given identity, historical location, and agency. We have forgotten where we come from (2008, p. 23).

This exclusion has led to women’s roles in reproductive labor being undervalued or overlooked within the capitalist system. Consequently, it reinforces the economic and social disparities between men and women.

In the light of Federici’s propositions, the Taliban’s policies confine women to limited societal roles as a result of the commodification of women’s labor under oppressive systems. However, feminists like Murphy are critical of this seeming claim of emancipation and point out the actual reason of commodifying aspect of capitalist consumerist culture. This concept is underscored in an article titled “Inner Human Voracity and Forbearance: Debates of Feminism in the Light of Quran and Iqbal” by Rabia Aamir. The article explains that the “commodifying aspect of capitalist consumerist culture” has led to the discredit and loss of legitimate claims of representation for women in contemporary society (101). This also underscores how their exclusion from significant participation in capitalist development, particularly in the economic sphere, has resulted in a power imbalance between genders. These practices were once customary in history but persist in today’s Afghan society, embodying what Gimenez describes as ‘material historical moments’—a complex network of social relations shaping gender hierarchies (Gimenez, p. 19). Materialist feminism attempts to focus specifically on social arrangements that emphasize women’s role, most notably, in the family, domesticity, and motherhood.

The narrator takes a central role in unraveling the story of Afghan women through personal narration, emphasizing the use of the 'I' pronoun. She adds, "What I write here are the wounded and torn pieces of my heart and the secrets an Afghan girl suffers" (Hoover, 2011). This approach positions the story as a memoir, placing the female experience at its core and giving voice to the unheard and marginalized. Describing the potential outcome of her marriage, she states, "I won't stay in this world" (Hoover, 2011). Utilizing linguistic techniques such as frequent interrogative sentences, exclamations, and negative phrases like "I can't marry", "NO", and "Nothing" (Hoover, 2011), the author prompts a self-reflexive response from readers. These techniques highlight the social and economic conditions of Afghan women within a tightly controlled religious society. The disrupted syntactic fluency, marked by intermittent use of punctuation and dislocated syntax, reinforces the theme of dislocation at a linguistic level.

At its core, the essay concludes with the protagonist's poignant lament, depicting herself as a "piece of cloth" of minimal value, posing the haunting query, "Who will buy me?" This question along with an introspective declaration, "I cost little," (Hoover, 2011) serves as a pivotal catalyst, urging an examination of the systemic exploitation of women as commodities for men's material gains. It prompts a reconsideration of societal structures and their profound impact on women's autonomy and agency (Gimenez, 1998, p. 10). This thematic thread aligns with Federici's exploration of historical exploitation within capitalist systems (p. 92), calling for a critical reevaluation of the historical commodification of women's bodies and labor for material ends (p. 13).

Moreover, the narrator's anonymity bestows a universal resonance upon the story, transcending individual female agency and delving into broader societal implications. Initially chronicling the pursuit of education and self-assertion in Afghanistan, the narrative adeptly traverses beyond the exploitation of women, eloquently highlighting how marginalized individuals, commodified by capitalist ideology, face systemic oppression. Materialist Feminism, distinct from other feminist paradigms fixated solely on bodily oppression, delves deeper into issues such as coerced marriages and motherhood. It emphasizes the criminalization of women's control over procreation, noting its profound impact not only on women but also on the structural fabric of capitalism (Federici, 2004, p. 92). Materialist feminism broadens its scope beyond biological experiences, acknowledging the role of social location, knowledge, and identity in shaping lived experiences. Critiquing the societal perception of marriage as a woman's primary career, it exposes the systemic dismissal of women's self-sufficiency. This forfeiture of control over wages, coupled with land dispossession, exacerbates the challenges faced by women in marginalized positions.

The narrative of the Afghani girl vividly portrays the theme of commodification, showcasing how her uncle's actions diminish her autonomy to a mere economic transaction amid financial hardships. Instead of addressing the

family's financial needs through alternate means, he opts to sell her as a bride for monetary gain, objectifying her agency and body in the process. The young girl's experience encapsulates the harsh reality of women being treated as commodities, reinforcing Federici's arguments regarding the historical oppression and exploitation of women under capitalist systems. The relationship between gender politics and body control is highlighted in this short story. Confinements, forced marriages, and domestic rapes are examples of how female bodies are controlled and cashed for monetary gains. Federici's work scrutinizes how capitalism historically exploits and commodifies women's labor (p. 135). The narrative is consistent with her exploration of how capitalism historically exploited and restricted women's labor. This is portrayed in the selected narrative as economic dependence, in which the female character is deprived of resources and opportunities for higher education. This is because of financial constraints.

Federici examines how economic factors interact with patriarchal structures to suppress women's autonomy and reinforce gender disparities. Due to economic limitations, women are denied educational opportunities, which is a manifestation of their subjugation. By limiting women's access to education and economic resources, Federici's analysis illustrates how capitalism perpetuates and reinforces gender inequalities. Moreover, the tragic outcome exemplifies the extreme consequences of patriarchal oppression when a woman chooses to end her life rather than succumb to forced marriage. It emphasizes the severity of gendered expectations and societal pressures, echoing Federici's analysis of how oppressive systems control women's bodies and choices. Federici's exploration of how capitalist and patriarchal systems historically exploit women's labor and autonomy corresponds with the narrative's depiction of economic dependency and the resulting limitations on women's autonomy. This highlights the intersectionality of economic factors and gender inequality.

