



**Patriarchy and Sexual Objectification in *A & P* by John Updike and *Mariah* by Che Husnah Azhari**

**Bello Usman**

Department of General Studies, the Federal Polytechnic, Damaturu

***Abstract***

The following essay will examine two short stories – *A & P* by John Updike and *Mariah* by Che Husna Azhari. The concept of *male gaze* by Laura Mulvey will be used to analyze the two short stories. The two short stories are different in terms of their setting. *A & P* by Updike was set in a small town in the United States of America where sexual revolution and feminism are becoming more pronounced while, *Mariah* by Azhari was set in a small town in South East Asia specifically, in the Muslim dominated Kelantan region of Malaysia. In Kelantan there is a strict Islamic code for dressing and women's roles are cut out for them by societal and religious norms. In *A & P* the male character, Sammy is a nineteen year old youth and the three female characters are all young girls. In *Mariah* the main character is a married man and an Imam. The female character, Mariah is a matured widow. Both Sammy and the Imam were involved in the act of gazing at the physical bodies of the women that attracted them. Both of them were erotically attracted to the objects of their gaze. The two stories highlighted the male objectifying gaze. They also underscored the inherent male subjectivities towards women. The core thesis in the stories is that women are consistently treated as sexual objects by men who are being supported by the norms of patriarchy.

**Keywords:** Erotic, Objectification, Pleasure, Psychological, Sexual, Voyeurism.

## Introduction

The two short stories are played out in two different settings in societies that are entirely opposed to each other in terms of cultural practices and the belief systems of the people. Each of the writers have a motive for presenting these representative characters. In terms of sociocultural practices we come into contact with liberal Western values that smacked of modernization and the culture of consumerism, sexual revolution and feminism of late twentieth century American society. John Updike in *A & P* provided a picture of a generational gap in terms of behavior between the younger generation of Americans and those that are older. It is noteworthy however, that despite the modern nature of the American life the girls in this short story inevitably drew attention to themselves because their behavior is a novelty in a small town in America. Other people apart from Sammy such as the other shoppers and his colleague at the counter Stoksie and the manager, Lengel were all attracted by the novelty of the girl's attire. Lengel confronted the girls and

berated them for coming into the shop dressed in bathing suits with shoulders bared. He was however, also affected by their naked flesh. Sammy on the other hand was completely captivated by the three girls. His close gazing at the exposed skins of the girls and the way they move and even spoke tend to evoke an erotic feeling in him. He thus, derives pleasure in the act of voyeurism and the titillating sexual arousal he had by merely looking at them. Indeed, he was unable to concentrate on his duty of serving customers. *A & P* is thus, a story that clearly shows an act of objectification of the woman's body and in the process its ability to arouse another person to have a deep feeling of sexual arousal. Azhari's *Mariah* is a story in which the author's motive in its telling reflects the sociocultural and religious values of a closely-knit Kelantan's Muslim society. The woman at the center of the narrative is a widow who remained single after the death of her husband. She is a beautiful woman with a well-proportioned body. *Mariah* dresses in the Muslim

approved code yet, through the gentle and erotic swaying of her ample hips the men in this small town become entirely entranced. Among the men of the town who were captivated by Mariah's beauty and sexuality was the town's religious leader – the Imam. When the Imam first encountered Mariah his past came crowding into his subconscious. His passion for the daughter of his mentor and teacher a Sheikh after an act of voyeurism at a communal well tormented him for many years when he could not assuage it because she was married off to another man. Mariah aroused in the Imam those long buried erotic feelings. The delicate nature of his religious calling clashed with his intense feelings for the widow. The irony of the matter is that Mariah was quite oblivious of the Imam's passionate feelings for her. At the end of the narrative the Imam and Mariah got married because the Islamic religion allows the man to marry more than one wife but with the understanding that he will treat all the wives equally. In the Imam's case he asked for his first wife's permission. It was only after the marriage when the Imam went into the bridal chamber to meet Mariah that she was able to actually look properly at the man she married and she approved. These two short stories underscored the differences of people's way of life as they occur in cultures that are not the same. The Imam got his object of desire, but Sammy could not and in the process lost his position in the grocery store. The fact remains however, that both stories presented the woman's body as an object of sexual arousal and in this context both authors objectified women as mere sexual tools in their narrative. In Azhari's narrative the issue of polygamy in the Islamic religion is also a key factor in Kelantan society which is predominantly Muslim. The author gave the reader a glimpse into the practice whereby men engage in it irrespective of how lovely or committed women are in their marriage. This is quite obvious when one considers the exemplary character of the Imam's wife who despite her good qualities ended up sharing her husband with Mariah.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Objectification Theory focuses on providing a framework for understanding the inherent consequences of living in an environment or culture that objectifies women. According to the theory, in Western countries objectification happens

