

The road to mecca essay sample

[Politics](#), [Democracy](#)



In this essay I will discuss the way the play “ The Road to Mecca” represents women’s rights to express themselves freely. Helen is a widow who lives in a rural Afrikaans town in the Karoo, New Bethseda. Since her husband’s death, Helen has filled her home and garden with statues and works of art such as wise men, camels, owls, mermaids and other figures. She has decorated her home with candles and mirrors and mosaics. She has created her own “ Mecca” of beauty and freedom among the conservative Afrikaans society that surrounds her.

The play explores her relationship with a young woman, Elsa Barlow. Elsa is a teacher from CapeTown and had been attracted by the Art of Helen’s home and befriended her five years earlier. The play starts with a visit from Elsa who has driven for 10 hours because of a troubling letter she received from Helen. Helen has had a few accidents around the house and the conservative Afrikaans “ dominee” is trying to convince Helen to move into a retirement home. Elsa realizes that Helen is desperate for someone to renew her faith in herself and her art. The play takes place in mostly one evening, in this evening friendships are challenged and their lives questioned.

Elsa is a radical, rebellious teacher that teaches uncontroversial material to her coloured students. She is an independent rebellious woman that believes in human rights and freedom of speech. When Elsa and Helen are discussing Katrina (Helens maid), Elsa expresses her feelings of feminism in the statement “ There’s nothing sacred in a marriage that abuses a woman.” Elsa has a very liberal way of thinking and wants to stand up for woman and encourage women to stand up for themselves. She wants Katrina to get out of the abusive relationship she is in with a drunk and she comments that “

She has got a few rights, Miss Helen, and I just want her to know what they are.” Elsa is outraged by the condition Katrina is living in and feels very strongly about her “freeing herself” from her toxic marriage and standing up for her human rights. She says that Helen should “Tell her to demand her rights to get up there and put her case.” Helen and Elsa have an intimate relationship and a great friendship, Elsa appears to be the more outspoken aggressive person and Helen the more calm, subdued person. These seem to be their coping mechanism due to the distress they are both experiencing.

Helen and Elsa both believe in their own freedom, Elsa’s approach tends to be more political, liberal and outspoken. Her words are her choice of freedom and she is an avid believer in freedom of choice. Helen although more quiet and less outspoken, is a source of motivation and admiration for Elsa. Unlike Elsa, Helen’s expression of freedom is her artworks. Although tragic, her husband’s death set her on a journey of self-fulfillment, inner peace and a soul-searching adventure. Helen does not agree with Elsa’s point of view with regards to Katrina and that woman should stand up for their rights and tells Elsa, “you’re terrible” to which Elsa is quick to reply that she is an “old, hypocrite”. Elsa often confronts Helen with statements such as “that’s the Afrikaaner in you speaking”. Elsa is diplomatic and well spoken and uses her speech as her weapon and aid of freedom.

Miss Helen creates beautiful artworks out of recyclable materials and cement that often upset the community; children have been caught throwing stones at her house and her statue. The community believes in conformity and the “

model way” of how people should behave and what people should do and Helen rebels against this and causes a lot of conflict.

Helen is not troubled by being treated as an outcast. She admits that she did not love her husband and remembers “ the darkness that nearly smothered” her life which was the emptiness until after his funeral, where instead of becoming a church going widow, she became an artist and stopped going to church. This upset the community and Marius the dominee. Helen was accused of being mad. The death of her husband set her free from the “ Afrikaaner life” that she was expected to lead.

Helen breaks every “ social rule” of the town and withdraws from the company of the community. She finds a peace in her home and discovers who she is and her direction. Many of the towns people see her sculptures as “ evil” and idolatry. Helen feels that her art is a direct representation of herself and her soul. Elsa is enchanted by Helen’s art and her freedom of expression. They both challenge each other and encourage each other in a time and place where woman are supposed to conform and succumb. The dominee comes to visit Helen while Elsa is there and an argument erupts. The dominee calls Helen’s art a “ hobby” and offers her a place at the retirement village where she could have a room to practice her hobby. Elsa and the dominee have a conflict in interests, Elsa is too outspoken for the dominee of the small town and they argue over and for Helen. They both believe they are looking out for Helen’s best interest and fight for what they want for her. Helen is torn and Elsa makes some cruel remarks towards her

character and her standing up for herself. Helen does not feel the need to stand up for herself in order to be free.

The dominee sees Helens art as against Christianity and a spiritual war takes place between Christianity and the self-relying and self-attaining free spirit. Helen refers to her art as her Mecca, Mecca being the holy city of Islam which in itself challenged the belief of the masses in the community (Christianity). Helen does not accept the dominee's offer to move to the retirement home and agrees with Elsa to go to the doctor to maintain her health so that she can remain independent, not only emotionally and spiritually but physically too. Helen doubts herself and her art but redefines herself and her home through the help of her friend. Helen's happiness did not rely on the community, they had turned their back on her a long time ago, but her happiness was her Mecca, which was herself. Helen's candles were a representation of her light and passion zest for life. Elsa rejoiced in her company and found strength through her. Elsa had her own troubles to face, that of lost love and troubles at work where she refused to apologise for going against the norms of society and indulged in Helens artwork to find the strength to be her own woman and stand up for what she believed.

Helen's artwork is her freedom of expression and an inspiration to Elsa. Both woman had a different way of expressing their freedom and different ideas and beliefs. The woman have taken a stand and gone against the norms of society and rebelled against social issues. The play addresses important issues of feminism. Although Elsa and Helen are conflicted and fight about their ideas, feelings and belief, Elsa states that Helen is " the first truly free

spirit I have ever known". The play explores the troubles of artists and the misunderstanding of their passion and drive as well as the need for self-fulfillment and a self-searching journey of freedom and joy, to a person's own Mecca.