

An investigation of
the book a beggar at
damascus gate by
yasmin zahran essay



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This paper seeks to investigate the book *A Beggar At Damascus Gate* by Yasmin Zahran in the light of the statement that “ It’s a story of a love affair between two contending cultures and ideologies. ” This paper will attempt to explain how love relationships belonging to two separate cultures could actually get affected by their beliefs and ideologies. The main characters in the love story include Ryya, the Palestinian woman who found love with man in the story, and Alex, the British man in the story and with whom Ryya fell in love.

Their love story was actually written by an archaeologist who found a personal journal in the closet of a small hotel in Jordan that describes the love affair between the two. The archaeologist-author therefore tried to piece together the lives of the lovers from the entries or records made in the journal. The author’s inquisitiveness leads to further investigation in which he eventually learns of the complex relationship and tragic destiny of the two lovers. It can be read from the account how the Palestinian people suffered which the author has described from the communications coming from Ryya, to the Alex, her husband.

It’s a story of a love affair between two contending cultures and ideologies really because the love story could be considered a metaphor between the Palestine Culture and the British culture. Their love story turned out to be ill-fated because of the fact of their past that Palestine was a colony of England. The author was able to find the trail in the lives of the Ryya and Alex over many years that are filled with their private thoughts, insinuations of killings, conspiracy, spying, and revolutionary activities.

The author's fascination with Ryya, the wife might have created a bias over her husband who happened to belong to the country of her country's colonizer and that by looking back at history, the lover's situation might still be part of the grand design of things why their country was still fighting for statehood. As a novelist, the writer appeared to have attempted to shape the Palestinian into the traditional role of a woman, but perhaps being pushed more by the reality of the situation, the true picture of Ryya as Palestinian who desired statehood first more than anything else at that time, came out from the novel.

Thus the observation that there is a battle between two contending cultures and ideologies might have a basis after all. Thus within the personal feeling of Ryya, happiness, freedom, independence and dignity are to come in first as nation above all other feeling during momentous encounters in the novel. Another proof that would explain the observation of contending culture and ideologies is the fact that there is nothing traditional about the lives of the husband and wife.

Their spending more time apart than together could only speak of an intimacy that has lacked the opportunity to blossom overtime. The novel also speaks of the couple traveling together and separately and the author was able to portray a meaning the one lover's mission is suspected by the other although one may not have a solid proof to back up each other's suspicion. To understand the view on contending culture and ideologies, one should view therefore the novel with the symbolism of the fight for independence, freedom and happiness and against oppression by one country over another.

Ryya's dealings in the novel with her husband could only lead a reader to believe that she has one true love left in her life, and that is her homeland of Palestine. For Ryya, her country was a place of peacefulness, sacredness, and happiness. In the story, it could be deciphered that her country's much deserved happiness is difficult to enjoy while her revolutionary stance against the occupation of Palestine by Israel was still there.

Ryya's showing of emotions to her husband could be best understood perhaps by someone who has experienced oppression and deprivation of freedom like a Palestinian. Historically, Palestine is one that is referred to as the Canaan or Promised land to the Israelites. It may be recalled that in the Bible times, that Israeli people were slaves in Egypt. By Bible account, there Egyptian slaves were promised a land of milk and honey which they were promised by their Creator. Under the ordinary course of events if a land is promised to a group of people, where will the residents go?

So Palestinian people were called a people with no territory and therefore even up to this time these people are opposed to the Israelites who now occupy what these Palestinians had then back in time. The feeling therefore that Ryya had with Alex must be one that asks for help to free her country but obviously Alex did not understand her feelings about her version of what her homeland is and it really means to her. In a relationship that involves the heart, a lover is expected to place himself into her lover's shoes but his inability created a stress or annoyance.

Such exasperation from annoyance may have actually come from his failure to empathize. An objective reader may easily understand that supposedly a

British like Alex may not have experienced to be oppressed thus his failure to empathize may actually be the cause the ill-fated relationship. Conclusion: The novel entitled A Beggar at Damascus Gate by Yasmin Zahran, did portray how a woman struggle for gender equality and how difference in culture between a colonizer and a colonized may have an effect on the relationships of who two people may be in loved.

The love of a Palestinian woman and a British man could only be subject to the deeper thoughts of a Palestinian woman whose country during the time referred to in the novel and even up to this time continue its struggle for self-determination and statehood. A person who is interested to study Palestinian culture could get a good picture from this type writing as one could relate with the struggle of the Palestinian people and perhaps would understand that the affairs of the heart like that of Ryya and Alex in the story could not be detached from the lover's culture and ideologies.