Zafar, Samra (with Meg Masters). 2019. A Good Wife: Escaping the Life I Never Chose - A Memoir. Toronto. Harper Collins.

Reviewed by: Gloria Bukuru, MacEwan University

The book “A Good Wife: Escaping the Life I Never Chose”, written by Samra Zafar and Meg Masters, is a memoir of Zafar’s life that entails her early years, arranged marriage, spousal abuse and her freedom. The memoir encapsulates the stories of many women who are married off at young ages, flown across the world away from their families and begin to face abuse by their husband and his family. This book review focuses on how religion, culture, the negative impacts that come with it and the comparison that can be drawn between the husband and the father of Zafar.

Samra Zafar’s also provides an analysis of the role of religion and how it negatively impacts women in terms of the regulation of their bodies and justifying abuse. Wearing a hijab is a choice a woman or young girl is supposed to make on her own. It is not to be forced on anyone. But the hijab in certain parts of the world is used to differentiate the “good girls” from the bad ones (p. 63). This notion is harmful because women are peer pressured into wearing a hijab to be seen as “good girl”, pure, and modest (p. 63). This makes the difference when the topic of marriage is being discussed. The girls who are seen as “good girls” are more sought after than those seen as bad girls (p. 63).

Religion is used to justify many atrocities from slavery to hate crimes. In Zafar’s book Islam was used to legitimize spousal abuse. Samra’s mother in-law says “it is perfectly permissible in Islam for a man to hit his wife” (p. 127). The use of sacred literature as a means of condoning

inhumane practices from one group to another is historic. The way the mother-in-law promoted this behaviour to her son struck me as odd because she is also a woman, mother, and someone's daughter. As a woman, I would think that she would have advocated on behalf of her son not to hurt his wife. Her behaviour speaks to the high level of religious socialization that she must have undergone to encourage her son to hit his wife.

Culture is the heartbeat of a society, the instrument used to determine values, norms and traditions. "The Good Wife: Escaping the Life I Never Chose" allows for an examination into the role that culture plays in a woman's life and the expectations associated with it. This is in terms of a women's responsibility and failures. A woman's responsibility is "to make things better" in the context of a marriage (p. 127). The understanding that one person is responsible for making a relationship work is absurd. It puts all the pressure on one person to ensure the success of a marriage which is not realistic. A good marriage requires both individuals working everyday to guarantee a happy marriage. The notion of putting all the pressure on the women is harmful as they will blame themselves for all the problems that occur in the marriage. And the marriage will only serve men because they have no responsibility to the women in any way.

In the culture described by the author, a woman was seen as a failure when she was "unmarried, [and] childless" (p. 39). This expectation forces women to enter marriages that they would not have without this expectation being placed on them. When a culture focuses heavily on the marriage status of women, it binds their worth to a man. Women are only seen as valuable when connected to a man. This notion is skewed because it means a woman who is "unmarried and childless" has no value to this community unless she is willing to assimilate (p. 39). This

means that a woman can accumulate accolades in her education but still be seen as a failure in her own community because she is unmarried. This is dangerous because it keeps women depending on men for financial stability which has led to abuse. When abuse occurs, the women are left helpless because they are unable to provide for themselves and thus the cycle continues.

The negative impacts of growing up in a community that does not see value in women is presented in “The Good Wife: Escaping the Life I Never Chose” in terms of suicide ideation and women being seen as property. The author Samra Zafar suffered years of physical and verbal abuse which caused her to wish “it could be over soon” (p. 301). This wish was made at one of her lowest points where she wanted to end her life. The trauma from years of abuse had left her feeling like she had no other choice but to take her own life. This can be explained by the lack of social structures in her community. A community that values women would have supports for those who are facing abuse and provide ways to leave the abuser. Zafar’s community did not value women enough to see the need for such structures to exist. When a community does not value women, women are left helpless and unprotected. This is evident in the years of abuse that the author faced.

In the modern world when discussing property, the assumption is that the discussion involves real estate, vehicles and other forms of material possessions. In the case of Zafar, she “was her husbands’ property” (p. 128). When a person is seen as property, they cease to be human; they cease to have rights. A society that views women in this manner removes their humanity and they become objects to be traded between men. This leaves women without a voice and a say in how their lives should be. This situation gives men all the power and makes women second class

citizens. This does a disservice to society as whole because fifty percent of the population is unable to reach their fullest protentional.

This book allows for an examination between Zafar`s husband and her father. Both Muslim men grew up in similar cultures yet one proved to be more progressive and enlightened than the other. Her husband was more conservative and stricter on Zafar than her father. Her husband is quoted saying “you have to be whore in the hospital too?” (p. 211). This was his way of controlling her behaviour and maintaining power over her. His behaviour is evident in patriarchal societies where men have been given immense amount of power over women. The way the husband treats Samra speaks to the type of values and norms that he has been socialized into; values that allow him to abuse his wife without remorse and take no accountability for his actions.

The father is liberal in terms of the way he continuously encourages his daughter to find her inner strength. He repeatedly emphasizes the importance of Samra “being her own person” (p. 61). His messages of encouragement are spread throughout the book. Her father`s insistence of his daughter`s independence and freedom are, in my opinion, one of the reasons she leaves her abusive relationship with her husband. The stark difference between these two men is interesting because it shows that socialization occurs on a spectrum in society. There are those who will be socialized on the conservative end of the spectrum and those on the liberal end of the spectrum.

Zafar`s book can be used to examine family dynamics of collectivist communities. This is in terms of living arrangements, role of religion, status of women, wedding rituals and funeral arrangements. Other disciplines can benefit from this book are sociology, psychology, social work,

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education, anthropology, humanities and gender studies. The book was insightful, well written, easy to read, and inspiring. I would recommend this book to others.