



RESEARCH PAPER

The Prostitute as the Other: A Postcolonial Reading of Paulo Coelho's *Eleven Minutes*

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: July 28, 2021	The present study uses the postcolonial notion of 'the other' to highlight the plight of a prostitute as presented in Paulo Coelho's novel <i>Eleven Minutes</i> . The prostitute, treated as an object of pleasure for men, is discriminated from the common people, and reduced to merely a commodity. The manifestations of 'the other' in <i>Eleven Minutes</i> can be seen in the form of linguistic features, indoctrination, objectification, and assimilation. This study aims at exploring the ways through which a prostitute is destined to lead her life as an outsider, and the status of being a normal person is snatched from her because she is taken as a corrupt seducer. The postcolonial study of Paulo Coelho's <i>Eleven Minutes</i> shows that the negative consequences of alienating the prostitute have the undesirable effects on the individual as well as the society as the whole.
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Introduction

The contemporary author Paulo Coelho's novel *Eleven Minutes* challenges his readers with the notion of the other through the central character, Maria, a prostitute, who contemplates herself as poles apart from the rest of the people. It sheds light on this dark sect of human society which has become the mere object of sexual pleasure and is deprived of any noble status in the society. A prostitute continuously faces humiliation and disgrace at the hands of those people who use her for their sexual gratification. *Eleven Minutes* reflects upon the adverse relationship between a prostitute and the society. Society, here, plays the role of the exploiter while the prostitute that of the exploited, thus making the latter alienated, marginalized, and dehumanized, or if quoted in simple words, 'othered'. *Eleven Minutes* raises the question regarding the meaning of being human at the deepest level. It also questions the ways through which an oppressed is made to lead his/her life in oppression.

These questions are hidden in the novel. The story reflects the critical sides of life including love, betrayal, inhuman attitude, prostitution, dreams, career and sacrifice. *Eleven Minutes* gives the opportunity to the reader to ponder upon the role of a prostitute as the other as it highlights the main character that lives in the similar world as ours but is regarded as an outsider for being a part of socially unaccepted profession, prostitution.

Paulo Coelho has highlighted the notion of the other in the text of *Eleven Minutes*. The story created by the author revolves around Maria's life before adopting the profession of prostitution and her life after becoming a part of this profession. Her initial life spent in Brazil is full of high hopes and beautiful dreams of her future life. She has a limited exposure to the world. She falls in love, faces despair, and decides not to love anyone again. Her life changes entirely when she moves to Switzerland and willingly becomes a prostitute for a short period of time to earn money for living with which afterwards she keeps on enjoying the luxuries of life. Though Maria becomes a prostitute with her own will but she faces a horrible side of life. She gets what she wants in the form of a luxurious life style but her body and soul do not coordinate with each other. She becomes a heartless woman who sells her body and never gains spiritual satisfaction until she meets the painter Ralf Hart who does not treat her as an object for his sexual gratification. Being a prostitute Maria faces the circumstances where she is treated as 'the other'.

Literature Review

Kavitha Ganesan's (2007) study of Coelho's *Eleven Minutes* rotates around the central character (i.e. Maria), a prostitute, with the starting point where she thinks that this could be a thrilling and exploratory profession. A spiritual understanding, paradoxically, in the case of this novel, materializes through the "eleven minutes" of sacred sex. Ganesan's paper looks at the ways in which Coelho has depicted the sexual journey of a prostitute as a spiritual one. Anastasia Anggraini's (2011) study discusses the authority of Ralf Hart's character on Maria and the growth in her character after adding him to her life. Ika Puji Astuti's (2014) thesis focuses on Maria's efforts to get better life and what sort of problems she faces during this struggle. Aprilia Lestari's (2014) study deals with the mental and emotional state of the main character Maria. Medista Ayu Ningsih's (2015) study aims at highlighting the protest against human trafficking as shown in the novel *Eleven Minutes* by Paulo Coelho. The study is conducted using the sociological approach. Rissa Nur Pratamy's (2016) study argues that the major problem faced by the protagonist Maria, is actually her creative power. She dreams of having a better life which she successfully actualizes. Maria endeavors to be a victorious person. She makes use of her creativeness to handle her plan. The researcher focuses on Maria's creative power which she uses to resolve her issues in *Eleven Minutes*.

