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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section(s): *Literature, Linguistics & Criticism***Intersectionality and marginalization in Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer*: A study of minority literature**Abeer A. Alrefai¹, Ayman Elhalafawy², Mohammed Abou Adel³, Badea El-Mezyen⁴, Hanene Lahiani⁵, Samir H. Khalifa⁶¹⁻²⁻⁴Department of English Language and Literature at Faculty of Arts, Kafrelsheikh University, Egypt.³College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, United Arab Emirates University, Al Ain, UAE⁵College of Education, English Language and Translation Program Al Ain University, Abu Dhabi, UAE.⁶Medical Sciences and Preparatory Year Department, North Private College of Nursing, Arar, Saudi Arabia.

Correspondence: College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, United Arab Emirates University, Al Ain, UAE.

Correspondence: mohamad.abouadel@uaeu.ac.ae**ABSTRACT**

This paper examines intersectional marginalization in Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* by analyzing how gender, race, and colonial legacy intersect to produce forms of exclusion within the novel's narrative framework. While existing scholarship has largely focused on racial hybridity, diasporic identity, and postcolonial memory—primarily through readings centered on the male narrator—this study addresses a critical gap by foregrounding the gendered dimensions of marginalization that remain comparatively underexamined. Accordingly, the analysis concentrates on selected female characters, including the narrator's mother, Lan, Madame, and other minor female figures, whose narrative positioning exposes recurring patterns of silencing, objectification, and peripheralization. The findings demonstrate that the novel constructs gendered exclusion through the convergence of patriarchal norms, racial hierarchies, class relations, and the enduring effects of colonial violence and war. Although *The Sympathizer* offers a sustained critique of imperial domination and racialized representation, it simultaneously reproduces subtle forms of gendered marginalization by confining female characters to symbolic, sexualized, or narratively marginal roles. In this context, the male narrator functions as a narrative mediator through which these gendered power relations are articulated and, at times, reinforced, thereby underscoring the necessity of an intersectional approach for reassessing the novel's critical and political scope.

KEYWORDS: gender, identity construction, intersectionality, marginalization, postcolonial literature

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1. Introduction

This paper examines how the novel, through an intersectionality lens, illustrates the lives of marginalized people. The research analyzes how different identity facets, such as race, class, and gender, overlap to form distinct domains of oppression and marginalization for the characters in the story (Salama & Fawzy, 2023). Viet Thanh Nguyen, a Vietnamese-American professor and novelist, was born in 1971 in Ban Me, Vietnam, and immigrated to the United States with his family in 1975. He had a hard time in the United States. While his family was getting used to life in Pennsylvania, he went through racism and was looked down upon in the local Asian community for being too Asian. It was during that period that he resolved to strike the battle for justice and equality in his own manner. He took up literature as his weapon and became a teacher of English, American Studies, and Ethnic Studies at the University of Southern California. Besides being a gifted educator, he was an eminent author with many notable publications, including *The Sympathizer*, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*, and numerous short stories, essays, and writings on the invisible minority. In 2016, he won the Pulitzer Prize for his debut novel, *The Sympathizer*, a significant event that ignited fervor and increased appeal not only among minority communities in the United States but worldwide (Gandhi, 2020; Lahiani et al., 2026).

Although there is an increasing body of scholarship on *The Sympathizer*, few studies address the issue of gender in relation to race and class as factors contributing to marginalization in the story (Asif et al., 2026). This novel explores the life of a communist spy living in the United States after the Fall of Saigon, chronicling his struggle with a divided self and his sympathy for a losing side. And of course, there are also multifaceted destinies of many others, especially the expatriates who became the “Other” in another foreign land. They are tasked with intersecting different minority identities that become more and more marginalized and isolated due to the assimilation process and the discrimination of the majority (Shrivastava, 2023).

The Sympathizer is set in Vietnam and explores the impact of colonialism and liberation on personal identity. It presents a complex portrayal of Vietnam through its protagonist, a communist spy who betrays his own people to the Americans. Despite openly identifying as a communist, his actions are more aligned with cultural imperialism, leading to internal conflict as he tries to balance his two conflicting identities. With a mix of humor and introspection, the novel delves into the individual’s struggle with self-identity and aims to reconcile the different facets of one’s being. *The Sympathizer* offers a unique perspective on combating racism by advocating for negotiation, compromise, and a blending of socialist and capitalist influences rather than outright confrontation (Traina, 2023; Alenzi, 2026b; Karam & Eissa, 2023).

