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The Many Faces of Extremism

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Introduction: Extremism in its Many Forms

In the west, “extremism” has incorrectly come to be synonymous with modern-day “terrorism,” specifically in the name of Islam. The word “extremism” is now ripe with insidious connotations that conjure disturbing images of fear, vitriol and violence: the horrifying images of clouds of black dust and debris enveloping the collapsing “twin towers,” ferocious mid-day bombings killing innocents in crowded town squares and live be-headings of western journalists. This modern western association of extremism with Islamic terrorism overlooks the fact that extremism is a master chameleon, not only capable of, but also quite adept at assuming multiple unique and sometimes unexpected forms.

“Extremism,” according to the Oxford dictionary, simply means “the holding of extreme political or religious views.” Thus the word itself is neither married to Islam nor is it wed to any other single religious or political view. Even the word “religion” has no single meaning. While religion is traditionally thought of as the worship of a God or Gods, it is also defined by the Oxford dictionary as a “pursuit or interest followed with great devotion” (accordingly, an avid golfer can be said to have found her religion). Thus extremism can relate to any behavior, action or notion that an individual pursues devotedly. An expanded vocabulary of sibling words to “extremism,” such as “radicalism” and “fanaticism,” still gives rise to the same one-sided modern western linkage to Islamic terrorism, even though these words are also not tied to any single denotation. The laser-like focus on one notion of extremism misses the reality, with potentially far reaching consequences.

A tour of great 20th century literary works underscores the existence of varying forms of extremism and the potential ramifications of each, spanning religions, cultures, geographies and historical time periods. This literary exploration shows that the west has unjustly wed destructive extremism to the Islamic religion, rather than to all people who behave in a destructive extremist fashion. This investigation will also show that on the one hand, extremism can lead to the cultivation of the earth and drive social movements that engender forward progress. On the other hand, extremism can induce genocide, misogyny, the pillaging of the earth, the dissolution of freedom, and political ties that outweigh human bonds, among other such calamitous outcomes. In several cases, this literary tour shows that extremism can unfortunately beget extremism. The theoretical challenge, for individuals and society at large, is to identify destructive extremism, and to determine whether it can effectively and fairly be curtailed.

Literary Tour of Extremism

That extremism can take many forms can be seen in Upton Sinclair’s novel, *Oil!* Sinclair relays the story of a bootstrapping oil baron named J. Arnold Ross, who builds an oil empire in the western U.S. during the fledgling decades of the 20th century. Ross’ oil empire is built on his unswerving compulsion to extract oil from the earth, at nearly any literal or figurative cost, including bribery and exploitation. Ross’ impulse to drill oil faces an increasingly robust obstacle: the fervent desire of the laborers who mine the oil fields to earn a living wage and to toil under reasonable safety conditions. These men are led by Paul Watkins, a man Ross’ beloved only son, Bunny, befriends at the outset of the story. To compound Ross’ troubles, Bunny sides with Watkins and the laborers. Thus the tension between

capitalism and socialism unfolds in this tale, and on either side of the divide emerge extremists, to varying effects. Our analysis focuses on two such extremists: J. Arnold Ross and Paul Watkins.

In the colloquial, crude and improper voice of our oil-obsessed magnate, J. Arnold Ross, Sinclair presents the pro-capitalism view:

“You listen to these Socialists and Bolsheviks, but my God, imagine if the government was to start buying oil-lands and developing them - there’d be more graft than all the wealth of America could pay for. I’m on the inside, where I can watch it, and I know that when you turn over anything to the government, you might just as good bury it ten thousand miles deep in the earth. You can talk about laws, but there’s economic laws, too, and government can’t stand against them, no more than anybody else. When government does fool things, then people find a way to get round it, and business men that do it are no more to blame than any other kind of men. This is an oil age, and when you try to shut oil off from production, it’s just like you tried to dam Niagara falls.” (Oil! Kindle location 5234)

In this passage, Sinclair paints Ross himself and Ross’ pro-capitalism views with a raw, escalated and emotive voice, using exaggerated and affecting phrases wrapped within long and ranting sentences, underscoring Ross’ extremism. Such phrases include “but my God...,” “...bury it ten thousand miles deep...,” and “...more graft than all the wealth of America could pay for.” Ross is the archetypal American cowboy, whose grimy demeanor is born in the black oil fields of the west and left unpolished by his increasing wealth, as emphasized by his use of the colloquial “just.” Sinclair also relays Ross’ compulsion to drill oil by using powerful visual and auditory imagery equating the cessation of oil drilling to the damming of “Niagara falls.”

Ross’ heightened aggravation during this monologue is fueled by his inability to convince his son to feel a similar devotion to oil-drilling as his own peaked attachment, or to concur that any means necessary to obtain oil are justified. We see the marks of Ross’ obsession with oil, and thus his extremism, in his inability to put his health first, working stubbornly to procure more oil “...in defiance of his doctors” (location 7342). Ross also pours his profits from oil drilling back into the bank loans needed to fund new oil development projects; a few highly successful oil projects simply won’t suffice. As Bunny says, “Dad was happy, because he had brought in another gusher, and proved up a whole new slope of the Paradise tract...he was preparing a colossal development – the bankers couldn’t keep him down...” (location 3717). Ross justifies his oil obsession with his faith in the great “oil age.” He believes that oil is needed to fuel the world’s factories, cars and homes and thus the global economy. The mantra Ross repeats throughout the novel, which serves as his own version of a religious hymn, and which Bunny refers to as the “answer kept in stock on the shelves of [Dad’s] mind,” is “the world’s got to have oil!” (location 5088). That oil happens to be a naturally supply-constrained commodity, and thus susceptible to wealth-generating price shocks for oil suppliers, *appears* to be icing on the cake for Ross. These are just a few of the markings of Ross’ extremism, and oil drilling is the subject of his devotion.

Sinclair’s placement in the story of this pro-capitalism monologue is deliberate. Ross is so taken by his obsession with oil drilling that he actively defends his beliefs while knee-deep in a bribery scheme

that ultimately leads to his own demise. Ross and his business partner, Vernon Roscoe, are in the process of bribing the Republican presidential candidate in order to gain the oil drilling rights for land annexed from a large competitor by the U.S. government for Navy use. Ross is so enraptured by oil, and so deeply embedded in his shady business practices, that he lacks perspective. A more rational and balanced person, one not afflicted by a form of extremism, would have at least considered the legal risks, rather than dismissing the “laws” of the land in favor of the “economic laws.” That Sinclair placed Ross’ great defense of capitalism in the midst of the act that engenders his demise summarily undercuts the pro-capitalism view; this appears quite deliberate given Sinclair’s own well-known pro-socialism views, including several failed attempts to hold political positions as a member of the U.S. Socialist Party.

Perhaps the ugliest manifestation of Ross’ extremism is the harm it does to the earth. As Sinclair so vividly depicts throughout the novel with visual imagery and metaphors, extracting oil from deep within the ground is an arduous and risky process. When this process goes awry, the results for the earth are disastrous, as Sinclair portrays through Bunny’s eyes:

There was a tower of flame, and the most amazing spectacle—the burning oil would hit the ground, and bounce up, and explode, and leap again and fall again, and great red masses of flame would unfold, and burst, and yield black masses of smoke, and these in turn red. Mountains of smoke rose to the sky, and mountains of flame came seething down to the earth; every jet that struck the ground turned into a volcano, and rose again, higher than before; the whole mass, boiling and bursting, became a river of fire, a lava flood that went streaming down the valley, turning everything it touched into flame, then swallowing it up and hiding the flames in a cloud of smoke. (Oil! Kindle location 2881)

In this passage, Sinclair personifies the oil, which is like an angry sleeping giant, “exploding,” “seething,” “boiling” and “bursting,” unhappily prodded from its slumber by J. Arnold Ross. The oil swallows everything in its path, destroying the wildlife and homes in the valley, seemingly gaining strength as it goes. The devastation and destruction caused to the earth after such an oil fire is extreme, often leaving all plant and wild-life eliminated and sometimes destroying entire local species. Ross, however, is entirely unmoved by the devastation of the oil fire; his only aim is to procure more oil. As he and Bunny watch the fire rage, he says to his disturbed son, “Cheer up, son! This here is nothin’, this is a joke...why boy, we got an ocean of oil down underneath here; and it’s all ours – not a soul can get near it but us!” (location 2929). Even when an oil fire is contained, the extraction of oil from the land will only ensue for as long as there is oil to be gained; when the drilling equipment is disassembled and the laborers depart, the land is left bereft, bled of its natural resources. This is the artifact of Ross’ extreme interminable need to drill oil.

Yet the aftermath of extremism need not be destructive. Paul Watkins is the man who opposes Ross’ extremism with his own form of radicalism. Watkins is a farmer’s son whose path is inextricably linked to both Ross men from the onset of the story. Watkins is a principled man: from our first encounter with him we learn that he cannot even sneak a meal from his Aunt’s kitchen without first committing to repay her. In contrast to Ross, Sinclair underscores Watkins’ integrity: “even before

[Bunny had] laid eyes on Paul Watkins' face, Bunny felt the power in Paul Watkins' character, he was attracted by something deep and stirring and powerful" (location 829) and "[Paul Watkins was] the straightest fellow [Bunny] ever knew" (location 6847). Watkins later serves in World War I. When the war ends, he finds himself stranded in Siberia without explanation or reasonable cause, where he is exposed to the principles of Bolshevism and Communism, which Ross dismisses in his pro-capitalism monologue. The knowledge Watkins gains of these causes abroad, coupled with the harm he sees done to the laborers in the oil fields in the western U.S., sends him on his own crusade.

Watkins becomes a leader among the laborers and an advocate of labor rights. Like J. Arnold Ross, he dedicates his life entirely to his cause, often forsaking his devoted sister and neglecting his own health and well-being, appearing gaunt and older than his years. Of the grief Watkins' numerous arrests and prolonged disappearances in the name of the labor movement cause his sister, Sinclair writes that she "was just setting out to be an old maid...and all on account of grieving her heart out about Paul" (p. 235). Paul appears to have found his own extremist cause, fervently defending the rights of the laborers, regardless of the cost.

Unlike J. Arnold Ross, however, Watkins' extremism produces constructive results. Watkins helps the laborers earn higher wages and safer working conditions through the formation of labor unions, and he advocates education, literacy and knowledge. His untimely death, as a result of blows sustained during a labor rally, is like a period that arrives prematurely in a sentence, as history demonstrates that people of his ilk, whose extremist views are about humanity and fairness, often do exact positive forward progression. For example, the collective organizations that formed in the U.S. after World War I successfully tampered some of the negative humanitarian effects of the industrial revolution by requiring basic workers' rights, such as reasonable length workdays, two-day weekends and minimum wages.

Other forms of extremism have their benefits too. *Gardens in the Dunes*, by Leslie Marmon Silko, explores extremism in connection to nature, to beautiful effect. Silko defines her characters not only by their personal actions and interactions with each other, but also by their personal connection to nature. Silko's writing is joined to the earth, as ornate and detailed descriptions of nature, specifically various species of plant life, form the tapestry of her tale. Silko writes of mother earth with the same devotion as Sinclair writes of the Socialist and Communist movements. *Gardens in the Dunes* is the tale of a young girl named Indigo, who is from a nearly extinct Native American tribe. Indigo's life becomes inextricably linked to the life of a white woman named Hattie, who is a former Doctoral candidate of the Divinity School at Harvard University and the wife of a highly misguided botanist named Edward. Both Indigo and Hattie have a special connection to nature, although they are each rooted to the ground to differing degrees. Edward, on the other hand, takes the opposite extreme approach: he abuses nature for profit to disastrous effect.