Material and Methods

One of the most significant issues related to the concept of 'the other' is that it is closely related to human oppression and degradation. The other has its grounds in the colonial period between the colonizer and the colonized. According to Tyson, the colonizers consider themselves to be the superior race that is civilized and represents the true culture which human beings must have. These colonizers marginalize the colonized and make them 'the other' who are inferior and lesser human beings in contrast to them. Tyson says, " This practice of judging all who are different as less than fully human is called othering, and it divides the world between 'us' (the civilized) and 'them' (the others, the savages)" (Tyson, 2015). According to Culea (2014), this division of 'us' from 'them' breeds inequality and generates tension between the members of the two groups by treating 'the other' as the inferior one. For Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985), the colonial discourse constructs its 'others'. "By this process, the creation of borders between those who are insiders and those who are outsiders does not occur accidentally but is intended and fuelled by established social laws, principles, and practices which mark boundaries between a group and other social groups" (cited in Ng'atigwa, 2014, p. 233). The problem arises with the categorization of the individuals into two groups, one that represents the standard and possesses the valuable identity, and the other group that has no identity, is devalued and described by its faults. This in result creates 'the other'. Generally 'the other' is the one who is detached from one's self. The other exists as its existence is important in identifying the 'normal'. Jean Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* describes the relationship between self and other through his existential philosophy (cited in Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2009). Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* says, "In the most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies, one finds the expression of a duality, that of self and other" (Beauvoir, 1972). According to Canales, "our understanding of other is important for how we understand difference and how we engage with those perceived as different from self as the other" (Canales, 2000). It shows that the others go through the feelings of humiliation, frustration, insecurity, and infuriation, which are caused by the oppressors treating them as the odd ones.

In a wider sense, 'the other' emerges when a mental detachment is created between 'us' and 'them'. It is basically the difference between what we think 'we' are and when we differentiate ourselves from the other thinking what they are not. We also define ourselves as a nation, a class or a race by omitting the others from the particular group. They are the outsiders who are not like us and do not deserve to be with us as they are an out-group. The use of the term 'them' is not itself a problem unless they are regarded as lower and inferior to 'us' (Boréus, 2001; Fitzsimmons, 2015; Kitzinger, & Wilkinson, 1996; Littlewood & Lipsedge, 1997). Usually the others are rejected through the process of exclusion. According to Boréus, "Exclusion occurs when human beings are deliberately excluded from a group, locked out, being deprived of goods of various types, and tends to be generally seen as unfavorable treatment" (Boréus, 2001) . This exclusion is done through domination and

subordination relationship, where the others are the subordinates of the dominant ones which results in the marginalization, alienation and exclusion of the other. This sort of othering is usually done through skin color, accent, language, physical abilities, gender, or age (Boréus, 2001; Canales, 2000). The 'other' is also maltreated through the process of discrimination. Boréus (2001) describes discrimination as adverse behavior of the members of a particular group on account of their association to that group. Discrimination goes against the rule of equality in the society in which a certain group of people is not treated on equal basis with the rest of the people. Discrimination can be done in various ways including emotional, physical or social abuse to degrade the deprived group.

Paulo Coelho's *Eleven Minutes* is one of the texts that represent women particularly prostitutes being degraded as others. The text of the novel reveals the ways in which one group oppresses the other and regards the oppressed ones as the inferior sect of the society. The novel shows that the prostitutes are not only excluded from the normal society being as others but are also used as an object. This points towards the significance of the relationship between the notion of 'the other' and the novel *Eleven Minutes* which can be analyzed and interpreted through the concept of 'the other'.

The manifestations of 'the other' for the fallen woman (Maria) can be obtained in the form of linguistic features, indoctrination, objectification, and assimilation. The findings of this research endeavor to show that the study of Paulo Coelho's *Eleven Minutes* helps us understand how the negative consequences of alienating the prostitute effects undesirably the individual as well as the society as the whole. This study is a qualitative and analytical one. The primary source used in it is the text of the novel. All the concepts will be discussed by relating them to the incidents and happenings taking place in the novel. The postcolonial concept of 'the other' can be applied in many different forms. The present article intends to analyze the various manifestations of 'the other' through linguistic features, indoctrination, objectification, and assimilation. Therefore, this article will try to explore the situation and the issues faced by a prostitute treated as 'the other'. The literary text *Eleven Minutes* by Paulo Coelho will be analyzed in order to answer the following research question:

Q. What are the various manifestations of 'the other' to which the protagonist in Coelho's novel *Eleven Minutes* is subjected as a prostitute?

Results and Discussion

The Manifestations of 'the other' as Portrayed in *Eleven Minutes*

The concept of 'the other' can be interpreted in many ways. The present study is concerned with the four forms of othering. These four forms of othering and their manifestation in the selected text are given below.