when girls and women are visually contemplated and assessed as a result of their sexual and physical attributes. The fallout of this is that the physical appearance is emphasized thus, separating the body from the individual owning it. This tends to allow the body to be treated as an object that exist for the pleasure of and use by others. Through sexual objectification women are usually disempowered in a male dominated culture (Moffitt 10). It is therefore to be expected that since women in patriarchal societies are mere sexual objects their worth is simply tied to this role and perspective. Gervais, et.al, agrees with other scholars that sexual objectification constitutes a critical problem for women because it usually mutates into extreme actions such as sexual assault and harassment. It can also take the form of remarks that are quite subtle but emanates from the objectifying gaze resulting from the physical appearance of the woman concerned (1). When women become objects of sexual appraisal based on their physical appearances they become victims of abuse and domination. In interpersonal relationships women have also been victims of constant sexual objectification although, researchers looking into this problem are more concerned with the sexually objectifying media in their studies. (Gervais 2). It is critical that researchers should focus more on all aspects of sexual objectification against women and even men so that the problem can be exposed and solutions found. The objectifying gaze is a specific form of sexual objectification of women. This form of gaze involves looking and the deliberate appraisal of the body (especially, of a sexual object) by another person. This form of gaze also tend to affect the smooth flow of interpersonal relationships and also having issues with one's body image.

Women who had experienced this objectifying gaze tend to associate it with the feeling of having their bodies put under a close scrutiny or surveillance and this leads to a deep feeling of debasement. It has also affected women's mental health through an increased sense of deep anxiety. Another side-effect is that this type of objectifying gaze from men lead women to have a heightened feeling of body shame and anxiety. Both women and men are victims of the objectifying gaze. Men are also sexually objectified in the media. Gervais also maintained that the objectifying gaze could affect the motivation by women in their future interpersonal relationships with the gazer (14). In other words, women tend to present to the person gazing at them the image of what he or she

is objectifying. The implication here is that the source of the objectifying gaze will certainly get the wrong picture. Thus, real interpersonal relationship between the two has been affected negatively.

The short story *A & P* by John Updike is a reflection of the 1960s America in the throes of sexual revolution and feminism. The story highlighted a day in the life of Sammy who was nineteen years old and a grocery store clerk. His encounter with the three girls in *A & P* represents a real erotic experience. It is not just a simple sexual adventure for him. His experience and his subsequent brash action (by quitting his job as an act of heroism because the manager – Lengel had accosted the girls) is an important development for him. (Bentley 2). Sammy’s age tend to highlight some of his subsequent actions in this story. His extreme captivation by the three girls and their swimsuit-clad youthful bodies underscored his sexual experience. Sammy’s perspective of the three girls that came into the grocery store also reveals his youthful idiomatic constructions and casualness and sexual capitulation. As far as he is concerned the girls are for all intents and purposes, naked. (Bentley 3). He was sexually captivated by the girls’ physical bodies and so he experiences an erotic feeling through his intense gazing at their barely clad bodies. The moment the girls entered the store Sammy’s language and imagery becomes a reflection of how sexually captivated he has become. His intense gazing at the girls also indicates his sexuality and thus, reveals his subjectivity towards the girls. Updike’s *A & P* underscored that in a setting such as the one in the story men cannot be differentiated by either age or position as far as their subjectivity goes. They are all ensnared in their sexuality and thus see themselves in line with their sexual differences (especially with women). In the grocery store all the men were sexually affected by the three half-clad girls. They view them with an objectifying gaze that is reflective of their eroticization of their bodies.