Hattie enjoys her gardens, which Silko describes poetically, using visual and olfactory imagery of a wide array of colors and scents, such as "a late afternoon breeze wafted the perfume of the yellow climbing roses on the kitchen garden wall," "...the white garden's snaking branches and thickets of white

bougainvillea...,” and “the scent of citrus blossoms suffused the night air and overpowered even the white climbing roses and the lilies” (p. 80, 83 and 90, respectively).

It is fitting that Hattie and Indigo should first meet in Hattie’s gardens given Indigo’s own connection to nature. Indigo comes from the “old gardens,” or the “gardens in the dunes” from which the novel derives its name, which is the land of her native Indian tribe, the Sand Lizards. Silko introduces the “old gardens” at the commencement of the story by describing their significance to Indigo, her family and their tribe by conveying the “...deep sand’s...” ability to hold “...precious moisture...” that “...nurtures the plants...,” and by relaying Indigo and her family’s cultivation of these plants, which “...they tended...” and “...cared for as if the plants were babies” (p. 14). The plants that sprout from the “old gardens” are so treasured they are personified: Indigo’s grandmother teaches her and her sister that “the plants listen...always greet each plant respectfully...don’t argue or fight around the plants – hard feelings cause the plants to wither” (p. 14). When Indigo first encounters Hattie’s gardens, she is taken by their beauty, going from “flower to flower, burying her nose in each blossom as deeply as she could...” (p. 82). Silko creates a spritely image of Indigo flitting from bloom to bloom to intone Indigo’s adoration and adulation of nature, stressing her extreme attachment to the earth.

While Hattie is fond of and cares for her gardens, they largely exist for her aesthetic enjoyment. Her greatest fascination is not her gardens, but rather the role of women in religion. This is a thesis topic she is shunned for endeavoring to investigate, and for which she is labeled a “heretic” given the misogynistic and narrow-minded disposition of her male and female peers at the turn of the 20th century. Hattie is immediately fascinated with the “female spiritual principle in the early church” when she unfolds ancient Gnostic texts, with the names “Sophia, Zoe and Eve” coming to her “again and again like a nursery rhyme” (p. 100). Yet Hattie’s fascination with the feminine deity doesn’t approach extremism, as she abandons her thesis as the novel progresses, despite the continual surfacing of the Goddess concept. After discovering Edward’s deceptions later in the story, Hattie “scarcely thought of her thesis now; it was already part of another life, and another person, not herself” (p. 370).

In contrast to Hattie’s relationship with her gardens, Indigo’s “old gardens” are imperative to her very existence, serving not only as a bond to her heritage, but also as a critical and often primary source of sustenance. Throughout the novel, Indigo relies on her own ability to plant, farm and forage to eat and to find shelter. As Indigo’s grandmother taught her, “[Sand Lizards] never found a plant they couldn’t use for some purpose” (p. 84). The differing roles of Hattie’s and Indigo’s two gardens in their lives is underscored by Silko when Indigo hunts for her dinner in Hattie’s gardens, while Hattie enjoys a meal that is cooked and served by her housekeeper inside of her own home: Indigo “inhaled the scent of orange and lemon blossoms, then suddenly caught the smell of roasted meat that wafted down the path from the back of [Hattie’s] house” (p. 83).

Indigo is pruned away from the “old gardens” by circumstances that are outside of her control, while Hattie leaves her own gardens of her own accord. When Indigo is forced to accompany Hattie and her husband, Edward, on their travels, she carefully collects and transports seeds from around the world to plant in the “old gardens,” which are always central in her mind. Thus the “old gardens” have a distinct gravitational pull on Indigo, which she returns with a symbiotic desire to expand and fortify

them. This pull is tantamount to the pull of the oil fields for J. Arnold Ross, or the pull of labor rights for Paul Watkins. As the following passage demonstrates, Indigo's connection to nature borders on the extreme, pervading her every thought, even if it is an admirable form of extremism that lends itself to the enrichment of the earth and the prolongation of her native culture:

Indigo had followed the rocky beach for a good distance, examining the bits of shells and kelp and driftwood she found among the gray rocks. The ocean was fascinating and Indigo was sorry when she got too hungry to keep walking along the shore. She left the beach and crossed the road to reach the overgrown meadows on the hillside where she had seen the purple blossoms of wild peas scattered among the sunflowers, goldenrod, and milkweed. She picked green pea pods and when there were no more, she hungrily pushed purple blossoms into her mouth as she continued to walk toward the west, through the old fields not planted for a long time. Where did white people get their food if they didn't plant these fields? She could not see what lay past the sharp curve of the bay, so she kept walking, alert for wild pea pods and berries or anything that might be good to eat. She wished she could locate some drinking water. Where did the stream flowing through Hattie's yard come down the hill? She stopped to empty the sand out of her shoe and to urinate. (Gardens in the Dunes, p. 165)

Indigo's deep integration with nature is accentuated by Silko's use of poetic and lengthy descriptions, as well as consonance, to describe nature in Indigo's eyes. For example, Silko describes "bits of shells and kelp and driftwood" and Indigo "picking green pea pods," while painting a picture of "purple blossoms of wild peas scattered among the sunflowers, goldenrod, and milkweed." Indigo finds the ocean "fascinating," so much so that she is "sorry" when she must address her body's need for food or to urinate. This is quite like J. Arnold Ross' obsession with oil drilling, which he puts above his health, or Paul Watkins' fixation on labor rights, which he puts above all else, including his physical comfort. Fortunately for Indigo, because it is the earth that so clearly sustains her, she sees the "purple blossoms" as food and she "hungrily pushes" them into her mouth.

Indigo's extreme connection to the earth is in contrast to that of "white people," as Indigo observes in the passage above when she asks herself "where did white people get their food if they didn't plant these fields?" Indigo consistently views white people's detachment from the earth as strange, whether she is questioning the clothing they choose to wear instead of being naked and thus more comfortable and close to the earth, or their desire to sleep on a bed instead of on the ground, next to the safety and comfort of the earth. While Hattie tends to her gardens, other "white people" neglect their own land, as Indigo perceives when she sees a garden that hadn't been "planted for a long time."

Indigo's stroll along the rocky beach is quickly interrupted when she is captured by two white farmers who see an Indian girl and assume that she is either "lost" or "belongs to someone named Mattinecock" (p. 166). Silko's use of the word "lost" is pointed, as Indigo has indeed been displaced from her home and her family. The assumption that Indigo "belongs" to someone and the adjacency of her stroll in nature and the sudden shock and upheaval of her capture in the narrative sequencing are emblematic of a broader theme explored in *Gardens in the Dunes*: whites have treated the Indians with

violence and hostility, and have simultaneously displaced the earth's caretakers. In this regard, the whites are also extremists of a very different form, as their obsession is the murder, dislocation and forced integration of the Indian people. This is a topic that Silko confronts head-on when she includes in the first chapter of the novel the following direct and grave description of the arrival of the whites, replete with disturbing short utterances:

The Sand Lizard people heard rumors about the aliens for years before they finally appeared. The reports were alarming, and the people had difficulty believing the bloodshed and cruelty attributed to the strangers. But the reports were true. At harvest, the aliens demanded and took everything. This happened long, long ago but the people never forgot the hunger and suffering of that first winter the invaders appeared. The invaders were dirty people who carried disease and fever....The Sand Lizard people remained at the old gardens peacefully for hundreds of years because the invaders feared the desert beyond the river. Then a few years before Sister Salt was born, in the autumn, as the people returned from harvesting piñons in the high mountains, a gang of gold prospectors surprised them; all those who were not killed were taken prisoner. Grandma Fleet lost her young husband to a bullet; only the women and children remained, captives at Fort Yuma. (Gardens in the Dunes, p. 15)

Indigo and her family fall victim to these "aliens," "strangers," "invaders" and "dirty people," who frequently imprisoned Indigo's mother and grandmother, kidnapped Indigo and forced her to attend white integration schooling against her will, and displaced her and her family on multiple occasions, among many other crimes. These extremists focused not only on the physical imprisonment of the Indians, displacing them from their traditional lands by forcing them to live on reservations, but also on superseding their culture. Those Indians who survived the wars waged against them by extremist whites, and then survived the starvation and disease found on the reservations, were ultimately expected to abandon their language, customs and traditions in favor of white ones. The destructive extremism of the white populations that eventually eradicated entire indigenous Indian cultures was driven by greed for greater land and resources, and was left unchecked by rational people who are tolerant of cultural and ethical divergences. Undertones of the extreme racism of the whites towards the Indians permeate *Gardens in the Dunes*; Hattie, for example, "wondered if [Edward] was concerned over the appearance that [Indigo] was their adopted daughter..." (p. 253).

Edward, despite being a botanist, shares none of Indigo's devotion to the fortification of the earth. Yet he too is an extremist in connection to nature: he is willing to go to great lengths to exploit the earth to garner a profit. Even Edward's mood is tied to his ability to earn a profit from manipulating the earth. As Silko writes, "[Edward] had returned from London in good humor...the director of Kew Gardens agreed to pay a handsome price for *Citrus medica* cuttings" (p. 253). Edward eagerly endeavors to illegally export and graft cuttings of this breed of citrus plant in order to profit from breaking the French and Italian monopoly supply of citron. Silko writes, "Edward smiled...one day their sweet oranges would outsell all others..." (p. 281). Edward had already experienced a financially costly and nearly deadly debacle as a result of another expedition intended to manipulate the earth for profit. Before Edward and Hattie wed, he ventured to the forests along the Para River in Brazil to procure plant species

for hybridization by Lowe & Company. His companions set fire to the forest, which Edward only later came to realize "...had been planned for months before by the investors, who wished to make certain they possessed the only specimens of *Laelia cinnabarina*...rival hybridizers would be stymied when they sent out their plant collectors now that the Para River site was destroyed" (p. 142). Silko personifies the Para River jungle to describe the brutal aftermath of the disastrous fire: "the blackened jungle was silent and motionless..." (p. 141). Edward left the Para River jungle permanently injured, in financial debt and with a tarnished reputation; yet instead of partnering with Hattie to resolve these issues, he undertakes the illegal citron expedition, another mark of his extremism. A balanced person, one not guided by an extremist view of money and nature, might have learned from his past mistakes. As a result of Edward's destructive extremism, which Hattie views as a "reckless deception" (p. 392), Hattie and Edward eventually divorce, and Edward dies virtually alone, potentially as a result of "experimental treatments" he receives from a dubious business partner.

Destructive extremism can also be seen in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which tackles the ugly theme of colonization. In this case, the British, French and other Anglo-colonists are the extremists, whose driving obsession is the colonization of Africa in an attempt to gain the wealth to be had from the sale of ivory. These late-19th century African colonists exhibit many of the traits of other extremists: they abandon their families, homes and creature comforts for their cause, as if responding to a spectacular calling. The consequence of their extremism is the murder, starvation and enslavement of the Africans.

Conrad's novella features a sailor named Marlow who retells his harrowing journey through Africa to a group of fellow sailors while docked aboard a ship on the river Thames. Marlow's love of sailing, and thus the sea, is tantamount to Indigo's adoration of nature. Yet Conrad devotes his energies primarily to the depiction of the unsightly theme of colonization. Marlow is the perfect literary character to relay the horrors of colonization to a broad audience. He is theoretical, poetical and rambling, and he appears to be prone to innocent verbal digressions. This makes the deliberateness of his message appear *not* to be so deliberate; this, in turn, makes his message appear less reproachful and thus all the more convincing.