This missing linkage demonstrates the necessity of a more integrated method of analysis that would place intersectionality in direct conversation with literary analysis. The study is divided into two main sections: theoretical and practical. The theoretical section discusses intersectionality and its effects, while the practical section explores how Viet Thanh Nguyen addresses the theme of intersectionality and marginalization, and their impact on immigrants, in his novel.

2. Theoretical framework

Marginalization was developed to analyze the intersection of race and gender and was part of black feminist legal theory. It refers to the process whereby a particular identity, or a set of identities, experiences a loss of social status and faces deprivation, powerlessness, and exclusion (Nggilu et al., 2025; Adel et al., 2024; Asif et al., 2025). These social injustices become the source of people’s identities or aspects of identity, thereby rendering them subjects without moral personality (Ayrım et al., 2026; Chami et al., 2025). Marginalization was the first academic term used to explain the historical discrimination of black women and illustrate the experiences of Kimberlé Crenshaw and others. The threat that minority women would no longer receive social benefits was then identified. Gender exclusion in race-related matters would mean that measures based on race could not be used to describe white women’s experiences. (Richardson, 2025; Casey, 2022).

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of identity, such as race, gender, sexuality, etc., intersect to create different forms of discrimination and privilege (Khater, 2022; Naguib et al., 2025). The term “intersectionality theory” was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, who defined it as a lens through which we can examine how power collides, interlocks, and intersects. Intersectionality examines similar intersections of social categories within race, gender, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, nationality,

and citizenship and their individual consequences and effects on social experiences, status, and knowledge, among other things (Alhourani et al., 2025a). The idea of the oppressed being “silent under the formal equality principles” was instead expressed through the theory developed by feminist and proper charter networks of black women in the United States (Shortland & Perkins, 2024; Paradhi & Gujar, 2025).

The term “intersectionality” also describes the interconnectedness of race, gender, and class, as seen in black women’s experiences in US law. Intersectionality emerged as a critique of US mainstream feminism, which had the problem of exclusively highlighting the experiences of white, middle- and upper-class women, failing to represent the heterogeneous composition of women globally (Harrison, 2023; Engstrand, 2024). Intersectionality stresses the confounding, comprehensive interrelations and interactions among various socially constraining factors that, in concert, determine the individual’s social location and outcomes, such as oppression and marginalization. Conceptually, intersectionality explains how different social statuses combine to create unique forms of oppression experienced by individuals with intersecting categories of gender, race, and social class. Interactions of these statuses and the resulting social structures have given rise to oppression and privilege of certain groups over others, which may conceal the specific struggles of individuals who are not part of the dominant group. Furthermore, these interrelations contribute to the diversity within a specific group, undermining the notion of a unified belief system or common experience, as different experiences and behaviors are shaped by different intersections of interactions. In summary, intersectionality is not merely a coalition of different theories, but rather a comprehensive and integrated analytical framework coupled with empirical practice. (Sabry, 2022; Al-Hindi, 2016).

In addition, intersectionality has been broadly embraced in literary studies as a versatile and effective tool for analyzing how texts depict intricate social realities. It empowers scholars to explore the placement of characters in overlapping power dynamics and how stories reveal or confront the systems of marginalization (Lestari et al., 2025; Sharma, 2024; Squint, 2023). Through an intersectional approach to analyze literature, it is possible to examine how authors form multiple identities and reflect the forces of exclusion, resistance, and agency (Alhourani et al., 2025b; Abou Adel et al., 2024).

In this way, the paper uses intersectionality as its main theory to investigate how the Viet Thanh Nguyen novel, *The Sympathizer*, reflects the concept of marginalization through a resulting combination of race, gender, class, and political identity (Dean, 2023; Soundharya, 2023). This novel can be considered in a more subtle way by examining how the subjectivities of the marginalized are depicted and how these subjectivities are imposed by structural forces (Johnson, 2018; Mahladar, 2025).

3. Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative literary approach based on close reading to analyze intersecting structures of power through narrative voice, characterization, and thematic development. It uses qualitative textual analysis to discuss the issues of intersectionality and marginalization in Viet Thanh Nguyen’s *The Sympathizer*. *The Sympathizer* is also well related to its political, cultural and historical backgrounds, and thus is an appropriate text to be analyzed through the lens of interpretation. The method is based on the development of intersectional theory by Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins, as well as on postcolonial theory and critical race studies (Nathan, 2023; Hodge, 2023; Baykara, 2024).

The analysis is conducted through close, systematic reading throughout the research to point out the significant moments when various identities, such as race, class, nationality, gender, and political affiliation, converge and push the protagonist to the brink. The aspects that can be studied through the socio-political commentary in the text, which is the subject of the current study, are narrative voice, character development, and plot development. The interpretation of the text is supported and a theoretical context is given with the help of secondary sources in the form of books on critical theory and literary criticism. Textual interpretation is also given priority in the analysis and this is in accordance with the practices of literary studies. This method is not intended to make generalizations but rather to consider the novel as a case study that demonstrates the major structural problems of oppression and identity negotiation in post-war immigrant experiences (Abouelnour et al., 2024b). Furthermore, the study illuminates the consequences of Nguyen’s narrative strategy and its role in inverting dominant Western discourses on the Vietnam War and Asian-American identity (Wang & Chen, 2024; Abouelnour et al., 2024a).

4. Literature Review

Since its publication in 2015, the exploration of intersectionality and marginalization in Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* has gradually attracted increasing scholarly interest. The work, which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, has received widespread acclaim for its careful portrayal of identity, dislocation, and political struggle, among other themes. Researchers have grounded the book in the contexts of postcolonial studies, diaspora theory, and critical race theory, thus affirming its challenge to the Western portrayal of the Vietnam War and its aftereffects.

Intersectionality, as conceptualized by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), serves as a crucial lens for examining how oppressive systems are designed to target people with multiple identities—a framework that includes race, nationality, class, and ideology, among others. When looking at the text via this lens, it becomes apparent that the unnamed character's (whose races are Vietnamese and French) mixed-race background, political duality, and immigrant status are all factors contributing to his continuous struggle with his identity. According to YẾN Lê Espiritu (2014), for instance, the identities of Southeast Asian Americans are often left out or wrongly represented in the narratives of war and migration that are claimed to be dominant—this is a theme that Nguyen, through the metafictional and confessional nature of his novel, actively critiques.

Critics have highlighted other aspects of Nguyen's literary work, particularly his contributions to Asian American literature. For Lisa Lowe (1996), for example, Asian American identity is nothing but a paradox; thus, it must be read through contradictions full of the historical processes like exclusion, assimilation, and imperialism. Moreover, the whole narrative of Nguyen's work reflects this idea, since it neither permits nor accepts easy classifications of either victimhood or heroism. The narrator of the novel, a communist double agent, invites the audience to think unilaterally about loyalty and betrayal, thus positioning himself as both oppressor and oppressed at the same time. Scholars like Josephine Park (2016) and Cathy J. Schlund-Vials (2017) argue that this complexity undermines the dominant narratives about the Vietnam War and simultaneously brings the erasure of Vietnamese voices from American memory into focus.

Moreover, some literature has emerged that addresses *The Sympathizer* through memory and trauma studies. Confession, as well as internal monologue, employed in the novel have been scrutinized as tools for communicating post-war trauma and cultural alienation. As the critics claim, Nguyen's character of memory is not merely singular but intersectional, revealing how colonial legacies, war, and exile intermingle to shape the protagonist's psychological fragmentation and moral ambiguity. Khalifa et al. (2025) and Algobaei et al (2025) highlight the relationship between the self and the other in postcolonial studies, showing how marginalized identities emerge within power structures. Moreover, Elhalafaway et al. (2025), Alenzi et al. (2026b), and Adel et al. (2026) reveal how identity is negotiated within oppressive systems, reinforcing the idea of marginalized subjects. Collectively, these recent papers highlight a theoretical idea for investigating marginalization and intersectionality in *The Sympathizer* as a work of minority and postcolonial studies.