In her analysis of Maniam’s play “The Sandpit: Womensis”, Wan Yahya maintained that the woman on stage is a male construction. She becomes an item for the sexual objectifying gaze of both men and women who do not in the first instance, see or regard her as a subject but rather as simply, an erotic object that is there to be viewed for sexual pleasure (Wan Yahya 9). Santha, one of the female characters assumed the role of a male whereby she erotically objectified another female body – that of Sumathi. The two female characters in this play

took on two traditional stereo-type roles Wan Yahya postulated: Santha – the male traditional role while, Sumathi the female traditional sexual docile role. These roles were accepted by these female characters without a fuss (9). Although, the oppressive ideological representation of the female body as an object has been exposed yet, a viable alternative has not been given (9). The critical aspect of Wan Yahya’s analysis therefore, rests on a deeper understanding of Women’s cultural and traditional position in patriarchal societies. Women are always regarded as objects for the sexual gratification of men. This perspective has inevitably, affected even the way women view themselves in relation to men.

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The essay will analyze the two short stories *A & P* by John Updike and *Mariah* by Che Husnah Azhari using the concept of *Male Gaze* by Laura Mulvey. The concept of Male Gaze has its roots in Psychoanalytic theory and Feminism. Specifically, Sigmund Freud was an important influence for Mulvey in the composition of the core ideas embedded within the concept. The concept also took a very close look at the way women are treated by a dominant cultural perspective across the world. This dominant view about the role of women derives from patriarchy, a condition in which women are disempowered by sociocultural belief systems that formed an integral part of the norms and values of a societal set-up. As a result of this dominating influence these cultural norms have been relentlessly applied on women without being questioned or reviewed. Religion has also become a major culprit in this sense due to its institutionalization of dogmatic roles for the man and the woman as separate genders.

Mulvey’s concept of the male gaze used an area of modern life that has become so integral in our society that we cannot contemplate life without it. She used the cinema and the interpersonal relationships that subsists between people there. Mulvey highlighted the interpersonal relationship between male spectators in a cinema hall and female actresses in a film or on a television screen. This by extension can also cover male viewers of a film or any television programme in the comfort of their living room. The concern is the way and manner women or the actresses are projected in the films and what effect they

are expected to have on those watching them. The eye of the camera in these films or television programmes according to Mulvey, are placed in such a way that the actresses would highlight the way men look or what they want to look at. In this context the woman becomes the object of the gaze (Mulvey 835). She therefore, identified three types of gaze: the eye of the camera or the person who controls it; the actresses or actors within the film; and those who watch the action or spectators. According to Mulvey the gender power asymmetry is a controlling force meant to favor men when they watch a film, this is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideologies and discourses. (838). In other words the concern of the cinema is the erotic pleasure that men can derive from watching or gazing at the bodies of women that a film presents. This goes to underscore the fact that women are used for men's objectifying gaze. The sexual objectification of women through relentless male gaze tend to deny them any form of human identity they are reduced to mere objects to be used for the sexual satisfaction of men and later discarded when no longer desirable.

Laura Mulvey used the terms *scopophilia*, *voyeurism*, and *narcissism* as important categories which were derived from Sigmund Freud to highlight the concept of male gaze. Scopophilia is the act of making people out as physical objects. These 'objects' are subjected to an objectifying gaze which indicates control and curiosity (Mulvey 836-837). Another implication of scopophilia is that another person becomes an object whereby sexual pleasure is derived from gazing at the object. Voyeurism is an act of deriving pleasure from watching something usually another person and then attaching or projecting sexual fantasies on such a person. The idea of narcissism derives from the process of internalizing or having a close identification with the object being gazed at. Thus, both scopophilia, voyeurism, and narcissism are derivable from the act of sexual identification. Men gaze at erotic objects through an objectifying gaze of women.

For Mulvey, there is a prevalent sexual imbalance whereby erotic pleasure through an objectifying gaze is divided into two: the male is always perceived as the one who does the gazing and thus, derives sexual pleasure in the act. The female is always seen as the one who is docile and the object being gazed at. This imbalance underscored the fact that in a culture whereby women are seen as sexual objects, their role is to fulfill the craving in a man. In other words,

Mulvey is saying that since women are portrayed as passive recipients of male eroticization, they are made to fulfill this role by the dominant culture which is patriarchal.