Conrad frames the theme of colonization early in the narrative structure when Marlow's memory of his African misadventures appears to be innocently jogged by his imaginings of the Roman conquerors who descended upon the Thames hundreds of years earlier:

"Mind, none of us would feel exactly like this. What saves us is efficiency – the devotion to efficiency. But these chaps were not much account, really. They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force – nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind – as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much." (*Heart of Darkness*, Kindle location 68)

In this passage, Conrad employs repetition, short utterances and foreshadowing as Marlow draws a parallel between the Romans, who he casually refers to as “chaps” of “not much account,” and himself and his peers. He endeavors in vain to distinguish between his generation and the invading Romans by repeating the word “efficiency” when he says, “what saves us is efficiency – the devotion to efficiency.” What he means by “efficiency” is unclear, and even he cannot commit fully to the notion of efficiency, quickly modifying his statement to “the *devotion* to efficiency” (emphasis added), implying that efficiency itself isn’t necessarily achieved. Such a vague concept of “efficiency” hardly seems to be a compelling saving grace for an entire generation!

Marlow again attempts to differentiate himself and his “civilized” generation from the Romans by quickly uttering that the Romans “were no colonists,” they were “conquerors” and “...for that you want only brute force – nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others.” With this statement, Marlow attempts to convince his listeners, and perhaps himself, that his generation of colonists isn’t as lowly as these Roman conquerors. He goes on to belittle the Romans by saying that they “grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale...” Yet Marlow describes the exact same actions he and his peers took in Africa when he defames the actions of the Romans. His generation starved, beat, murdered and enslaved the Africans while depleting their natural resources in a greedy quest for the riches that could be garnered from the sale of ivory. Conrad describes the pull of Africa’s ivory on the men when he equates it to the holy sound of a church bell or the call to prayer: “the word ‘ivory’ would ring in the air for a while” (location 602). Thus the African colonists, like the literary characters described earlier, appear to have found their own form of extremism, to which they commit themselves extremely.

Marlow refers to the Romans’ pillaging as “men going at it blind – as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness.” Conrad metaphorically equates men “blindly” ravaging the land and its people to “a darkness;” in the case of the colonization of Africa, this darkness might figuratively equate to the greed of the colonists, their hideous treatment of the Africans or the ugliness of colonization itself, or it might literally equate to the darkness of African skin. The literal interpretation of the word “darkness” relates to Marlow’s next statement: “the conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.” What a colossal understatement!

In fact, the damage caused by the brand of extremism associated with colonization is so vast and so hideous, that Conrad uses powerful language throughout *Heart of Darkness* to relay its effects. One such image is the African heads that sit atop spokes around Kurtz’s hut (location 1033). Another such image arises early in Marlow’s travels through Africa when he encounters a horrifying scene of near-dead Africans who have been enslaved by the colonists. Conrad portrays these men’s wretched state using repetition, parallel construction and disturbing visual imagery:

“Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair...They were dying slowly – it was very clear. They were not

enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now - - nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. (Heart of Darkness, Kindle location 252)

Elsewhere in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow relays his own response to the grotesque treatment of the Africans when he sees free African villagers running along the shore as his boat slowly maneuvers its way up what is presumably the Congo River. Of these men he says, “what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity – like yours – the thought of your remote kinship...” (location 620). Despite the obvious humanity of the Africans whose land the colonists have invaded, the colonists are driven by an intense, fervent desire for wealth and conquest. This extreme fervor outweighs any concerns for their own physical well-being, again an indicator of extremism. Upon his arrival to the first major depot in Africa, Marlow observes that the manager of that depot had made a name for himself simply because, unlike all of the other men, he had never been “laid low by disease” (location 356). This phrasing is ironic and pointed, as the manager is, in fact, quite a lowly man. The other colonists, including Marlow himself, jeopardize their lives to colonize Africa, even though the risks of fever, disease and death appear to be well understood.

In *Black Water*, by Joyce Carol Oates, we leap ahead to the late-20th century in an idyllic town in Maine. In *Black Water*, one of our extremists, the Senator, not only puts his political career above all else, but is driven by his sexual desires, in sharp contrast to the other extremists we have explored thus far, who put their extremist causes above their physical needs. Our other extremist, Kelly, has an Oedipal need to be loved by a father-figure, which unreasonably drives her actions and manifests itself in her premature death by drowning in an automobile that is carelessly piloted by the drunken Senator.

Oates relays Kelly’s tale in a modern, casual and seemingly spatially disorganized yet entirely deliberate narrative, replete with repetition, short utterances, long and fragmented sentences and literary caesura. Kelly’s tale is told in the third person, featuring flashes of the memories that swamp her mind as she slowly suffocates inside of a car at the bottom of a black lagoon. Kelly is smart, but she is also young and thus lacks experience. She is pretty, although not stunning, and thus lacks self-confidence. She is eager and well-intended, but also impressionable and thus susceptible to outside influences. Above all else, Kelly suffers from an Oedipal Complex: her desire to be adored and respected by an older, fatherly man, which Freud and other psychologists describe as an unconscious desire harbored against our common sense and social ethics (*Professor Keefer*), overruns her common sense. Thus when Kelly meets the older and distinguished Senator, a man who is the focus of her college thesis, she is awed and seeks his affections. When he seeks her attention in return, their unique forms of extremism are revealed, as is illustrated in the passage below:

He had told her to call him by his first name – his diminutive first name - of course. But somehow just yet Kelly had not been able to oblige. Such intimacy, together in the bouncing jolting car. The giddy smell of alcohol pungent between them. Beery kisses, that tongue thick enough to choke you. Here was one of the immune, beside her: he, one of the powerful adults of the world, manly man, U.S. Senator, a famous face and a tangled history, empowered to not merely endure history but to guide it, control it, manipulate it to his own

ends. He was an old-style liberal Democrat out of the 1960's, a Great Society man with a stubborn and zealous dedication to social reform seemingly not embittered or broken or even greatly surprised at the opposition his humanitarian ideas aroused in the America of the waning years of the twentieth century for his life was politics, you know what politics is, in its essence: the art of compromise. (Black Water, p. 61)

The Senator's request that Kelly call him by his "first name – his diminutive first name – of course" is the first intimation of intimacy between them, an intimacy that the Senator initiates by requesting that she use his shortened first name. The reader never learns the Senator's name, however, as Kelly doesn't feel comfortable addressing him with anything other than his formal title: "but somehow just yet Kelly had not been able to oblige." That Kelly cannot "just yet" see him as anything other than a great man with an important title, despite the casual approach he takes with her throughout the story, demonstrates the power imbalance between them and underscores her need to be desired by a father-figure, an older man who is seemingly worthy of her respect. Later in the narrative, when the reader learns of Kelly's first meeting with the Senator, Oates once again demonstrates Kelly's Oedipal Complex when she portrays the Senator shaking "Kelly Kelleher's *small boned hand*, squeezing... 'Kelly, is it? Callie? *Kelly*'...She'd laughed, liking the sound of her *school-girl name* on the Senator's lips" (emphasis added, p. 83).

Oates' placement of this passage also underscores the Oedipal extremism that influences Kelly, and the Senator's response to it, as the passage is immediately followed by the Senator, in reply to Kelly questioning whether they were lost, saying "'this is a shortcut, Kelly'...as if speaking to a very young child or to a drunken young woman, slowly... 'There's only one direction and we can't be lost.' Just before the car flew off the road" (p. 61 and 62). The Senator addresses Kelly like a child; this is what Kelly appears to have desired, a father-figure, and yet he dismisses her condescendingly as either a kid or a drunk, even though he is the one who is clearly intoxicated, and he is indeed lost.

That Kelly's affection for the Senator is driven by her Oedipal Complex is visible in the descriptions Oates applies to the Senator. These descriptions are distant, editorial and admiring, as if they might appear in a favorable newspaper clipping, forming the image Kelly has of the "powerful" and "adult" Senator in her own mind. Oates writes, "here was one of the immune, beside her: he, one of the powerful adults of the world, manly man...U.S. Senator, a famous face and a tangled history, empowered to not merely endure history but to guide it, control it, manipulate it to his own ends." In describing the Senator as a "manly man" with a "famous face," Oates uses consonant word pairings to underscore the elevated view Kelly has of the Senator. In these sentences, Oates details cracks in the Senator's persona and Kelly's view of him when Oates uses words like "tangled," "control" and "manipulate."

The Senator represents the stereotypical powerful older man, an ideal object of Kelly's Oedipal fixation. He is confident and accustomed to being the center of attention. He is tall and "broad shouldered," (p. 80) handsome from a distance, and although he is fraying around the edges in his older age, described as "beginning to go soft in the gut" (p.90) and having "faintly yellowed [eyes] as with fatigue" (p. 58), this only makes him more attractive to Kelly, who is subconsciously seeking just such an

experienced, worldly older man. Oates describes him in a poetic style as “...an old-style liberal Democrat out of the 1960’s, a Great Society man with a stubborn and zealous dedication to social reform...” This description of the Senator contrasts with the description of Kelly’s own father, who appears to be a conservative, average American citizen who supports politicians who Kelly dubs “Nazis” and “fascists” (p. 41). Although extreme, it isn’t uncommon for a young woman to rebel, attempting to garner attention by seeking the affections of an older man whose political leanings are both in-line with her own and juxtaposed to those of her father.

The Senator seems to key-in immediately on Kelly’s worshipful view of him and he seeks her affections in return. He is affected by a form of physical extremism, driven by his sexual desire for a far younger woman, despite his marriage and the risks to his political career of such an association. The erotic tension between Kelly and the Senator is palpable in the passage above, as Oates rhythmically writes: “such intimacy, together in the bouncing jolting car.” And yet there is also a clear undertone of disgust that begins to emerge in this passage, serving as an ominous and foreboding sign: Kelly recalls the Senator boldly approaching her earlier in the day and stealing a kiss: “beery kisses, that tongue thick enough to choke you.” That he feels he can approach her and kiss her aggressively so early in their relationship, practically “choking” her in the process, again suggests an extreme focus on his physical needs and a power imbalance. Oates also uses the visual imagery of the Senator’s “thick” tongue as an analogy for his masculinity. It is his masculine desire to sleep with Kelly – driving recklessly in part to accomplish this goal – that leads to Kelly actually “choking” to death.

The Senator also suffers from another form of extremism: he puts his political ambitions above all else, including Kelly’s life. While appearing to be a man who fights for the rights of the underprivileged, he is later revealed as a typical hypocritical politician. This is made obvious by his decision to kick Kelly to save himself from the sinking automobile, thinking only of his reputation and making no attempt to save Kelly’s life. In the passage above, Oates again uses the word “seemingly” deliberately, emphasizing how little we know of the Senator’s underbelly relative to his “humanitarian” public image. Oates also uses the words “stubborn” and “zealous” in a positive sentence, and yet these words have obvious negative connotations.