Indoctrination

Through indoctrination, the targeted others are made to believe in their current situation as the desired one by putting some ideas or beliefs in their minds. "Indoctrination is intended to influence targets to believe in what they are told without questioning the veracity or authenticity of the conveyed information" (Iona & Crasner, 2016). The process of indoctrination can be done in any context, be it, social, political, religious or military. This process occurs in *Eleven Minutes* when Maria accepts her current situation as a prostitute and resigns herself to her present status as the other woman.

After her very first encounter with a man as a prostitute, she writes in her diary, "I don't feel in the least bit sorry for myself. I am still not a victim, because I could have left that restaurant with my dignity intact and my purse empty" (Coelho, 2003). Though she has started working as a sex worker but does not feel a tint of remorse on her decision. She is now indoctrinated by the idea that she has taken the right decision of adopting this profession. She feels the freedom which she had never felt before, "she hadn't felt so well or so free in all the time she had been in Switzerland" (Coelho, 2003). After joining the profession of prostitution formally, Maria feels herself at ease and can feel the professional jealousy of other girls at the club for her. The indoctrination about prostitution makes her feel proud of her adoption of this profession thinking it a normal profession like any other one, "None of them had come up to her to say hello or to wish her success in her new profession, but that was perfectly normal; after all, she was a rival, a competitor, competing for the same trophy. Instead of feeling depressed, she felt proud" (Coelho, 2003).

She is further indoctrinated by the professional set up she is living in that she is among the few lucky ones among all the workers of this profession to earn more than she had imagined. Also she finds it much easier to earn more in shorter time than in any other profession, "Was that a lot? She had earned a thousand francs for one night, but perhaps that had just been a beginner's luck. At any rate, an ordinary prostitute could earn more, much more she could ever earn teaching French back home. And all they had to do was spend some time in a bar, dance, spread their legs and that was that. They didn't even have to talk" (Coelho, 2003). Maria's boss at the club, Milan indoctrinates her with the notion of respect and honor of his business and wants her to follow certain rules of this profession, "Milan was a respectable married man, concerned for his reputation and the good name of his club" (Coelho, 2003). Maria feels herself obliged to maintain the respect of his boss, she says, "I have a job, I have a boss who protects and trusts me" (Coelho, 2003). Maria feels comfortable in a sadist relationship with Terence and feels elated with the humiliation she faces. This is the clear case of how the protagonist Maria is indoctrinated by the social set up about her profession. She is made to believe that she has adopted the best profession for herself and she owns it proudly.

Objectification

The notion of objectification is a critical one, generally used to describe the negative ways through which one group generally treats the other one as an object. According to Nussbaum it is a mode of thinking, speaking and acting to express the attitudes and objectives of one person to another by making him/her to be an object, thing or commodity (Nussbaum, 1995). The inhuman treatment of the superiors towards the inferiors thinking them as others and regarding them merely as objects describes well the process of objectification. Objectification makes the others lose their self confidence and their selfhood. They become deprived of their own subjectivity.

In *Eleven Minutes*, the process of objectification is used to describe how the prostitute is regarded as the other and how she is reduced to an object or commodity to be used by men. For instance, at the very start of the novel, Maria contacts a model agency which hires girls for a modeling career but it turns out that these girls are then sent into a world of prostitution. Such agencies use these girls as commodities for the purpose of earning money. Further when Maria meets an Arab guy, he offers Maria handsome amount to spend a night with him. He says, "If you come up and have a drink with me in my hotel room, I'll give you a thousand francs" (Coelho, 2003). This is the clear indication of objectification of the female body. Later, Maria writes in her diary, "I have discovered the reason why a man pays for a woman: he wants to be happy" (Coelho, 2003). Here, a prostitute is objectified as a source of pleasure giving object to a man. Later, this stance strengthens when she learns how to become a good prostitute, "the first thing she needed to know was how to behave, how to give pleasure and receive money in return" (Coelho, 2003).