Furthermore, literary scholars have noted Nguyen's unmasking of Orientalist stereotypes as a conscious act of deconstruction. Drawing on Edward Said's (1978) analysis, a number of critics reveal the way in which the novel not only breaks down the stereotypes but also disavows Western cinema and literature depicting the Vietnamese either as pathetic victims who cannot even express their suffering or as ruthless and unfeeling enemies. However, among all, the narrator is the one who sees through the war's actual causes and implications; thus, he not only ridicules and criticizes prevailing discourses but also, through his role as the cultural consultant on an American film, articulates a forceful critique of the war, Hollywood's representation of it, and the imperialist narratives that perpetuate marginalization through representation.

5. Discussion and Results

The current study delves into the influence of intersectionality on the characters in *The Sympathizer*. Intersectionality, a term that was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, describes the intersection of social classifications such as race, sex, class, and sexual orientation. It acknowledges that a person can be discriminated against or oppressed in several ways simultaneously, and these overlapping identities shape their social lives and opportunities (Lancet Regional Health – Americas, 2025; O'Connor, 2015). In Nguyen's *The Sympathizer*, the main character's experiences demonstrate the intricacies of intersectionality as he struggles with his identity as a Vietnamese communist spy in the United States during and after the Vietnam War.

The main character, known only as the sympathizer, represents a fusion of intertwined, at times contradictory identities that are the main source of his ordeal in the novel (Lee, 2024). Being a Vietnamese immigrant in the U.S., he gets the worst of racism and discrimination. His situation is commonly viewed through the prism of 'Otherness', so he is pushed away from the center of the American world, always suspected and hated by those people around him. Additionally, as a communist loyalist, he is pushed aside politically and thus is doubly alienated from both the Vietnamese-American community and the American mainstream society (Chung, 2022). Besides, the protagonist is a man, and his war, exile and displacement experiences are exactly what the processes of gender, class, and power have been making throughout history. Although he is a male protagonist, he enjoys certain privileges and freedoms that are denied to women in the novel, but he has to cope with societal and masculine power expectations that, in fact, limit his emotional and vulnerable expression. His being an educated, middle-class intellectual person marks a separation between him and the other Vietnamese refugees in the U.S., who are usually poor and facing the same systemic barriers to social mobility. (Seo, 2023; Bennamate, 2024).

Through the protagonist's experiences, Nguyen explores how intersecting oppressions and privileges determine people's social identities and experiences (Rader, 2021). *The sympathizer's* unclear place as both inside and outside, enemy and ally at the same time, underscores the difficulties of managing multiple identities in a world that tries to pigeonhole and label people according to narrow, restrictive stereotypes. By questioning the intersections of race, gender, class, and power in his novel, Nguyen not only forces the readers to reconsider the traditional ideas of identity and belonging but also asks them to acknowledge the role of overlapping forms of oppression and privilege in people's lived experiences (Nguyen, 2017).

Intersectionality emphasizes the importance of including diverse goals in minority literature, such as those related to racial and religious groups (Haque, 2023). Therefore, the study can help learners not only see the intrinsic value of the work when a minority is closely depicted but also learn about the diverse values of reality. Undeniably, marginalized authors not only belong to one single minority but are always members of many different groups. By sharing personal stories, individuals can help people with similar backgrounds understand and empathize with others who are experiencing similar situations. Intersectional literature lets minority readers with multiple identities see their experiences reflected in literature, not just as part of who they are, but as an integral part of the broader human experience (Crenshaw, 1989).