At the denouement, we learn that the Senator is so willing to protect his political career, he even concocts a tale in which Kelly “was drunk, and she got emotional, and she grabbed at the wheel and the car swerved off the road...” (p. 147). Thus he is such an extremist in relation to his political career that he not only abandons Kelly to die, but he also then assigns her the blame for the accident. While the consequences of the Senator’s extremism remain unknown to the reader at the close of *Black Water*, the outcome of Kelly’s extreme Oedipal need to be loved by a father-figure is her unfortunate death. Had Kelly not been so driven by her extreme Oedipal Complex, she might have made a series of more balanced and rational decisions about the Senator. She might have concluded that he was married, far too old for her, and far too intoxicated to drive. Instead, when the Senator asks Kelly if she would like to turn back, she replies “of course not” (p. 109).

We will now turn our attention to the brand of extremism associated with the unjust treatment of Muslim women in certain cultures and enclaves, which, as we will discuss, can beget an extremist

response. Contrary to modern western perceptions, this form of extremism has nothing to do with the Islamic religion itself, nor does it relate to the traditional western visions of Islamic terrorism. Rather, it has much to do with the human interpretation of the Islamic religion. Namely, some men, and even some women, persistently and doggedly treat women appallingly, virtually enslaving them, belittling them, mutilating them and degrading them, often in the name of religion, even though the Islamic religion itself in no way mandates such wretched treatment of women. In *Paradise Beneath Her Feet*, Isobel Coleman addresses the influence of some tribal customs on interpreting Islam in a manner that encourages the extreme treatment of women:

Islamic feminists claim that Islamic law evolved in ways inimical to women not due to any inevitability or intention in its core beliefs, but because of selective interpretation by patriarchal leaders...the worst practices toward women, like those of the Taliban, in fact represent a subversion of Islamic teaching, its corruption by tribal customs and traditions. (Paradise Beneath Her Feet, p. xix)

Coleman later provides extraordinarily vivid real-world examples of several Muslim women who have been severely mistreated and abused. She uses a series of factual accounts to relay the notion that some Muslim women are subject to destructive extremism that “flies in the face of Islamic values:”

In some [Islamic] societies, women’s rights are at the forefront of a protracted battle between religious extremists and those with more moderate, progressive views. In the name of Islam, numerous women leaders have been assassinated; hundreds of girls’ schools have been destroyed in Pakistan and Afghanistan; across South Asia, the Middle East, and even in Muslim communities in Europe and North America, thousands of young women – mothers, wives, sisters, daughters – have been murdered by close male relatives for supposed “honor crimes”; in Somalia in 2008, in front of a crowd of a thousand people, a thirteen-year-old girl was stoned to death for adultery after her family told local authorities that she has been raped; in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, Islamic vigilantes throw acid on women’s faces for not fully covering themselves. In Palestine, Sunni extremists belonging to shadowy groups such as the “Swords of Islamic Righteousness” threaten to slit the throats of female broadcasters from “vein to vein” if they do not wear strict Islamic dress. All these acts of violence are justified by their perpetrators as upholding sharia [or Islamic law], as conforming to the will and rule of God. Yet moderate Muslims condemn this violence as perverted extremism that flies in the face of Islamic values. (Paradise Beneath Her Feet, p. 7 and p. 8)

Such extreme poor treatment of Muslim women dismisses their humanity, much in the same way the colonists dismissed the humanity of the Africans in *Heart of Darkness* and the whites dismissed the humanity of the Native Americans in *Gardens in the Dunes*. This extremist behavior can provoke extremist reactions on the part of the mistreated women, who appear to abide by Newton’s Third Law of Motion, which states that every action has an equal and opposite reaction: put simply, extremism can beget extremism.

The first novel we explore that addresses destructive extremism against some Muslim women and their extremist response is *The Patience Stone*, by Atiq Rahimi. *The Patience Stone* is set in Afghanistan in the early-1990s in the midst of a destructive civil war, and like *Black Water*, takes place inside a single space, in this case a room, in which an unnamed woman's husband, who is also nameless, lies dying, having been shot during a silly dispute. Like *Black Water*, the memories of the woman in *The Patience Stone*, which span multiple years and settings, form the basis of the storyline.

In *The Patience Stone*, Rahimi portrays a critical moment in the transformation of the unnamed woman from a victim of men's whims, including those of her husband, to the master of her own fate: she has been treated extremely, and she responds in kind. Rahimi relays the woman's immense grief after she has been raped by a young male soldier, as well as her final transformation, in short, rhythmic, emotive and visually moving sentences:

The woman is still sitting in the same place. She stays there a long time, without a glance at the green curtain. Her eyes fill with tears. Her body huddles up. She wraps her arms around her knees, tucks in her head and wails. A single, heartbreaking wail. A breeze flutters, as if in response to her cry, lifting the curtains to let the gray fog flood the room. The woman raises her head. Slowly. She does not stand. She still doesn't raise her eyes to the green curtain. She doesn't dare. She stares down at the crumpled notes scattering in the breeze. Cold or emotion, tears or terror makes her breath come in gasps. She is shaking. Eventually she gets to her feet, and rushes into the passage, to the toilet. She washes, and changes her dress. Reappears. Dressed in green and white. Looking more serene. (The Patience Stone, Kindle location 1100)

The woman is nearly animalistic in her grief, with her body "huddle[ed] up" and a "single, heartbreaking wail" escaping her lips. Her grief has accumulated over a lifetime of abuse suffered at the hands of her father, husband, the soldier who raped her and even her mother-in-law. Each of these individuals has fanatically followed the tribal cultural norms and the religious teachings of those who would have them believe that women aren't equal to men. In doing so, they have taken the extreme stance of ignoring the humanity of women, and the equal devotion of these women to a shared religion. As Khaled Hosseini writes in the introductory lines to *The Patience Stone*, "it is a vexing fact that women are the most beleaguered members of Afghan society...the ironclad rule of patriarchal, tribal law has long denied women their right to work, education, adequate health care, and personal independence..." (location 8).

The female protagonist in *The Patience Stone* has reached her tipping point in this critical scene, a tipping point that will alter the course of the narrative by provoking the woman's extremist response. She is still afraid of her husband, who has come to be represented by the "green curtain" behind which she has hidden him. Yet she gradually regains her humanity as she "raises her head. Slowly." The woman leaves and then "reappears. Dressed in green and white. Looking more serene." Green is commonly used in literature and art to symbolize the earth, and thus life and growth, and it is also symbolic of Islam. While the husband is cloaked behind a "green curtain," the woman has been reborn in this scene, unable to be kept down, and she appears "serene" as a result. She too has emerged in the color green,

implying that she has not shed her faith, but rather the human constraints placed on her by those who use her faith as an excuse to oppress her. She also emerges cloaked in white, which is symbolic of rebirth and innocence in the west, and is the color of mourning in China and parts of Africa.

The woman in *The Patience Stone* has always had the gumption to be an extremist, she has just kept it hidden, buried deep until this critical juncture. As the woman confesses her secrets to her bedridden and seemingly unconscious husband, the reader learns that the woman has consistently taken whatever steps have been necessary to protect herself, even if they have been extreme. When the woman's husband proves to be barren and yet she faces the blame for their childless marriage and risks being cast aside, she finds another man to impregnate her – not once, but twice. When her father sells her sister in exchange for gambling debts brought on by quail fighting, she kills his quail. When her husband engages in intercourse with her while she pretends to be asleep, and then beats her when he discovers that he is covered in her “impure” menstrual blood, she later retorts by using his body as she wishes while he lies in bed unconscious.

The woman has had a clitoridectomy as a young girl, which is an extreme act that irrevocably alters the female form, often leading not only to physical discomfort during sexual intercourse, but also to long-term health problems, including ongoing vaginal infections. Sex is an important component of the woman's story, as it is a means by which some men, and even some women, have attempted to control her by robbing her of her ability to physically enjoy the act of intercourse, by requiring her virginity for marriage and then demanding that she submit to sex only when it behooves her husband, and ultimately by raping her. The woman first lies to the soldier and his peer, telling them that she is a prostitute only to protect herself. Yet she responds to the extreme act of rape, and to the extremism of all of the sexual oppression she has suffered, by becoming a prostitute. Prostitution not only provides her with the ability to earn an income to provide for herself and her children, but it also offers her a chance to wrest some control, despite the social stigma associated with the profession, thereby displaying a form of opposite extremism. The woman “laughs sarcastically,” underscoring her distress, as she relays her view of the power inherent in prostitution to her unconscious husband using vulgar and frank language. Presumably it is uncommon for a Muslim woman in this part of the world to speak in such a manner to her husband or any other man – whether conscious or not – again conveying the extremity of her response:

“I had to tell him that – otherwise, he would have raped me.” She is shaken by a sarcastic laugh. “For men like him, to fuck or rape a whore is not an achievement. Putting his filth into a hole that has already served hundreds before him does not engender the slightest masculine pride...Men like him are afraid of whores. And do you know why? I’ll tell you why, my sang-e- saboor: when you fuck a whore, you don’t dominate her body. It’s a matter of exchange. You give her money, and she gives you pleasure. And I can tell you that often she’s the dominant one. It’s she who is fucking you.” (The Patience Stone, Kindle location 1469)

God Dies by the Nile, by Nawal El Saadawi, is another literary work that demonstrates that extremism can beget extremism. The novel portrays the hopeless lives of the poor who live along the

banks of Egypt's Nile river in a village named Kafr El Teen during the mid-21st century. It describes the struggles faced by a family of peasants and their fellow villagers, whose lives are destroyed by the ruthless actions of the wealthy and powerful men of Kafr El Teen, particularly the Mayor.

The Mayor of Kafr el Teen abuses his authority, using the local village women for his carnal pleasures, and then discarding them. The Mayor preys on the village women, whose innocence he finds "exciting," preferring them to the women of Cairo who have "brazen" eyes and are no longer "intimidated" by anything (p. 120). As the village barber says of the Mayor's propensities, "you know he gets bored very quickly, and none of these girls has lasted with him very long" (p. 159). These women, once discarded by the Mayor, are shunned by their families and the broader community. Yet the Mayor appears to escape broader scrutiny, as he is described as "above suspicion, above the law, even above the moral rules which governed ordinary people's behavior" (p. 123 and 124). The Mayor has many of the symptoms of extremism: like the Senator in *Black Water*, the Mayor appears to think first of carnal need for these women, and he is willing to go to great lengths to fulfill his desires, including murder and deception.

The female protagonist, Zakeya, responds to this abuse, which her beloved niece and other members of her family have suffered, with her own form of extremism: she beats the mayor to death with a hoe, which he "did not feel...land on his head and crush it at one blow" (p. 173). Zakeya's extremism is marked not only by the very act of murder, but also by her inability to think of anything else, including her own physical needs, as she "never slept, or even closed her eyes" as she crouched in waiting for the mayor (p. 173). Zakeya is also willing to sacrifice her physical freedom to eliminate the Mayor, as she later finds herself imprisoned for his murder.