The color code which Maria has to follow being a prostitute is black. She is bound to dress in black to attract more customers. Milan, her boss guides her to dress in black, "tomorrow wear black pants, bra and stockings" (Coelho, 2003). Further in the novel, she ponders on the girls not following the color code of a prostitute and wishing to look beautiful "she always wore black to work, and she couldn't understand why the other girls at the Copacabana tried to look provocative in their low cut dresses and garish colors" (Coelho, 2003). Here, the black color specified for working as a prostitute is also the objectification of the prostitute. The price of a prostitute is fixed which she has to get from her customer. Milan tells her, "'the price is three hundred and fifty francs.' 'Right,' said a humbled Maria. First he had asked about the color of her underwear and now he was deciding how much her body was worth" (Coelho, 2003). This is how through objectification her boss fixes the price of her body. Another instance of treating Maria as a commodity is when Milan tells her that she 'must learn to be punctual. Just remember I am feeding my children on your commission" (Coelho, 2003). Here, Maria is totally reduced to a source of earning money for the sake of feeding Milan's family. Later in the novel, Maria contemplates about her present situation. "Money was one motivation, she thought, but was that all? Or did the people there, the customers and the women, also enjoy themselves in

some way" (Coelho, 2003). The use of the words 'customers' for men and 'women' for prostitutes highlights the objectification of the female body. This shows that the prostitutes will always remain the products or objects to be purchased by the customers and will never attain the status of a customer, instead will remain a commodity forever.

Maria is told by one of her fellow colleagues, "prostitution isn't like other businesses: beginners earn more and the more experienced earn less. Always pretend you're a beginner" (Coelho, 2003). A prostitute when ages, loses her charm and her value lessens. The younger the prostitute the more she is demanded by the customers. An aged prostitute is doubly marginalized and becomes an 'other' among the others' community. Hence, Maria is conscious of two things mainly to maintain her value, "both improving the quality of her services and the chance of earning some extra money" (Coelho, 2003). Maria is well aware of her duty and the demands of her profession. She knows how she can earn more. She has no other source to make her living and tries her best to maintain her worth, "she was off duty now and would save her seductive powers for late, for men who would pay handsomely for her efforts" (Coelho, 2003).

Further objectification of Maria's body can be seen when she writes in her diary, "I'm not a body with a soul. I'm a soul that has a visible part called the body" (Coelho, 2003). Maria, here, is well aware of her body being used as an object and accepts that her body is devoid of the soul. Maria's objectification can further be seen when she decides about the roles she has to play to satisfy her client who needs emotional satisfaction as well along with the sexual one, "tonight I'll play the part of prostitute or friend or understanding mother, even though in my soul I'm a daughter in need of affection" (Coelho, 2003). This division of roles to be played by Maria is another instance of her being used as an object according to the wishes of her customer, though she herself yearns for some affection inside her heart.

Another incident of objectification can be seen when Maria becomes a victim of sadomasochism. She meets her 'special client' named Terence who takes pleasure in treating her as a worthless object through domination and subordination relationship and tells her "the master is here to drive the slave on. The pleasure of the slave is the joy of the master" (Coelho, 2003). Maria in return takes her objectification casually, and in fact, feels comfortable when mistreated, "she felt like an object, a mere instrument, and incredible though it may seem, that feeling of submission gave her a sense of complete freedom" (Coelho, 2003). Hence, the notion of objectification can clearly be seen through various instances in the novel where a prostitute is used as a commodity and objectified as a body to be used.

Assimilation

Assimilation is done to cover up the act of objectification. While objectification is a form of rejection through the processes of exclusion, discrimination and devaluing the others in a negative manner, assimilation is done by using positive

words for 'the other'. It can also be termed 'othering by valuing'. It is done to make the inferior group feel affirmative about the superior group in spite of the mistreatment inflicted by the superior ones. This strategy is adopted to make 'the others' feel that they are not different from the dominating group. Nevertheless, the inferior ones are still being discriminated and devalued.

In *Eleven Minutes*, several instances of assimilation can be traced out when Maria feels positive about her profession. Maria's beauty is praised by the man who intends to spend a night with her. He says, "You're very pretty" (Coelho, 2003). Such words of praise are used as a strategy to make 'the others' feel they are not lesser than the superior ones and to make them feel normal. It is through the process of assimilation that Maria feels that she is free and can enjoy any sort of freedom. After becoming a prostitute, Maria has a new concept of love. While writing about love she thinks that she can get it whenever she wants to have it without any obligation and this freedom is only awarded to her, "this is the true experience of freedom: having the most important thing in the world without owning it" (Coelho, 2003). When Maria meets Ralf Hart, he tells her that he can see her 'special light', an unusual comment for a prostitute. He says, "You have a glow about you. The light that comes from sheer will power, the light of someone who has made important sacrifices in the name of things she thinks are important. It's in your eyes, the light in your eyes" (Coelho, 2003). The words 'light', 'glow', 'will power', and 'sacrifice' well explain the use of the process of assimilation for Maria. Maria being a prostitute gains 'respect', another instance of assimilation as respect and prostitute are two opposite words, "Maria was a respectable, rather unusual prostitute, and after six months, she had acquired a large, faithful, very select clientele, thus arousing the envy and jealousy, but also the admiration of her colleagues" (Coelho, 2003). Here, 'respectable', 'unusual prostitute', 'faithful and select clientele', and 'admiration', are used for a prostitute to make her feel like a normal person and her profession like any other dignified profession. Hence, these instances of assimilation used in the novel add towards the process of othering of Maria as these are mere positive words just to cover the objectification of her body as a prostitute.