Within the two short stories both authors presented characters who are engaged in the act of male gazing. This form of gazing involves scopophilia, voyeurism, and narcissism. The male objectifying gaze is quite obvious and it underscored the way the women characters are seen as objects of erotic pleasure. The dominant patriarchal cultures in the two stories tend to highlight the role of women within the two societies. In *A & P* Updike presented the male gaze to reflect the inherent subjectivity of the men in the grocery store. All the men in the store were captivated by the girls and this shows their acts of voyeurism. The men in *Mariah* were also involved in the act of scopophilia and voyeurism. The author however, gave an authentic picture of a deeply religious society in which their act of objectification goes on without being questioned because the norms and values of the society allows men to marry many wives. The Imam and the other men in the town flock to Mariah's food stall in order to gaze at her. The objectifying gaze they direct towards Mariah is sexually objectifying. In essence therefore, both stories can be assessed through the use of Mulvey's concept of male gaze.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Male Gaze in *A & P* by John Updike**

*A & P* by John Updike recounts the story of Sammy a nineteen year old young man who is working as a grocery clerk in a small town in the 1960s United States of America. The story presented the reader with a scenario being played out which reflects the changing ethos in a society moving towards modernization that is coming to grips with an emerging sexual revolution and feminism. Two sets of characters are immediately discernible – Sammy and the rest of the men; then we have the three girls who walked into the grocery store barefooted and wearing only swimsuits. The whole drama revolves around these key characters. It is Sammy however, who is more affected by the casual entry of these three girls into the store. When the three girls entered the store the air instantly became charged. They became the cynosure of all eyes. Sammy most of all began a voyeuristic journey in his eroticization of this half-clad girls. He



was completely arrested by the girls who are a novelty and an intrusion into a near conservative male dominated setup. Right from the beginning Sammy is involved in the act of voyeurism through his intense and mesmerized gazing of the three girls. Indeed, he was so captivated by them that he singled out one of the girls whom he described at great length: The girl in question wore a green outfit and she is quite fleshy with a nice smooth skin, parts of which has not been tanned by the sun. (*A&P* 1).

Voyeurism is a concept within male gaze which Mulvey associated with deriving sexual pleasure through the process of surreptitiously watching someone. It also implies an act of objectification of the object of desire. In the above excerpt Sammy was intently watching and deriving erotic pleasure from the bodies of the young girls especially, the one whom he singled out as his most prized erotic object – the girl in the green outfit. Voyeurism has a basic characteristic and that is the fact that the object under scrutiny is fundamentally, not aware that another is closely watching. This happens to be the case with Sammy and the girls. The author did not dwell on whether the girls are aware of the commotion they have caused in the shop or not. Readers can however deduce that it is Sammy and the other men in the shop who are more captivated while the girls go about their business. It is imperative to note that the skimpily clad young bodies of these girls aroused in the men an erotic feeling and thus, the objectifying gaze underscored the sexual differences between these two sets of characters. What the girls wore – swimsuits – which barely covered their bodies and also the way they move within the shop triggered the male objectifying gaze. Another core aspect of Mulvey's male gaze is the concept of scopophilia. This involves the objectification of the thing or person that one is closely watching. In the context of this short story, the girls are being equated to mere objects when the reader considers Sammy's descriptions and language when he describes each of the girls quite vividly from the dress they wore – one is fleshy and has on a bright green swim suit and the seams of her are vivid. The uncovered part shows her pale belly. He describes the nose, the lips and the hair. He then goes on to describe the queen of them all who walks tall and regally on white long prima donna legs. (*A&P* 1).

The description and the vivid language that Sammy employed to give an image of the girls clearly shows how he speaks about the girls as if they are not human

but like items on display. His words are those of a person who is in the process of a mesmerizing contemplation of something that he deeply desires and wish to possess. His isolation of their bodies as parts of his erotic observation further shows how objectifying his gaze was. The concept of scopophilia in the text above lend credence to Mulvey's thesis that in the male gaze the woman is generally viewed as an object for the sexual satisfaction of men. Sammy's objectifying gaze is intensely male and his subconscious mind is closely aligned to the physical bodies of the girls and which he is erotically fantasizing about. The girls had ceased to be human beings but objects of a primordial desire that has deep roots in his physiology as a man. This is more apparent when the reader considers the fact that only the men in the store are erotically captivated by the girls' presence in the shop.