The story vividly portrays the intersection of materiality and patriarchy, exemplifying the commodification of the protagonist's body within a capitalist framework. In South Asian societies, women bear the weight of "honor," leaving them more vulnerable to cruelty and injustice. The narrative's economic language, from the title "I Am For Sale, Who Will Buy Me?" to references to money and material possessions, underscores the narrative's exploration of the protagonist's objectification and exploitation. The narrative accentuates the dichotomy of material wealth, centering on the transactional nature of life through the title. This prompts a self-reflective exploration of consumerism. The story's language echoes the significance of material possessions like cars, mobile phones, and bank accounts, illustrating the exchange of material utility in the selling and purchasing of the author herself. Money becomes pivotal for the protagonist, facilitating her dream of education, yet becoming essential for survival within her patriarchal family. Following her father's death and a financial crisis, her uncle, instead of seeking solutions, opts to sell her, a distressing decision is further exacerbated when her brother follows suit, selling her for money. Through a materialist

feminist lens, the story unveils the grim reality of women's bodies being commodified and exploited in patriarchal and capitalist systems, reinforcing their subordination. This urgent narrative challenges the existing gender roles and advocates for transformative social change, envisioning a society where women enjoy the same social and economic equality as men. This version aims to distill the key points about the story's portrayal of commodification and exploitation of women's bodies while underscoring the urgency for progressive societal change envisioned by materialist feminism.

Federici provides a context for analyzing the historical commodification and exploitation of women within oppressive social structures as Afghanistan descends into political and social chaos under the Taliban regime. In *Caliban and the Witch*, Federici meticulously examines how capitalism intertwines with the suppression of women's autonomy, particularly in their access to resources and education. Within capitalist systems, women's labor and roles have systematically faced devaluation, often relegating them to marginalized positions within the workforce. Her exploration sheds light on how these systems historically exploited women's labor, limiting their access to resources, including educational opportunities. Her analysis emphasizes the disturbing commodification of the protagonist, aligning with her broader investigation into how capitalism devalues and exploits women's agency and labor. Furthermore, she illustrates how capitalism establishes economic structures prioritizing profit-making and power consolidation, confining women to domestic or undervalued labor sectors, and thus limiting their access to resources and education. Throughout history, women have been systematically denied equal opportunities for educational and economic advancement within these capitalist structures, perpetuating gender-based inequalities. Federici's work exposes the historical processes by which capitalist systems devalue and commodify women's labor, creating economic disparities that restrict women's access to education and resources, ultimately suppressing their autonomy and impeding their economic empowerment. As a result, she sees the oppressive nature of regimes such as the Taliban as mirroring the themes of control and commodification in her work, which sheds light on the challenges faced by Afghan women in such oppressive environments.

The narrative vividly illustrates how dysfunctional political and social structures entangle psychological, cultural, and emotional constraints, obstructing marginalized groups from attaining economic and social stability. Materialist feminism, highlighting gender as a social construct, exposes assigned responsibilities like childbirth within societal structures. This perspective delves into gendered labor divisions, unequal compensation, and the undervaluation of caregiving. The story culminates in a poignant reflection encapsulating despair within oppressive conditions: "I will leave the world for those who can live in it, who can find a solution" (Hoover, 2011).

Underpinning the narrative is a profound agony beyond physical existence. Materialist feminism emphasizes the role of diverse material conditions in shaping gender's social construction. Christine Delphy's theoretical proposition prioritizes social transformation over seeking change within capitalism. She exposes how societal gender roles subjugate women to domestic chores, deconstructing marriage as an exploitative labor contract for men (Delphy, 2016, p. 11). Emphasizing the woman's intersectional experience—socio-economic class, cultural context, and patriarchal influence—materialist feminism recognizes multifaceted factors shaping women's lives. Federici's exploration of women's bodies around transition to capitalism illustrates regulated reproductive capacities and disciplined sexuality, turning bodies into conflict battlegrounds.

IV

Federici's work, *Caliban and the Witch*, offers valuable analytical frameworks that resonate with contemporary Afghan women's struggles. While her historical focus on Europe requires careful consideration in applying parallels to Afghan society, her insights on capitalism, patriarchy, and resistance hold relevance in a global context. Federici's emphasis on solidarity and transformative potential in the face of oppression remains pertinent to modern feminist movements. Her theoretical framework aids in understanding gender-based challenges in Afghanistan, supplementing contemporary research and local perspectives. *Caliban and the Witch* not only provides historical context but also guides efforts toward gender justice and liberation, reinforcing the importance of localized analysis in understanding Afghan women's circumstances.

Conclusively, this essay presents a progressive examination of patriarchy within the Afghan context, delving into the evolving political and social landscape over the past five decades. It sheds light on the exploitation of women's rights by various groups for political gain, advocating for the recognition and freedom of Afghan women (Hennessey, 1993, p. 71). In another article, Sara Suleri is cited as maintaining a similar point of view that for the woman from the third world surpassing the constricting object status becomes crucial, as it adds complexity to the task of articulating views from both the standpoint of being a woman and subsequently as a postcolonial figure (Aamir, 2018, 83). As a result of highlighting this perspective, policymakers, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations (as in this case) may be able to tailor interventions and policies to address the specific needs of various groups of Afghan women. This analysis contributes to amplifying female voices by addressing a spectrum of critical issues within male-dominated Afghan society, including patriarchy, imperialism, religion, politics, marginalization, and suppression.

This research conducted by a Pakistani holds the potential to significantly impact this area by offering unique insights and perspectives, enriching the comprehension of Afghan women's experiences through a diverse cultural and regional lens. Through an exploration of the narrative's themes, this

article seeks to address and contextualize gender inequalities inherent in Afghan society while utilizing the theoretical implications of Materialist Feminism (MatFem). By examining the commodification of women's agency and bodies within the story, it sheds light on broader gender inequities within Afghan society. Additionally, this study unveils the repercussions of Taliban administration and the exploitation of women under fundamental religious principles, offering insights into the plight of Afghan women amidst societal norms.

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