5.1 Racial and Ethnic Hybridity

This paper also investigates how characters are marginalized in *The Sympathizer*. In *The Sympathizer*, we are introduced to a diverse cast of characters, each struggling with their own sense of identity and place in society. However, throughout the novel, we witness the marginalization of certain characters based on their race, class, and gender. In the novel, the character of *the Sympathizer*, a Vietnamese spy, is the most notable example of marginalization and exclusion by those around him. The disjointed identity of the narrator indicates intersecting forces of race, class and ideology "I am a spy, a sleeper, a spook, a man of two faces" (Nguyen, 2015, p. 1). He is already alienated, a traitor, and the source of suspicion in a world where *The Sympathizer* is constantly looking for a place among normal people. The hero's alienation in *The Sympathizer* is the result of his mixed heritage, being the son of a French priest and a Vietnamese woman. He also refers to himself as "a bastard, the illegitimate child of a Vietnamese mother and a French priest" (Nguyen, 2015, p. 3), which supports the idea of marginalization through hybridity. He has a dual nationality, which isolates him from the Vietnamese and the French; thus, he is caught in limbo where he is not really a part of either group. His feelings of alienation have worsened because of his role as a spy, which requires him to regularly deceive and betray the people closest to him (Nguyen, 2017).

Thus, the main character is subjected to constant scrutiny and mistrust by his fellow workers, who regard him with suspicion. The combination of his different backgrounds and unclear loyalties makes him an easy victim of blame and inequality, as the others want to separate themselves from the danger he allegedly represents. The protagonist's shift to the margins of society is evident not only in his physical presence but also in his mental state, as he feels segregated and alienated throughout the book. Furthermore, the Sympathizer's separation from others is further supported by the racial and social stratifications that dominate the novel's universe. He is regarded by the Vietnamese as an inferior person because he has a Vietnamese mother and a

European father, and they treat him with contempt and scorn. In the same way, the French colonizers regard him as less than human and an object of exotic intrigue, thereby reinforcing his status as an outsider stranded on the periphery of two worlds.

In attempting to assert his identity and agency, the protagonist is, however, persistently overcome by the various forces of marginalization that have come to surround him. Nevertheless, his efforts to navigate and make sense of the complex web of loyalties and allegiances in the novel do not actually help him; rather, they provoke hostility and suspicion, as his rivals try to shape and control his identity for their convenience. Finally, Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* shows its main character drifting, isolated, and fighting for a place to belong in a society that constantly rejects him (Nguyen, 2017). The role of the protagonist, who suffers from the same fate, in *The Sympathizer* is nothing but a powerful indicator of how systematized power and oppression might eventually lead to people's exclusion and dehumanization. The marginalization of female characters in *The Sympathizer* is also inevitable. Although mainly concentrating on the male lead, a Vietnamese spy nicknamed "the sympathizer", the story in fact comprises several female characters whose tales are quite often ignored or overshadowed (Crenshaw, 1989). One of the means through which women are marginalized in the book is the stereotyped portrayals that limit their power and character traits. For instance, the protagonist's girlfriend, Lana, is characterized as a shallow and materialistic person whose main function in the plot appears to be merely that of the protagonist's love interest. The same applies to the protagonist's mother, who, as a typical, submissive figure, is primarily concerned with living up to family and cultural expectations (Smith, 2018).

The Sympathizer presents another aspect of the aforementioned marginalization of female characters through their lack of involvement in the story's significant moments and events. The narrative, on the whole, focuses on the male characters, especially the principal one, and delves deeply into their experiences and views, but that is still a case where female characters are frequently pushed aside or even excluded from the scene entirely. The very presence of this kind reinforces the notion that women's personalities and narratives are of less value or significance than men's. In *The Sympathizer*, female characters share the same fate as they are treated as mere objects or subjected to sexualization. The novel has a number of female characters, many of whom are portrayed as nothing more than sexual objects or merely attractive women, rather than as fully developed, complicated human beings. This process of objectification perpetuates gender stereotypes and thus women's characters in the story lose power and freedom in their decision-making.

The marginalization of the working class, both within the Vietnamese community and in American society at large, is one of the novel's major themes. This marginalization is represented by the life story of the main character, who is a Vietnamese communist spy working for the South Vietnamese government. Over the course of the book, the main character undergoes numerous challenges and setbacks as he tries to come to terms with his identity as a working-class immigrant in the US. He must choose between becoming a traitor who fights against his own nation or using violent methods to remain undetected. His situation reveals a powerful metaphor showing how poor people in society must face their toughest challenges because society values power and profit over basic human rights. The main character's struggles demonstrate how the Vietnamese society overlooks the needs of its working-class people. Despite his dedication to the cause, his upper-class and educated fellow countrymen treat him as an outsider. The protagonist experiences deep feelings of shame and insecurity, which make the social gap between characters more obvious. He writes: "We had not come from the peasant class... arriving penniless in America" (Nguyen, 2015, p. 39), which reveals the division of classes. He believes himself to be lesser than the elite while needing to conceal his working-class background because people will treat him with disrespect.