In the following passage, Saadawi introduces a scene that, like the terrible rape passage in *The Patience Stone*, serves as a critical tipping point in the dramatic structure of the novel, and underscores the suffering of the village women of Kafr El Teen. It is at this point, long before Zakeya has determined to kill the Mayor, that her sorrows have accumulated and reached an unbearable pitch. Zakeya expresses her distress by becoming physically despondent. Her family and fellow villagers respond by initiating a ritual involving wailing, dancing and animal sacrifice, which is intended to heal:

Her wail went back and back to such times and others she could not forget like a lament which has no end, and sees no end to all the pain in life. It seemed to be as long as the length of her life, as long as the hours of her days and nights. It went on and on as she tugged at her hair with all her might, tore her garment to shreds, and dug her nails into the flesh of her body as though she wanted to tear herself apart. It went on and on as Om Saber continued to fill her cupped hands with the blood of the slaughtered cock, and spray it over her face, and her neck, and over her body at the front and the back. "Scream Zakeya!" she cried out. "Chase the evil spirit out of your body. Scream as loud and as long as you can." Now they were all screaming at the top of their voices. Zakeya and Om Saber, Nafoussa and Zeinab, Sheik Metwalli and all the men and women of Kafr El Teen who were gathered around. Their voices joined in a high-pitched wail, as long as the length of their lives, reaching back to those moments in time when they had been born, and beaten and bitten

and burnt under the soles of their feet, and in the walls of their stomach, since the bitterness flowed with their bile, and death snatched their sons and their daughters, one after the other in a line. (God Dies by the Nile, p. 96)

In describing Zakeya's despondency, Saadawi masterfully expresses the anguish and frustration of the women of Kafr el Teen, many of whom are beaten, used and oppressed. Of their anguish, Saadawi writes, "their voices joined in a high-pitched wail, as long as the length of their lives, reaching back to those moments in time when they had been born, and beaten and bitten and burnt..." Saadawi emphasizes their pain with extreme words that serve as resonant descriptors; she also uses consonance and a poetic, euphonic rhythm when she uses the words "born," "beaten," "bitten," "burnt," "bitterness" and "bile" in a single, emotive sentence. Saadawi also employs visual imagery of the physical harm they suffer, such as burns to their feet from laboring barefoot in the fields under the scorching sun. Zakeya's emotions become the collective emotions of the villagers, and her anguish becomes their collective pain. Saadawi writes, "now they were all screaming at the top of their voices." Zakeya's painful memories span her entire lifetime, as she is born into an unjust world. That Zakeya's deep pain, and that of the villagers, particularly the women, has plagued them is evidenced by Saadawi's repetition of the phrases "as long as the length of her [their] life [lives]" and "on and on." It is this collective pain, coupled with the harm caused by the Mayor's extremist actions, which leads Zakeya down the extremist path.

Next we turn our attention to one of the ugliest manifestations of extremism: genocide. Genocide is defined by the Oxford dictionary as "the deliberate and systematic destruction, in whole or in part, of an ethnic, racial, religious, or national group." The words "deliberate" and "systematic" are critical: one requires an element of intent and the other implies organization and planning. The act of committing genocide thus has all of the markings of extremism. It involves the devoted pursuit of an interest, which in this case is the mass extinction of a specific population.

Snow, by Orhan Pamuk, grazes the topic of genocide, specifically the Armenian genocide that occurred in Turkey between 1915 and 1923. Whether the Armenian genocide actually occurred remains a subject of heated debate even today. Despite numerous historical records supporting its occurrence, Turkey has never acknowledged that these events transpired, and citizens who attempt to verify or recognize the existence of the genocide are often punished. The lack of freedom of speech in Turkey is such that in 2005, Pamuk was tried for mentioning that Armenians and Kurds were killed in Turkey. Given these constraints, the history of Turkish Armenians lingers like a distant cloud in *Snow*, never quite making its way to the forefront, but still ever-present. Pamuk makes several positive, passive references to the Armenians, including the following: "during the Ottoman period, many different peoples had made Kars their home. There had been a large Armenian community; it no longer existed, but its thousand-year-old churches still stood in all their splendor" (Kindle location 436). Pamuk's passing mention that the Armenian community "no longer existed," without further explanation, coupled with his use of the word "splendor" to describe the Armenian churches, is a telling refrain.

Snow is the story of a young Turkish poet named Ka, who returns to a small impoverished town in eastern Turkey during the waning years of the 21st century after twelve years of exile in Germany.

During his brief stay in Kars, Ka finds himself at the center of the religious, political, social and ethnic tensions that plague modern-day Turkey. *Snow* is so buried in societal divides, it becomes challenging for the reader to differentiate between the numerous factions that comprise Kars, and the terminology and ideology that apply to each. Pamuk shows that it is insufficient to simply be a member of Turkish society. One must self-identify as a Muslim, a Christian, an atheist, a secularist, a political Islamist, a leftist Islamist, a Kurd, an Azeri, a Terekemian, a communist, a Marxist communist, a democrat, a member of the People's Party, a member of the Prosperity Party, a headscarf wearer, and so on. Self-identification in any one category can lead to the extremist pursuit of whatever underlying cause that category represents. The Turkish state itself institutes its own form of extremism, forbidding divergent views through the use of spying, police brutality and propaganda. Contrary to the western view of extremism as behavior propagated by Islamists, in this case, the Turkish state spies heavily on the Islamists: as Pamuk writes, "in the old days, [the Turkish police] kept files on leftists and democrats, but now they're most interested in the Islamists" (location 2372).

Snow, like *The Patience Stone* and *God Dies by the Nile*, demonstrates that extremism can beget extremism. When the secular Turkish state mandates that young women cannot wear their headscarves to school, even though these headscarves are a critical part of their self-identity and an expression of their Islamic faith, the young women protest. The state responds by arresting these women and banning them from school, doggedly pursuing its stance. It is believed that at least one woman responds to this extremism with her own brand of extremism: she kills herself, a horrible sin in the Islamic faith and a drastic, symbolic final act. Society too propagates a form of extremism by making outcasts of young women who refuse to abide by the social and cultural norms, such as chastity, propriety and obedience, including marrying far older men at the behest of their parents. Sometimes these women are made outcasts simply with innuendo of their noncompliance. In each of these cases in *Snow*, the extremist pursues his or her cause with devotion and the consequences are suicide and murder.

The Armenian genocide is a highly relevant history to the underlying plot of *Snow*, not only because the act of genocide is based on extreme intolerance, but also because similar ethnic, religious and social tensions explored in *Snow* contributed to the Armenian genocide, even though it occurred nearly 100 years earlier. The Armenian genocide featured a "deliberate" mass deportation and massacre of Armenians beginning in 1915, which was driven by the leading political party's advocacy of "Pan-Turanism" or the creation of a new empire stretching from Anatolia into Central Asia whose population would be exclusively Turkic. This goal was widely publicized in political propaganda, and clearly required the elimination of the Armenian population, which was Christian, and thus an impediment to the creation of an Islamic-only empire. The Armenian genocide was also "systematic," as the removal of Armenians from the region was deliberate, methodical and forcible, involving mass marches into the desert, starvation, internment in concentration camps, and ultimately, murder.

In *The Knock at the Door*, Margaret Ajemian Ahnert vividly portrays her mother Ester's personal experience as a young Armenian girl living in Turkey at the start of the genocide in 1915. Ester, her family and fellow Armenian villagers were forced to flee their village at the start of the genocide in a forced march to a death camp in the desert of Der-el-Zor. Ahnert writes, "it was rumored that those who made it to the death camps were the strong ones, most died along the way" (location 965). Many

Armenians died long before reaching the death camps because they either starved to death or were attacked by Turkish soldiers while en route. Ahnert describes just such a brutal attack, which Ester experienced during the forced march to Der-el-Zor, using disturbing visual and auditory imagery and metaphors:

I slipped to the ground. Around me people were screaming. Some were crushed under wagon wheels; others were bleeding from various parts of their bodies. One horse stomped on a woman next to me and I heard the loud cracking of her bones breaking. It was like the sound of Grandmom cracking walnuts, only louder. Another man near me was stuck under a broken wagon wheel. He was holding onto a woman's hand. Her head was missing! Those who were not killed on the first charge were robbed and beaten. Then the soldiers came for the girls. The prettiest ones were taken first. I watched as soldiers lifted some of the girls by their hair and threw them over the backs of their horses. Then they rode away. (The Knock at the Door, Kindle location 948)

Just as *The Patience Stone* and *God Dies by the Nile* show that extremism can beget extremism, so too does *The Knock at the Door*. Ester's grandmother responds to the extreme brutality of those bent on the genocide of the Armenians with her own extreme act: she scratches Ester's face with a sharp rock, and then rubs raw garlic and mud into "the creases" of the wound. With "a satisfied tone in her voice," Ester's grandmother says, "there, this will fester and weep and you will look ugly. Quickly, put on these baggy clothes, and maybe the soldiers won't want you" (location 951).

It is estimated that by 1923, one-and-a-half million Armenians had been killed, eliminating entirely the Armenian population from the region and between one-third and one-half of all Armenians globally. Boualem Sansal, the author of *The German Mujahid*, a novel we explore next, alludes to the Armenian genocide when he writes that the Turkish people had "a genocide of [their] own, one which is all the more terrible since they have the gall not to admit to it" (p. 176). The Armenian genocide even served as a vile launching pad for the Holocaust. In 1939, in reference to the extermination of the Poles, Hitler said, "who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?"

The German Mujahid addresses the Holocaust directly, and in doing so, portrays the many consequences of multiple forms of extremism. *The German Mujahid* is the modern day tale of two brothers who appear to share little in common. The elder brother, Rachel, is a responsible French citizen: he holds a university degree, has maintained a bread-winning career, a lovely suburban home and a beautiful wife. The younger brother, Malrich, shares none of his brother's accomplishments: he hasn't achieved an education, has had numerous run-ins with the law and lives in the "estate," a slang-term for the housing developments on the outskirts of Paris that provide shelter to the underprivileged, consisting mostly of first and second generation Muslim immigrants. Sansal relays the tale of these two brothers using their respective diaries as the plotline. This enables him to portray the varying forms of extremism using two distinct voices. Rachel's language is educated, formal, scientific, analytical, rigid and proper. In contrast, Malrich's language is colloquial and brimming with curses. Both brothers are born in a small village in Algeria called Ain Deb and later immigrate to France. Their mother is a Muslim Algerian national and their father is a German who presumably immigrated to Algeria in the late 1940's

or early 1950's. The parents are later murdered in a massacre in their hometown; when Rachel returns to Algeria to mourn their death, he discovers that his father served as a Nazi officer during World War II, having likely run the gas chambers and crematoriums used to "exterminate" millions of Jews. Rachel endeavors to uncover the truth about his father, while asking himself an important theoretical question: "are we responsible for the crimes of our fathers, of our brothers, of our children?" (p. 46). What Rachel uncovers ultimately leads him to suicide, leaving Malrich to retrace his brother's steps. In the process, Malrich draws a parallel between the extremism of the Holocaust and the extremism of a new form of strict Islamic law that has overtaken the "estate."

Like the Armenian genocide, the Holocaust meets all of the characteristics of genocide, and thus represents one of the most devastating forms of extremism. The Holocaust involved the "deliberate" and "systematic" murder of "an entire ethnic, racial, religious, or national group." In this case, the primary target was the Jews, although the Nazis cast a wide evil net, also targeting gypsies, the disabled and homosexuals, among others deemed to be "racially inferior" to the Aryan German people. In an effort to concentrate, monitor and enable the fast removal of entire Jewish populations, the Nazis forced Jews to identify their religion by wearing a yellow star and created "ghettos" where Jews were required to live. These "ghettos" were small, often walled-in areas within urban cities that were characterized by overcrowding and close Nazi oversight. Eventually the Jews were forcibly removed from the "ghettos" and taken to "concentration camps," where they were first separated from their families and loved ones. They were then either murdered, typically in gas chambers, or forced to remain in the concentration camps to labor under brutal conditions. By the end of World War II, the Nazi regime had viciously murdered nearly six million European Jews, or nearly two out of every three Jews who lived in Europe prior to the Holocaust. Millions of others, including many Russians and Poles, also perished under Nazi rule.