Sammy's assessment of the girls' mind indicated a subjective view that men have of women especially in patriarchal societies. Women and girls are deemed to be merely objects for the use of men and whom can be discarded when they have fulfilled their roles. This stereotype of women is at work here when Sammy maintained that girls' minds are simply like the sound of a bee in a glass jar and that one of the girls – Queenie seems to be controlling the show. (*A & P* 1).

The implication of the above further indicated how men regard the intellectual capacity of women. Since they (the women/girls) are regarded as mere objects, it therefore follows that their thinking abilities would naturally be looked down upon. This presumptive perspective on the part of Sammy is quite typical of men in societies that are dominated by discriminative norms and values against women and their abilities.

In voyeurism the process tend to absolutely dominate the mind of the person involved in it. The psychology of the individual is filled up with the object of attention. The position of the items of clothing on one of the girls led Sammy to eroticize further on the exposed bare skin of the girl. His intense erotic feelings are borne out of his close mesmerizing gaze of her bare skin: She is wearing a dirty pink or beige colored swim suit whose straps are hanging down her shoulders. This first caught his attention. The way she wore her bathing suit became the initial force of his eroticism then his attention shifted to the more captivating aspect of his voyeurism: The straps were loose on her shoulders and

this exposed the clear flesh above her chest up to her long beautiful neck. (A & P 1-2).

The objectifying male gaze in the passage above is borne out of a deep erotic feeling which leads Sammy to experience sexual satisfaction through his voyeuristic action. The exposed bare flesh of the girl is the object of his fantasy and thus, he does not mind watching more of it. Sammy's narcissism become gradually apparent when he becomes not only erotically captivated with his object but also when he internalized those intense sexual feelings as a result of the girls' exposed body. Sammy's age becomes a critical factor in this erotic experience. It becomes for him an important aspect of sexual encounter in which he behaves in a typical manner of men in a male dominated society. The intensity of his feelings can be gauged by his language use. He is captivated to the level of distraction. He can no longer concentrate on his primary duties as a grocery store clerk. The other men in the store were also captivated and were thus, involved in the act of gazing at the girls yet, they are not completely entranced like Sammy. Stokesie who is also a clerk was watching the girls but not in the deep absorption that characterizes Sammy gaze. The rest of the people – the shoppers were also momentarily distracted by the swimsuit-clad girls. Sammy describes how the shoppers reacted: He calls them sheep, a description that fundamentally indicates stupidity. At first they were noisy, busily chatting and selecting groceries but all of a sudden they became momentarily attracted to Queenie's bare shoulders. The distraction was just brief then, they went back to their shopping. (A & P 2). This imagery of the other shoppers by Sammy highlighted two things: In the first instance, he regarded the shoppers as sheep which indicates his distaste for them by equating them to animals who are seemingly foolish and insensitive like a sheep. The shoppers were just distracted momentarily by the girls. They continued with their shopping. This underscored the fact that the sort of objectifying gaze that Sammy and the rest of the men such as Stokesie, old McMahon, and Lengel the manager gave the girls is missing here. When Lengel accosted the girls it was quite obvious that he too has been affected by the girls: He told them point blank that they are not on a beach but in a grocery store and so they should have dressed more decently. He repeated his words of admonition which made Sammy to smile. (A & P 3). It is clear that despite Lengel's strictness and religious background he was yet

involved in the act of voyeurism because according to Sammy he is also a keen observer of the girls. (*A & P* 3). In a culture that is male dominated women and girls are usually regarded as the other and they become subjects for male objectifying gaze.

Sammy's act of voyeurism and his last heroic act of quitting his job to protest Lengel's diatribe on the girls fails to earn him even a glance of approval from his erotic objects. After they have paid off their purchase they left the shop. Sammy's last desperate act to draw the attention of the girls is so pathetic and immature that the reader is reminded of his age and inexperience. He nonetheless continued with his objectification of the girls as he watch them move out of the door of the store. He described one of the girls as a raw material probably for his eroticization.