Besides the internal and external pressures the protagonist has to endure, the novel somehow reveals the broader social and economic forces that contribute to the marginalization of working-class people in the USA. The main character's life as a refugee and immigrant gives a vivid picture of the hardships faced by persons leaving their countries for a better life. It is a struggle that is further intensified by the racism and discrimination that many working-class immigrants face when they move to a new country, as well as by the economic inequality that makes social mobility more difficult (Nguyen, 2017; Khater, 2023). The book is a great demonstration of how working-class people were pushed to the margins of American society and the Vietnamese community. Through the protagonist, the author shows how class, race, and power together determine the fate of the weakest group in society. The novel not only portrays the situation but also helps

readers recognize that their beliefs about such matters may be based on misconceptions and that their actions can contribute to a fairer and more equal society. Moreover, the paper discusses the complex themes of identity, politics, and power, particularly gender and intersectionality. The novel's hero, a Vietnamese-French-American man, is torn between his loyalty to communism and his position as a spy for the South Vietnamese regime during the Vietnam War. The author, through the male character, depicts the world of gender interrelations with race, class, and nationality shaping individuals' struggles and impressions.

One of the main dimensions of gender and intersectionality in *The Sympathizer* is the way the male protagonists navigate their masculinity amid a society that restricts and dictates their conduct. The main character, being a Vietnamese male, is required to follow the conventional masculinity - a strong, stoic, and emotionally detached figure. Yet his spy adventure forces him to confront himself and his own deficiencies, undermining norms of manhood. In addition, the novel exposes gender as interwoven with both nationality and race; indeed, the central fact of the narrator's Vietnamese male status in America dictates how he negotiates his identity and relationships with others (Nguyen, 2017). Furthermore, *The Sympathizer* also investigates the intersection of gender with power dynamics and politics. The protagonist's dealings with female characters in the novel, especially with his mistress, highlight the gender dynamics of war and conflict. Additionally, the novel reveals that the use of gendered violence and oppression by the powerful is a means of control and domination, which in turn emphasizes the interaction of gender and power in shaping people's experiences (Nguyen, 2017).

5.2 Race and intersectionality

The main character struggles with his identity as a Vietnamese spy in America, navigating a society that wants to put him in a box and label him, and confronting the racial and intersectional complexities that shape his experience. Looking at things from an intersectional viewpoint, Nguyen transforms the situation by showing how race not only interacts with the rest of the identity but also brings different levels of oppression and privileges to different people within already marginalized communities. The main character's internal race-related conflict becomes one of the most remarkable features of the book. He gauges the impact of race on his life by saying, "I am a spy, a sleeper, a spook, a man of two faces. Maybe not, but who is to judge?" (Nguyen, 2015, p. 1). The main character's identity crisis is underscored by this quotation, in which he grapples with the diverse expectations of a Vietnamese man living in America, who is expected to behave like a stereotypical character or is not allowed to switch or combine roles according to context.

Moreover, Nguyen considers the racial and gender dimensions, mostly through Madame's character. Madame, a trans woman running a sex business, confronts the femininity-masculinity dichotomy and complicates the protagonist's perception of gender roles. While pondering about Madame's distinct identity, the protagonist declares, "She was born a boy, and had sex changes, and thereby, defied categorization by gender, those comforting pigeonholes of cock and cunt, the male-female binary that pacified all but the most stubbornly individual souls" (Nguyen, 2015, p. 148). In addition, poverty shapes the characters' experiences in the narrative. The intimacy between the main character and Bon, the protagonist's childhood friend and a wealthy person, highlights the differences in social privilege among Vietnamese immigrants in America. The protagonist conveys the class struggles, declaring, "Bon's social position was his salvation. The poor got fucked, the affluent got immigrant visas" (Nguyen, 2015, p. 124). At the intersection of race, gender, and class, Nguyen gives up the oversimplified identities and shows the humaneness of being multiple marginalized at a time in a world that tries to both homogenize and simplify people's identities. Throughout the story, the protagonist questions himself and reflects on the diverse experiences of the characters, among whom the newly born, the dead, and the immortal overlap, implicitly highlighting the need to acknowledge and appreciate the full diversity of human identity.