Like the Turkish government in 1915, Hitler and the Nazi party used propaganda, fear and violence to sway many German people to behave in such a vile extremist manner. Sansal writes of some of the revolting propaganda slogans used by the Nazis: "God helps those who kill the Jews;" "an Aryan in the hand is worth all the Jews in the world;" "preserve the bloodline, beware of contamination;" and "is your neighbor sick or handicapped? Kill him" (p. 85). Sansal relays the sheer hatred, ignorance and madness of these Nazi extremists when Rachel encounters the deranged son of a former Nazi officer who appears to hate everyone but the Aryan Germans. He vilely refers to the "...backstabbing French cunts...," the "...vermin...Yids..." and the Russians, Chinese and Koreans as "...commies and niggers and gooks..." (p. 98, 99 and 100). Like any other extremist, this man is devoted entirely to his cause, still "running" an entirely unnecessary organization called "Unit 134" decades after the end of the war. Rachel encounters this insane extremist as he retraces his father's footsteps and aggressively conducts Holocaust research that teaches him of the extreme horrors committed by the Nazis. Rachel relays some of these horrors in his analytical and scientific voice in the passage below:

Overseeing an operation of this nature is not as easy as it might seem. It is a complex industrial process with all the flaws inherent in such systems: a poorly educated workforce prone to absenteeism, then there were the power failures, stock shortages, disparities between supply and demand at the Kremas, which disrupt schedules and break the working

rhythm, creating bottlenecks and resulting in workers unable to work. Then there is the necessary micromanagement – as we call it these days because it sounds more complex than management – with all that it entails: unfeasible performance targets imposed like religious tenets, inter-departmental rivalry, the cliques, the clashes of interest, the scrabbling for seniority, the blunders. (The German Mujahid, p. 138)

Rachel appears unable to unwind the actions of the extremists who commit genocide, including his own father, from his logically-trained mind. Thus he relays the act of gassing millions to death and then burning their bodies as a business person might relay the findings of a financial statement analysis or the review of a company's initial public offering prospectus. This leaves his language devoid of symbolism or poetry, and makes it instead cold, frank and process-oriented. Ironically, Rachel provides this detached assessment of mass murder after he has lost his sanity and is close to death. He appears to have retreated into his own mind, hewing to his natural tendency towards analytics. Rachel refers to the systematic murder of millions as a "complex industrial process" focused on "productivity." He references manufacturing terms such as "bottlenecks" and "performance targets." He equates the excess or under-supply of dead bodies for cremation to "shortages between supply and demand." Rachel's research shows that the Nazis used a "production line" process to assuage the guilt of the concentration camp workers, "giving each individual worker the impression that he was performing only the most innocuous task in the extermination process" (p. 135). The emptiness of Rachel's language, and the parallel he draws to a manufacturing machine, does not reflect his own feelings about the Holocaust; rather, it reflects the sick mindset of any extremist who can engage in the act of mass murder because of a severely misguided devotion to an evil cause. Thus Sansal's use of Rachel's methodical, removed voice to relay this mindset – a mindset that is so utterly devoid of humanity – is entirely appropriate. The extremists Rachel detachedly describes include the "poorly educated [concentration camp] workers" and Rachel's own father. Rachel describes his father's extremism when he says, "[my father] did not kill one person, he killed two, then a hundred, then thousands, tens of thousands, he might have killed millions. He was caught between hatred and servitude and such chasms of the mind are bottomless" (p. 226 and 227). Perhaps the "hatred" to which Rachel refers is the "cause" associated with the extreme act of genocide, the fervent loathing of an entire people, while "servitude" is the act of murder in fulfillment of that evil cause. As Rachel says, "murder on this scale is not something that can be achieved by a random serial killer" (p. 139).

Just as *The Patience Stone*, *God Dies by the Nile*, *Snow* and *The Knock at the Door* show that extremism can beget extremism, so too does *The German Mujahid*. Rachel becomes obsessed with uncovering his father's history, possessed by an extreme devotion to understanding the past, which Malrich refers to as Rachel's "journey to the heart of darkness," like Conrad's exploration of colonization in *Heart of Darkness* (p. 169). As a result of this devotion, Rachel eventually loses his job and his wife. Just like several of our other extremists, Rachel's physical and mental health deteriorate as he puts his cause above all else. Malrich describes this deterioration: "Rachel wasn't the same anymore, he spent all his time brooding, he was reading way too much and travelling all the time, running around all over the place, and every time he came back he was worse" (p. 38). Rachel's extreme obsession with the Holocaust eventually drives him to commit suicide, as did the covered girls in *Snow*. This is, of course,

among the most extreme and absolute of acts. Unlike the obvious destructive extremism of genocide, Rachel's extreme act of suicide can be construed as either constructive *or* destructive. On the one hand, it is clearly destructive because it leads to the premature death of an honest, earnest and bright young man. On the other hand, it is also constructive because it is well-intended. Rachel won't classify his death as "atonement" for his father's sins, but even as he sarcastically refers to a God that "majestically roams the heavens" while permitting the destruction of genocide, he nonetheless poetically refers to his suicide as "a gesture of love:"

So, for my father, for his victims, I will pay in full. It is simple justice. Let it not be said that all the Schillers have failed. May God, that blind and senseless thing that majestically roams the heavens, forgive my father, and let Him take note that for my part I expect nothing of Him. May his victims forgive us, that is all that matters to me. My death does not atone for anything, it is a gesture of love" (The German Mujahid, p. 227)

Rachel's suicide, and the diary he bequeaths to Malrich after his death, leaves Malrich to retrace Rachel's steps. In this way, Sansal creates a symbolic and poetic symmetry between the actions of the two brothers, despite their blatant differences in education, lifestyle, manner and speech. However, Malrich's retracement doesn't lead him to commit suicide. Instead, he draws a parallel between the extremism of the Holocaust and the extremism of a new form of strict Islamic law that has overtaken the "estate." Malrich begins to see this parallel when a beautiful young Muslim woman from the "estate" is found dead in a basement, "all naked and tied up with barbed wire, her face and body burnt to shit with a blowtorch" (p. 64). She was violently and symbolically killed because an extremist determined that her physical appearance was un-Islamic and because she "hung around with boys – and not just any boys – *kaffirs*, unbelievers" (p. 65). The Islamic authorities in the "estate" are subsequently arrested and replaced by new, even more "extreme" authorities. Malrich imitates Rachel by writing a letter to the French Minister in which he describes the parallel between these two forms of extremism in his frank, matter-of-fact and streetwise tone, devoid of nuance or innuendo:

Jihadists have taken over our estate and are making our lives hell. It's not an extermination camp yet, but it's pretty much ein Konzentrationslager, as they said during the Third Reich. Gradually, people are forgetting that they live in France, half an hour from Paris, and we're finding out that the principles France talks about on the world stage are really just political bullshit. Even so, and in spite of our flaws, they are principles we believe in more than ever. Everything that we as men, as French citizens, refuse to contemplate, the Islamists are more than happy to do and we're not even allowed to complain because, they tell us, it is the will of Allah, and Allah's law trumps everything. At the rate things are going – since the adults are too pious to open their eyes and the kids are too innocent to see further than the ends of their noses – the estate H24 will soon be a full-blown Islamic Republic. (The German Mujahid, p. 157)

Sansal effectively relays the horrors of genocide by using the two distinct voices of Rachel and Malrich. This enables the reader to connect to the story through more than one channel, and it creates a symphonic account, with crescendos, pianissimos, dissonances and harmonies. While

Rachel's detailed historical accounts often provide the meat and bones of the tale, Malrich's curse-laden tongue provides a few moments of levity for exhalation. One reader might relate to Rachel's responsible ways and analytical mind, while another reader might relate to Malrich's "sailor mouth" and street-smarts. One reader might see Rachel's suicide as an honorable act, while another reader might view Malrich's day-to-day life as requiring real gumption. Rachel recounts the horrors of the past in vivid detail, while Malrich is more firmly planted in the troubles of the present day. Together, Sansal's two brothers are the yin and the yang that form the whole.

In *Soul Mountain*, Gao Xingjian employs a similar technique to portray the literal and metaphorical journey of "self," enabling the reader to relate to this exploration through multiple channels, whether sexual, mythological, logical or natural, and through multiple parts of one psyche. *Soul Mountain* is a form of self-portrait for Xingjian that was written shortly after the end of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. It is not an autobiography, and yet it relays parts of his life: for example, his lung cancer misdiagnosis. It is thus not entirely fictional, although it is replete with ancient Chinese folktales and other yarns. The novel is subdivided between the "I," whose path seems to more closely mirror Xingjian's own path, and the "you," "he" and "she," whose paths appear to be more mystical, mythological and fantastical. "I," "you," "he" and "she" explore the Chinese mountains largely on foot in an effort to escape the oppressiveness of communist China and to find the "self." "I," "you," "he" and "she" have always been four parts of a single psyche, the yin and yang of the protagonist, and thus eventually merge into one "self." Xingjian appropriately writes of the endeavor of discovering the "self" or the "soul" from the perspective of "I:" "however, the problem is if my soul manifested itself, would I be able to comprehend it? And even if I were able to comprehend it, what would it lead to?" (location 3528). Like *Gardens in the Dunes*, the journey to find the "self" is deeply connected to nature, as the impressive mountains in rural China serve as the backdrop. Yet the journey is also a statement about the effects of extremism in communist China: like *Snow*, *Soul Mountain* explores a nation suffering from the severe hangover of extremism, in this case the after-effects of the Cultural Revolution.

The Cultural Revolution began in China in 1966, and although it officially ended in 1969, in actuality it lasted for an entire decade. The Cultural Revolution was conceived of and led by Mao Zedong, then the Chairman of the Communist Party of China. The *stated* intent of the Cultural Revolution was extreme: to remove all capitalist elements from within China. Thus the stated intent of the Cultural Revolution, while not focused on the racial, ethnic or religious characteristics of a people, shared much in common with genocide, as it called for the elimination of an entire group of people with a shared common characteristic: a less than fervent belief in Mao Zedong's vision of communist China. Chairman Mao, as he is often called, attempted to remove these people by initiating a war against the "bourgeoisie" and the "proletariats." In reality, this meant an attack on "intellectuals," including authors, scholars and artists. In reference to art and literature, Chairman Mao famously said, "there is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes, art that is detached from or independent of politics.

Proletarian literature and art are part of the whole proletarian revolutionary cause.”¹ With these words, Chairman Mao framed these “intellectuals” as enemies of the people, and he succeeded in turning the broader population, including Chinese university students, against them.

Similar to the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide, Chairman Mao used propaganda as a means of converting the masses to his extremist cause. One such form of propaganda was the publication of the “Little Red Book,” which contained many of Mao’s speeches and quotes. Chairman Mao was so devoted to his own views that he had the “Little Red Book” made small enough in size that the people could carry it with them at all times. While Chairman Mao said that “to read too many books is harmful,” ownership of the “Little Red Book” was virtually mandatory for Chinese families. In *The German Mujahid*, Rachel draws a parallel between the “Little Red Book” and Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, which was Hitler’s own version of vitriol in writing: “just look at the horrors visited on so many honourable peoples in the service homilies as pathetic as *Mein Kampf*, and with only the meagre resources of third-world countries: Mao's Little Red Book, Qaddafi's Green Book, the writings of Kim Il-sung and Khomeini, and those of the "Turkmenbasy" - Saparmurat Niyazov - and the millions of people destroyed by sects devoid of ideas and of means” (p. 140 and 141). Thus Mao Zedong shared much in common with other extremists, such as Hitler, who used their positions of power to spread messages of hate. These men were all narcissists who viewed their own extremist beliefs with extremist fervency, and saw fit to immortalize their ignorance in writing.