### **Male Gaze in *Mariah* by Che Husna Azhari**

The setting for Azhari's story is quite different from Updike's *A & P*. Her characters are steeped in the Islamic way of life. The story can be said to be the author's attempt at extolling the issue of polygyny as a practice among Muslims. She also highlighted the role of women in this type of religious society where a woman's position is in the home and the duty of bearing children is placed squarely on her. The narrative underscored the inherent subjectivity of men in a patriarchal set-up. Azhari in a way is putting a searchlight on closed societies where the norms of religion are placed on a high pedestal. The Imam is the most important person in the village and thus, he becomes not only the custodian of the Islamic way of life but he is also a role model in the whole community. The reader is given a glimpse of the Imam's home where his wife is an embodiment of virtue and how the perfect wife should be: clean and orderly, a good cook, respectful, a role model to other wives in the village. Cik Yam is the type of woman that everyone would want to have as a typical wife. The only negative in the Imam's home is the absence of children.

The story opened directly with the crux of the matter – the male objectifying gaze that is directed at a female. The scenario is quite comedic in the sense that one encounters matured fully grown and married men waiting in the village market at a little past seven in the morning waiting eagerly like school boys for the rice seller to come. The scenario is apt because it gives readers the

opportunity to assess the behavior of the men that were gathered. Mulvey's male gaze underscored the objectification of women by men. The men gathered in the market place waiting for the *nasi* seller Mariah are there not because of the *nasi* itself but rather for the seller. Their open and shameless act of scopophilia is being highlighted by the author when Mariah entered the market place: The gaze of the men was resolutely fixed on the entrance point of the village square. It is obvious the men were expecting something very interesting to come through that entrance. A woman came in with two huge basins on her head and to the excitement of the waiting men her hips were sensuously swaying as she walks towards them. This act mesmerizes the men and kept them rooted to their seats. (*Mariah* 71).

Mariah is able to captivate the men in the village with the sensuous and seductive swaying of her hips. The men gawk at her as they harbor erotic feelings towards her. Here, the objectifying gaze of the men can be said to be scopophilic in the sense that the gently gyrating hips of Mariah is the cynosure of the men's eyes and which they gaze at with total absorption. Their concern is not Mariah as simply a person but her body parts – hips, gently swaying which causes them erotic pleasure; beautiful face and a well-built body – these are the parts that gives them pleasure. In this context therefore we see how the female body Mariah's, is being objectified. Like Updike's *A & P* we also encounter a case of voyeurism in the behavior of the men. They watch not openly, but surreptitiously. They pretend as if it is only the rice that they want from Mariah. But it is quite obvious that Mariah's physique is the real thing that they are craving for. The men whose wives had already prepared their breakfasts at home chose to eat Mariah's not-so-well prepared food simply because of her sexual appeal.

In the Muslim dominated Kelantan a beautiful unmarried woman even if she is a widow is seen to be an asset because she is a potential wife. Mariah is a widow and even though she is already middle aged yet possesses the vital physical qualities of a young woman in her twenties: Mariah follows laid down conventions of her society meticulously. The men in the village eat rice in her stall and eroticize about her due to the fact that she is unmarried. (*Mariah* 72). Mariah is careful in the way she dresses because she knew the strict dress code for women in the Muslim dominated village of Molo. Despite her unmarried

status and stunning beauty she cannot be said to be loose as far as the norms and values of Islamic decorum is concerned. In this context we see a marked difference in the behavior of the key characters in the two stories under review. In *A & P* the three girls were clearly in contravention of the societal dress code and it could be a reflection of sexual revolution and the growing feminist tendencies inherent in that society. Updike presents female representative characters who are resisting both patriarchy and religious dogmas as enunciated by Lengel when he challenged the girls of their inappropriate dressing. Azhari's focus is to present female characters who live within the conventions of both religion and societal norms and values. Mariah is representative of females who live according to the dictates of religion and societal values.

The Imam of Molo village was among the men who were intensely captivated by Mariah. Due to his status the Imam was accorded a special place in Mariah's food stall. When the Imam's wife got to hear about the matter she reacted like any other wife would who has been committed and loyal to her husband. Cik Yam the Imam's devoted wife confronted him about Mariah. She refused to cook lunch and served the Imam the *nasi belauk* he did not eat in the morning while he was at Mariah's stall. She told him that she can cook better than Mariah and that the whole village saw him eating in the stall as if he has no wife. The embarrassing thing is that the matter was reported to her. (*Mariah* 76).

