

Female characters in "the road the mecca"

[Literature](#), [Character](#)



Within Athol Fugard's "The Road the Mecca", there are three important female characters: Helen Martins, Elsa Marlow, and Katrina. Each one of these women face various struggles during the story such as old age, loneliness and many kinds of prejudice from the people living in New Bethesda and Cape Town. " This oppression is religious, social, marital and racial."

The first woman is Helen Martins. She is the main character of the story. She is a woman whom is nearly seventy years old and who has recently lost her husband. After the loss of her love she resorted to creating sculptures as a means of seeking comfort and a way in which to battle the feeling of sanguinity. It is this that causes her to face religious oppression. The townsfolk disagree with the sculptures displayed across Helen's yard and send the local pastor to try and persuade Helen to remove her sculptures but, Helen refuses to do so; she claimed that the darkness of her life can be removed by her candles, freedom, and work.

Helen Martins also suffered from social oppression. The same local pastor, Pastor Byleveld, later visits Helen again, only this time for a different reason. He offers her the necessary papers of containment for the old age home, Sunshine Home for the Aged. This is after Helen told her friend Elsa: " The only reason I've got for being alive is my Mecca. Without it I'm... nothing... a useless old woman getting on everybody's nerves... and that is exactly what I have started to feel like."

To Helen building her own Mecca has brought interest back into her life and makes her feel fulfilled and happy, yet others want her to stop this purely

based off the fact that they have opposing views about her work. Helen rejects the papers but later on, under stress, she nearly signs the papers. Ironically, when she refuses yet again, the pastor realises his mistake and praises Helen for the amount of will power she possesses.

The next woman is Elsa Marlow. She is an English teacher who built a friendship with Helen Martins as she felt she could trust her. Within the story Elsa suffered severely from social oppression as she was openly opposed to apartheid. She assigned a writing piece to her students which encouraged her black learners to rebel against the systems of the apartheid government. Within the story, she tells Helen that once she returns home, she may have to face the Board of Enquiry of the Cape Town Schools and may possibly be fired for her so-called: "wrongdoings".

It later comes to rise that Elsa is having an affair with a married man which she thought would leave his wife for her (this man's wife was Katrina), however her trust in this man was misplaced and she was left behind as the man returned to his wife. She then realizes that she was pregnant but quickly aborts the baby out of fear of the social repressions she would face if she were to be a teacher with a child out of wedlock as well as the complications she might face with being a single mother. She becomes riddled with guilt over her choice not to oppose an oppressive social system. Elsa also faces more social oppression as Pastor Byleveld tries to get her to convince Helen to sign the papers and be brought into the Sunshine Home for the Aged.

The last woman is Katrina. She suffers both marital oppression and physical violence from her husband. She is a seventeen-year-old maid of Helen who is victimized by apartheid. Her husband, Koos, is a drunkard and accuses her of having their baby with another man. He beats her and threatens her which causes her much distress.

All the oppression which these women face is tied into the setting of the play as it shows the society that these women live in and how it oppresses them. They are mistreated and forced to do things purely due to it being accepted by the rest of society. The problems which these women face highlight the things which are wrong with the world they live in. Even these three women are very different; they face the same issues with oppression