Linguistic Features

The concept of 'the other' is usually manifested through the processes of discrimination and exclusion; hence the linguistic feature has a negative meaning. To evade the ethical sense, the harsh words, phrases and sentences used are often softened. This feature is termed as euphemism. Euphemism is a courteous and indirect way of communication either in written or spoken form that replaces the harsh and impolite words or sentences conveying something unpleasant with the polite ones to neutralize the negative effect. In *Eleven Minutes*, the author has used these techniques in his narrative. Maria writes in her diary while thinking about adopting the profession of prostitution, "I walk about the streets and look at all the people, and I wonder if they chose their lives? Or were they, like me, 'chosen' by fate" (Coelho, 2003). The word 'chosen' she uses for herself indicates that she was destined

to become a prostitute. Maria while in the process of deciding to become a prostitute takes it just as a simple experiment. "she hadn't decided anything, she told herself. It was just an experiment" (Coelho, 2003). The word 'experiment' indicates that the author here tries to soften the gravity of the situation by just calling it a simple experiment for Maria.

When Maria meets the owner of the club, she tells him that she is looking for 'work'. The word work here is used for the profession of prostitution to make it equal to any other profession. Further in the novel, "she went to a shop where she made her first investment in the possible career" (Coelho, 2003). The word 'possible career' is used to conceal the bitterness linked with the word prostitution. Maria is then taught the rules of the 'ritual'. The ritual here refers to spend time with the man as a prostitute. Throughout the novel, all the men meeting Maria are referred to as her 'clients' or 'customers'. These clients make her 'the other' woman who is paid for her profession of working as a sex worker. Maria refers to this act of selling her body as an 'adventure'. While listing the types of men she goes out with, she calls the third type as Godfathers who "were the only ones who, in a very subtle way, knew the meaning of the word 'Adventure'" (Coelho, 2003). While talking to the librarian, her only friend in Geneva, she herself refers to prostitution as a deplorable profession. She says, "Do you mean prostitution? That's a very strong word" (Coelho, 2003). Further, her job is termed as an unconventional job and the word 'work' is used now and then to nullify the harshness of the word prostitution, "she realized that, despite her somewhat unconventional job, nothing very exciting had happened apart from that week in Rio and her first month in Switzerland. Otherwise, it had been home, work, home, work and nothing else" (Coelho, 2003). These examples demonstrate that Maria being a prostitute is treated as 'the other' though not by directly calling her a prostitute at certain events but by using different other words for her and her profession to give her more comfort. Hence linguistic feature is used as a device to hide the prostitute as the other in the novel *Eleven Minutes*.

Conclusion

There are different features that we find about the notion of the other in Paulo Coelho's *Eleven Minutes* and which are applicable to the case of the prostitute as depicted in the novel. From a postcolonial perspective, it exposes the destructive nature of the concept of the other. Moreover, postcolonial theory helps to explain the reasons of exclusion and discrimination against the inferior group. The concept of the other has a broader scope and can be incorporated in different situations with the particular concern. In *Eleven Minutes*, this concept clearly indicates the distinction between the common people and prostitutes; 'us' and 'them'; 'the self' and 'the others'. The concept of the other is manifested in several forms in the novel as discussed above. The four forms of manifestation, i.e., indoctrination, objectification, assimilation, and linguistic features, are used to elaborate the inhuman treatment of society towards the prostitutes and describe the ways through which they are devalued as lesser human beings. The prostitute is treated as an object or commodity by the society and she faces humiliation being regarded as the other sect of the

society. This exclusion of the prostitute from the society has negative consequences on the individual as well as the society as the whole. Although the phenomenon of the other cannot be completely avoided, but through this article regarding the notion of the other in Paolo Coelho's *Eleven Minutes*, the awareness about the inhuman attitude of the society towards the prostitutes can be raised by highlighting the dire consequences of the mistreatment inflicted upon this other sect of the society.

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