Village gossip is a feature of life in Molo. Cik Yam learnt of the Imam's breakfast escapade at Mariah's stall through another woman, Cik Gu Nab who was also jealous of Mariah's monopoly the village men's attention. The Imam's reaction after being confronted with this embarrassing fact was typical of men's subjectivity and arrogance in a patriarchal society. He did not try to apologize to his wife but he rather blamed all women their jealousy and gossip: The Imam blamed all women for making men's life miserable when his wife confronted him with the matter. (*Mariah* 76). The Imam's reaction is similar to that of the three girls in Updike's *A & P* when Lengel the Manager confronted them about their indecent dressing. Queenie their leader maintains their innocence and their decency. She pouted her lips at Lengel with the thought that the shop's management is outdated and not chic. (*A & P* 4). Both are unapologetic and arrogant when confronted with their misdemeanor. The difference is underscored when we consider that Azhari's society is Muslim and male

dominated. The values of religion places the man way above the woman. In *A & P* it is obvious that the women are beginning a process of liberating themselves from the strictures of patriarchy. Another aspect of the Imam's subjectivity is his misplaced bias against his wife for her inability to bear children like other women who gives birth like rabbits. (*Mariah* 74). To the Imam and the rest of the men in Molo village giving birth is the sole responsibility for the women folk. This echoes Sammy's bias against women in *A & P* when he compared the mind of the girls as the buzzing sound of a bee that was trapped in a glass jar. (*A & P* 1). This perspective of women tend to highlight how they are seen as mere objects by men for use as implements to be discarded when no longer in need. In *Mariah*, the Imam was transported back to his teen years when an act of voyeurism led him to fall passionately in love with his Sheikh's daughter and who later married someone else. He confessed to his wife about his past and his intention to marry Mariah as a second wife. The author is in a way highlighting the dilemma of women in a strict Muslim society who are exposed by the norms and values of Islam to polygyny. Women would always be treated as objects for the satisfaction of the sexual craving of men. The Imam at the end got married to Mariah and thus, assuaged his long suppressed sexual urge which started when he indulged in an act of voyeurism on the daughter of his Sheikh. The devotion of his wife means nothing in his bid to satisfy his primordial craving.

## CONCLUSION

Laura Mulvey's concept of male gaze is quite noticeable in the two short stories – *A & P* by John Updike and *Mariah* by Che Husna Azhari. Particularly, the critical concepts of voyeurism, scopophilia and narcissism are apparent in the way women are being objectified by the men in the stories. In Updike's *A & P* we encounter a situation where Sammy, the nineteen year old protagonist exhibits the male objectifying gaze on the three girls who entered the grocery store where he works as a clerk. The girls came into the shop with their beautiful alluring bodies barely covered in swimsuits. Their appearance triggered a chain of reactions especially in Sammy and the other men in the shop. Sammy's Voyeurism underscored a real sexual experience for him. He projected his sexual feelings on these girls. The more Sammy gaze at the girls the more he

became sexually stimulated. Sammy's heroic but naïve decision to quit his job indicates his inexperience. In *Mariah* we encounter a strict Muslim society where the norms of proper conduct are enforced. Mariah, although properly clothed yet, captivated the village Imam who eventually married her. There is an underlying aspect to Azhari's presentation of the key characters in her story: Women are being objectified especially when we consider how the Imam and the rest of the village men gaze at Mariah. They were captivated by her swaying hips, stunning beauty and the critical fact that she has no husband. Both voyeurism and scopophilia is seen to have taken place in this story when we consider the intense male objectifying gaze and how they eroticize the body of Mariah. They were mesmerized by her gaily swaying body. The Imam's narcissism becomes clear when he decided to marry Mariah despite his wife's devotion and loyalty. The Imam has the society and religion in his favor in his quest to marry Mariah. Azhari in *Mariah* is extolling the virtues of the Islamic approval of the practice of polygyny and which tended to highlight the authenticity of her story. Both stories however, portrayed societies that are male dominated. Updike's society is beginning to resist it, Azhari's is consolidating it.

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