The *actual* intent, as opposed to the *stated* intent, of the Cultural Revolution was extremely narcissistic: to remove Chairman Mao’s political opponents and shore-up his power within the Communist Party. Prior to 1966, Chairman Mao’s political authority had rapidly declined as a result of his misguided plan to evolve China from an agrarian nation to an industrialized one, referred to as the “Great Leap Forward.” The “Great Leap Forward” was a five-year plan first implemented by Chairman Mao in 1958; it involved the mass relocation of Chinese citizens into agricultural communes. Once citizens were relocated to a commune, they were responsible for meeting or exceeding specific state-set agricultural production targets. They were also encouraged to set-up “backyard” steel production plants. Like other forms of extremism, propaganda played an important role in rapidly and dramatically shifting the demographic and economic characteristics of the country. For example, agricultural workers were encouraged to listen to pro-communism speeches on public address systems while working in the fields. Like the consequences of other extremist causes, the results of the “Great Leap Forward” were also extreme: agricultural workers were distracted by steel production mandates and failed to produce sufficient food; this, combined with both floods and droughts in different regions of the country, led to mass starvation. Moreover, the steel produced in “backyards” was too weak to be used in construction and the steel production processes consumed much of the coal the country’s rail system required to operate. By 1959, it was apparent that the “Great Leap Forward” had failed,

¹ <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/ch32.htm>

and Chairman Mao publicly admitted as much. He is quoted as saying, “the chaos caused was on a grand scale, and I take responsibility.”²

Instead of recognizing that his extremist causes were bound to lead to “chaos on a grand scale,” Chairman Mao emerged a little over five years later with another extreme idea: the Cultural Revolution. The results of the Cultural Revolution were also extreme, and in many cases, mirrored the results of other destructive extremist causes, such as the Holocaust or the Armenian genocide: religion was broadly prohibited; ancient religious artifacts, art and literature were destroyed; children and college students were encouraged to take-up arms within an unofficial army that came to be known as the “Red Guard;” freedom of thought and of speech were eliminated; propaganda was widespread; and thousands were murdered or sent to work camps that shared much in common with the concentration camps Sansal so vividly depicts in *The German Mujahid*. Often the simple accusation that a person was against the Cultural Revolution or even a member of the bourgeoisie could lead to death, and many of Chairman Mao’s own political opponents were killed or sent to work camps as a result of such accusations. Chairman Mao encouraged the use of violence as a means of enforcing the Cultural Revolution. Two famous quotes underscore his views on violence: “power grows from the barrel of a gun”³ and “a revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another.”⁴

Soul Mountain addresses the Cultural Revolution with a sidelong glance, much as *Snow* addressed the Armenian genocide from a distance. In both Turkey and China, it remains difficult today to publicly address these historical issues head-on without negative repercussions. Yet the Cultural Revolution, and the aftermath of the oppressive weight of communism in China, is the driver of the “self’s” escape to the mountains. Thus, the Cultural Revolution lingers in the background of *Soul Mountain*. Xingjian makes several references to the effects of the Cultural Revolution. In one passage, he references the destruction of historical cultural artifacts: “the clan genealogy mounted on yellow silk, confiscated and publicly burnt during the Cultural Revolution, was twelve feet long” (location 962). He later references a failed agricultural attempt as a result of the Cultural Revolution that destroyed a lake and the surrounding area, which became “all swampland...that defies drying off or being restored to its original state” (location 2020). In both of these references, Xingjian paints an indirect metaphor of the destruction caused to the Chinese people. It is their prized historical artifacts and their beloved land that were destroyed by the Cultural Revolution. It is the people who cannot be “restored” to their “original state” because the losses they suffered were so great.

² http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/great_leap_forward.htm

³ <http://art-bin.com/art/omao5.html>

⁴ http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china_1900_mao_war.htm

In another passage, “I” attempts to understand the practices of the Yi people by asking a Yi *bimo*, or a Yi shaman priest. Presumably historical records of the Yi are hard to come by post the destruction of the Cultural Revolution, and the Yi have a heritage that is distinct from the Han ethnic majority in China. When “I” asks the *bimo* whether the Yi engaged in cruel punishments such as “chopping off the heels, chopping off fingers, gouging out the eyes, slicing off the ears and spiking the nose,” the *bimo* replies, “we had all these, but of course in the past. They aren’t much different from what happened during the Cultural Revolution” (location 2254). This is among Xingjian’s most direct denunciations of the effects of the destructive extremism of the Cultural Revolution. The statement is not buried in “your” mythological tales. Instead, it is part of a patterned and rhythmic dialogue in which “I” asks a question of the *bimo*, who responds to each question by suggesting that the Yi are really no different from the Han. The *bimo* directly equates the extreme historical punishments enacted by the Yi to the barbarism of the Han during the Cultural Revolution. Because “I” engages in this dialogue, this statement on extremism sits in the equivalent of the frontal lobe of the brain, the present, analytical and logical psyche.

Like *Black Water*, *The Patience Stone* and *God Dies by the Nile*, *Soul Mountain* is also an examination of the extremism that often exists in the male-female relationship. In *Soul Mountain*, “she” is the yin of the “self,” and thus a part of the same protagonist who questions the Yi *bimo*. Despite her status as a part of the whole “self,” and her role as the feminine component of the “soul,” “she” is painted with a narrow brush, conforming to the “self’s” narrow notion of women. “She” is the weakest, softest part of the “self.” When “she” falls in the muddy road while “you” are trekking in the mountains, “you” says, “this is women...they want to go travelling in the mountains but don’t want any hardships” (location 3331). “She” then covers her face with her “muddy hands and starts crying like a child” (location 3338). “You” portrays her as a “child,” and thus paints her as the immature, undeveloped portion of the psyche. Yet it is likely the entire “self” that is so tempted to quit, perhaps by engaging in a childish tantrum. It is not only the journey to find the “self” that is so utterly frustrating, but also the escape from the oppression of communism and the after-effects of the Cultural Revolution. “I,” “you” and “he,” the masculine parts of the “self,” don’t express emotional frustration, only “she” does. Yet the masculine parts of the “soul” express sexual frustrations and desires. “She” is an object of sexual desire; although “she” is a part of the same “self,” “she” is also the manifestation of male lust. The male parts of the psyche simply fail to understand the feminine part, even though “she” is a piece of the whole. As “I” says earlier in the tale, “my understanding of others, including women, is actually superficial and arbitrary” (location 2697). “She” chides “you” to reconsider “your” superficial notions by saying, “don’t keep saying women this, women that, women are also human beings” (location 3137).

Yet the “self” persists in portraying women, including its own feminine side, through an extremist lens, especially in “your” mythological tales: the young and beautiful women are nearly always “sluts” or “seductresses,” and the older and uglier ones are nearly always “witches.” Because extremism often begets extremism, a wronged woman is always highly vengeful in “your” myths. The passage below relays the beginning of a tale “you” tells about a young Chinese

woman. The tale is a myth replete with visual imagery, metaphors and foreshadowing. Thus Xingjian shifts from the logical voice of “I” to the whimsical voice of “you.” Because the myth is relayed orally, it maintains the verbal rhythm of all of “your” tales, and it is interrupted by “her” often childish questions and comments, such as “that’s disgusting:”

On those very hot days when all the villagers sat out on the streets to eat their evening meals, she would walk by every doorway, wriggling her bottom with two empty water buckets on her carrying pole. Maozi’s mother poked her husband with her chopsticks and got such a thrashing during the night that she howled with pain. That sexy fox spirit, the women in the village with husbands all wanted to box her ears. If Maozi’s mother could have had her way, she’d have ripped the clothes off her, grabbed her by the hair, and pushed her head into a nightsoil bucket. That’s disgusting, she says. But that’s how things turned out, you say. (Soul Mountain, Kindle location 3070)

The woman in the folktale has a “sexy fox spirit,” which in Chinese mythology means that she is young, beautiful and potentially dangerous. Thus she is typecast as the beautiful young “seductress.” She knows that she is sexy, as she “walk[s] by every doorway, wriggling her bottom,” enticing the local village men. When “you” says that if “Maozi’s mother could have had her way, she’d have ripped the clothes off her, grabbed her by the hair, and pushed her head into a nightsoil bucket,” “you” is employing foreshadowing. This is close to what later occurs to the beautiful “fox spirit” when she is caught sleeping with Sun the Fourth. The village women decide to punish the beautiful young woman for seducing their husbands: they “stripped off her clothes, trussed her up, and carried her off on a pole,” leaving her still bound in a leper colony after they “stomped on her” and “cursed her” (locations 3086, 3088 and 3090). The beautiful young woman returns to the village several rainy days later, still appearing gravely injured. She eventually recovers and becomes even more “bewitching,” but she ceases to walk about the village in the daylight. It is later discovered that she has contracted leprosy as a result of the rough treatment she received; shortly thereafter, several men in the village contract leprosy, as do their wives. The extremism of the punishment the woman suffers begets an extremist response: the “fox spirit” takes her revenge on the village by inflicting them with leprosy. “You” portrays the state of the leprosy-ridden villagers with disturbing visual imagery when “you” says that they were either “losing skin, losing hair or had running sores” (location 3112).

Men also consistently behave with extreme violence toward women in “your” tales. When a nineteen-year-old girl participates in an armed battle and is captured by the enemy, she is “stripped” and a soldier fires “a magazine of bullets from his submachine gun into her vagina” (location 3272). The visual imagery of the stories “you” relays about women are gutturally disturbing. Women are also often raped. In another tale “you” tells, three men rape and then murder a sixteen year-old *zhuhuapo*. This woman is also young, beautiful and seductive, and her ghost haunts “you” in the form of a bird because “you” didn’t come to her rescue. In yet another myth, a man rapes a “mute girl.” When the man later dies, the ghost of the “mute girl” “appeared before his eyes and he couldn’t get rid of her” (location 2884). These rape victims can only confront the perpetrators of violence against them in the after-life, and in one case the victim is

“mute,” because women appear to have no “voice” in the natural world. As “you” says, “any woman who has been taken advantage of will hunger for revenge! While she lives, and if she can track down the person, she will gouge out his eyes and curse him violently, invoking demons to banish him to the eighteenth level of Hell so that he can be horribly tortured!” (location 2888). This is the manifestation of a consistent theme: extremism begets extremism. The violence these women suffer leads them to respond with their own brand of extremism, typically in the form of harsh revenge.

Cross-cultural analysis: The Significance of Attire, Appearance and Color

In our analysis of the varying forms of extremism in 20th century literature, as well as the consequences of these differing types of extremism, attire and physical appearance consistently emerge as differentiating cultural markers, not only for women, but also for men. Clothing color also proves to be highly symbolic, especially in the context of varying cultures.

The female headscarf and the covering of Muslim women, for example, emerge as consistent themes. This is clearly the case in *Snow*, where contrary to the widely-held western perception that the headscarf is a form of misogyny and female oppression, young Muslim women fight to *keep* their headscarves on in the classroom. As Hande, a young woman who faces familial pressure to forsake her headscarf says, “after all, when I do take off my head scarf, I won’t be doing it of my own free will” (location 2537).

A clear divide emerges in both *Snow* and *God Dies by the Nile* between the Muslim women who cover themselves with a headscarf and those who don’t. According to these two novels, Muslim women who live in heavily populated urban areas with more robust economies tend to elect *not* to cover themselves, while Muslim women who live in rural and poorer areas tend to elect *to* cover themselves. This is true of comparisons made between Kars and Istanbul, and Kafr el Teen and Cairo. The village women of Kafr el Teen in *God Dies by the Nile*, like the men, and in contrast to the Mayor’s wife, wear a galabeya, which is a long, loose and draped garb. The Mayor of Kafr el Teen, when considering the innocence of the covered village women says, “how I hate the false sophistication of Cairo women, like my wife...” (p. 120). Earlier in the novel, the Mayor comments that women have “lost all morality” as he glances at the “bare thighs of his wife showing beneath her tight skirt” (p. 50). The Mayor’s veiled annoyance at his wife’s garb, which he likely views as a sign of her wantonness, immorality and disobedience, reveals a latent hostility that some uncovered women may experience in areas of the world in which other women are covered.

In *The German Mujahid*, as noted earlier, Malrich uses disturbing visual imagery to describe the brutal murder of a beautiful young Muslim woman who is killed, in large part, because she refuses to conform to the veil. In an extreme expression of intolerance for her refusal to cover herself, her body is left in an overtly sexual position, chained, naked and charred. Yet even the veil isn’t powerful enough to suppress a Muslim woman’s sexuality if she so chooses. Rachel describes the inherent sex appeal of the veiled Egyptian women he encounters on his business travels, and how these women refuse to be tamed by either the veil or their husbands: “we were seeking a glimpse of an Egyptian woman wearing a

close-fitting tunic, a headscarf framed by colored pom-poms. If their husbands were nearby, keeping an eye on them, it was all for nothing, they have no control over their wives...their wives have lots of tricks to give these latent murders the slip” (p. 183). Thus even a veiled, fully-covered woman can still be a sex object to men other than her husband, with her “hips swaying, arms out-spread, full breasts, a mischievous smile, a pair of bewitching eyes” (p. 183). Some Muslim women appear to have found a way to eschew the veil, even while appearing to comply.

In *Paradise Beneath Her Feet*, Coleman writes of Iranian Muslim women using their clothing to challenge oppressive authorities: “some [Muslim women] challenge the restrictions imposed by the regime with their dress, wearing bright, tight clothes in defiance of the religious authorities” (p. 125). Coleman also writes of the role of the veil in relation to secular reform in many Muslim societies, underscoring the socioeconomic divide between veiled and unveiled women:

While some...leaders made real investments and reformed laws to benefit women, others made superficial changes, emulating the west to appear “modern.” Their shortcut to modernization often began with the cultural touchstone of women’s dress, and mostly stumbled, with the symbolic lifting of the veil. For opponents of these cultural changes, feminism became synonymous with a rejection of local culture in favor of that of the west. It became a class issue, with urban elites embracing social change as much as rural traditionalists resisted it. (Paradise Beneath Her Feet, p. xxii)

The woman in *The Patience Stone* appears to wear traditional western dresses throughout the novel, at least within her own home. Rahimi provides detailed descriptions of these dresses at numerous points throughout the story. Early on in the tale, the woman’s body is “swathed in a long dress. Crimson. Embroidered, at the cuffs and bottom hem, with a few discreet ears and flowers of wheat” (location 69). The color red is used to symbolize blood, love, infatuation, or fervent emotions, and is seen as a sensual color in the western world, while wheat is often viewed as a sign of fertility. Thus Rahimi pointedly portrays the woman as a vital, sexual being, in deep contrast to her bedridden husband. As discussed earlier, the woman wears a dress of green and white, symbolizing earth, life, Islam, mourning and rebirth, in a transformative passage in the novel. Yet the woman also never leaves her home without first putting on her veil, and she consistently removes it as soon as she reenters her home. As Rahimi writes, “she walks straight into the room, straight to her man. First she takes off her veil” (location 533). The putting on and taking off of the woman’s veil is mentioned each time she comes and goes from the home, a total of eleven times in a short novel, evoking the ritual of the act, and perhaps the symbolic weight of it as well.

Thus attire emerges as a significant issue in many Islamic cultures, even though the Islamic faith shuns narcissism; a faithful Muslim should be concerned with the soul, not physical appearances. Yet, as our literary review shows, attire in many Muslim cultures has come to the forefront. It has come to signify socio-economic gaps and differences in religious dedication or fervor, and it has come to be emblematic of struggle: a struggle for freedom from the veil for some women, a struggle to express their dedication to Islam for other women who wish to remain covered, and a struggle for some men who wish to impose their will on either side of the divide.

In the U.S., women struggle too with the social connotations of their attire and their general physical appearance. In *Black Water*, Kelly is compared to her friend Buffy, who “it might be said was the more worldly of the two young women” (p. 27). While Kelly paints her nails a “subdued, tasteful...pale pink-coral-bronze” (p. 26), Buffy “painted her nails, finger- and toenails both, arresting shades of green, blue and purple” (p. 28). Here too the colors women adorn themselves with have an important connotative meaning, with Buffy’s “arresting” primary color choices expressing her overt sexuality in comparison to Kelly’s more subdued sexuality, and the more muted color palette Kelly selects. In the passage below, Oates again relays the difference between the two women using the colors they wear. While Buffy dons a “silky black bikini” and “lewd glitter-green fingernails and toenails,” Kelly wears a “daffodil-yellow” tunic:

Now at Buffy’s, in her new swimsuit fitting her slender body like a glove, white spandex, teasing little pearl buttons, a single strip, the invisible underwire bra lifting her breasts pushing them together so there was a shadowy cleavage and she’d seen his eyes drop there unconsciously, she’d seen his casual gaze take in her ankles, her legs, her thighs, her breasts, her shoulders bare except she’d slipped on a daffodil-yellow crocheted tunic out of modesty perhaps out of her old shyness regarding her body so unlike Buffy in her silky black bikini her campy led glitter-green fingernails and toenails. Buffy with her flawless skin, her funny “faux” ponytail, brash enough and confident enough...” (Black Water, p. 50 and 51).

In *Gardens in the Dunes*, Indigo views her western clothing as a symbol to others that she has abandoned her culture. When she arrives at a train station where Indian women are selling baskets to arriving passengers, she “was relieved to see that none of the Indian women had noticed her, dressed as she was like a white girl” (p. 124). Ironically, Hattie faces a similar unwelcome response when she wears Indian garb later in the novel: “...the woman tried to persuade Hattie people would think her strange if she continued to wear the dress – a squaw dress....when Hattie made no reply, the woman warned her if she wore that dress around town, it wouldn’t help matters [between Hattie and the Indians]” (p. 459).

Attire as a distinguishing characteristic is not only relevant for women. In *Snow*, Ka wears a gray winter coat purchased in Germany, which serves as a distinguishing marker not only of his wealth relative to the poor people of Kars, but also of the wealth of the west relative to that of rural Turkey. Of Ka’s coat, Pamuk writes, “we should know straightaway that this soft, downy beauty of a coat would cause [Ka] shame and disquiet during the days he was to spend in Kars, while also furnishing a sense of security” (location 138). Ka feels “shame” for his coat because it marks his relative wealth, but the coat also serves as a source of “security” because of its warmth and perhaps because it is emblematic of Ka’s perceived ability to escape to the west if his endeavors in Kars fail. Underscoring the differentiating marker of physical appearances, Pamuk writes that when Ka begins to recite a poem to the townspeople of Kars he stood out because he was “taller than everyone else there” and “on account of his German charcoal-gray coat” (location 3002). Both Ka’s height and his expensive and foreign gray coat appear to imbue him with a superior stature when compared to the local townspeople.

Just as Silko and Rahimi use color in relation to personal appearance to relay specific emotions, sensations and themes, so too does Pamuk. The color gray or charcoal is synonymous with seriousness,

mourning, loss and depression. It is a color that emerges as a physical attribute throughout *Snow*, almost always in connection to poverty, calamity or death. Teslime, one of the suicide girls, presumably kills herself because she is so revolted by a “gray eyed” widower her parents want her to marry (location 2480). When Ka first encounters Muhtar, the ex-husband of the woman whose hand in marriage Ka seeks, he “noticed that [Muhtar] now had a large belly and his hair was thinning and turning gray...even in university days, there had been nothing special about Muhtar” (location 1065). Ultimately, it is the gray coat that Pamuk describes as having been shot when Ka is murdered: “the other two bullets had shattered major blood vessels around his heart and his liver, piercing both the front and the back of his charcoal-colored coat, which was drenched in blood” (location 5182).

Xingjian also uses color to relay key emotions. Color plays a critical role in many Chinese customs, and the symbolism of colors in the east can differ substantially from their symbolism in the west. While red can have several negative connotations in the west, such as Satan and blood, it is widely considered an auspicious and lucky color in China. Thus red paper and envelopes are frequently used to wrap gifts in Chinese culture, and Xingjian notes this in *Soul Mountain* when the “self” observes that the “...shops along the river all have their bamboo poles out with red packets of cash dangling from them, everyone wants good luck” (location 980). Red lanterns are also seen in the mountain villages throughout *Soul Mountain*, again as a symbol of luck. While blue also has several negative connotations in the west, sometimes representing depression, it is associated with immortality in China. Yet Xingjian reverses the role of red as a lucky color when the *zhuhuapo* who is raped and murdered wears a “red camellia in her hair” (location 1504). Xingjian simultaneously refutes and reinforces the role of blue as a sign of immortality when the *zhuhuapo* wears a “light blue fine-weave cotton jacket” and “blue cotton shoes” (location 1506). She is killed, and yet she also remains immortal, as she later re-emerges as a “shrike with white toes...” (location 1532).

In *The German Mujahid*, Rachel employs personal attire and appearance to pay full respect to his father’s victims. He crafts his suicide to mirror the death of a concentration camp victim: he shaves his head, becomes physically frail, in part in sympathy with his father’s victims and in part out of emotional and mental distress, wears “creepy striped pajamas” and then bathes in “exhaust fumes” in his garage until he dies. Sansal relays this image of Rachel’s death early in the narrative, long before the reader understands the cause of Rachel’s suicide. It is a haunting image of a concentration camp victim, one that perseveres in relaying utter misery even over fifty years later.

Thus attire and color serve as important distinguishing characteristics, marking differences in sexuality, customs, cultures, wealth and religious views, or serving as an attestation to the past. Attire on its own might not drive extremism, but it can serve to accentuate the divides that may eventually lead to extremist actions.

Conclusion:

As our literary exploration has shown, extremism is marked by a devoted pursuit and is often characterized by the placement of that pursuit above nearly all else, including the extremist’s physical well-being, and often in spite of the well-known risks. Extremism is not linked to any single religion,

culture, geography, or cause, as is demonstrated by the range of extremists our literary analysis has identified. Extremism need not be related to religion, nor must it be destructive. Yet extremism can, by its very nature, be marked by a certain level of intolerance. When that intolerance is directed at socially destructive behaviors, extremism can be a positive force. When the opposite is true, extremism can be detrimental. The antithesis of extremism might very well be balance or compromise: the ability to see, understand and viscerally feel the perspectives on both sides of the divide. Such a state of nirvana, while difficult to achieve, should be a driving goal. Perhaps more importantly, destructive extremism must be identified, and where possible, quickly and fairly excised, as no society can sustain the consequences of destructive extremism, such as genocide, the pillaging of the earth or the miserable treatment of women.

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