A key event in the book is the moment when the protagonist thinks of himself as a "half-breed, half-Vietnamese and half-French" (Nguyen, 2015, p. 143), which vividly illustrates both his character traits and the intersectionality of his identity. This expression makes the person's life more complex because, at one point, he is seen as both an insider and an outsider in Vietnamese and French society. Additionally, he has a common identity that exposes him to all kinds of discrimination and deprivations, a situation that effectively illustrates the complex relationships between the two factors of race and class by way of their intersections.

5.3 Gender and Representation

The protagonist's role as a communist spy in capitalist America further complicates his understanding of class and privilege. He is still considered a threat by the American government and society because of his political beliefs, even though he is well-educated and intelligent. The situation shows how an individual's social class, together with their political beliefs, determines their personal identity and life experiences. The book explores the intersection of gender and social class through the main character's mother, who works as a maid for a wealthy Vietnamese household. The mother character functions as a representation of a working-class woman who exists in a society that privileges men over all other genders, while her economic status makes her vulnerable to life's most dangerous experiences. The novel explores how race, ethnicity, and identity interact through the main character, who is a mixed-race Vietnamese communist spy living in the United States after the fall of Saigon.

In *The Sympathizer*, one of the major elements of ethnicity is the identity crisis of the protagonist, who has to cope with being both Vietnamese and American. This inner turmoil is made clear when he describes himself and even more when he ponders his roots, saying, "Vietnamese and French blood ran in my veins, but I was as much a product of my country as if she had bled me into existence" (Nguyen, 2015, p. 9). The quote underscores the protagonist's complex relationship to his ethnicity as he tries to reconcile the opposing forces of his heritage and his environment. Intersectionality, similarly, reinforces the narrative by providing the characters with different paths to truly discover their identities in a world where race, class, and gender govern people's lives. To illustrate, the protagonist's situation as a Vietnamese refugee in America is determined by the social class and ethnicity he has to face, just the same as in his comments about the Vietnamese community in America: "We had not come from the peasant class, like the majority of our compatriots, fleeing the country and arriving penniless in America, learning to survive by hook or by crook" (Nguyen, 2015, p. 39). The quote indicates the protagonist's consciousness about the different experiences within the Vietnamese alien community, as well as the distinctive hurdles he encounters as a member of the educated upper class.

5.4 Class and Social Hierarchy

Additionally, the interplay of race and sex is reframed in *The Sympathizer* through the characters Lan and Madame, who break through the barriers of their roles and the presuppositions attached to them. For example, Lan is not willing to let the world impose on her the typical picture of an obedient Asian woman, she is rather playing a dominating role and is independent when it comes to her relations with the narrator: "She did not speak English poorly, as I expected her to, and she did not cast down her eyes, as I expected her to, and she did not bark 'I love you, GI' at me, as I expected her to" (Nguyen, 2015, p. 77). Madame disrupts binaries: "She was born a boy... defied categorization by gender" (Nguyen, 2015, p. 148). Yet women remain narratively marginalized. The excerpt highlights Lan's going against cultural stereotypes and affirming her identity, which runs counter to societal expectations. The study demonstrates that Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* uses a complex narrative to unmask the marginalization of the protagonist and, by extension, the Vietnamese diaspora through the intersections of race, class, ideology, and displacement. The anonymous narrator of the novel—a half-Vietnamese, half-French communist spy—represents a tangle of identities that locate him both within and beyond several social, political, and cultural systems at the same time.

6. Conclusion

The present study shows that, while engaging in a forceful critique of imperial domination and racialized representation, *The Sympathizer*, at the same time, quietly supports and reproduces the subtle process of gendered marginalization in narrative terms. By scrutinizing the role of certain female characters, especially the narrator's mother, Lan, Madame, and a number of scattered minor female characters, this study found that the marginalization of women takes a number of narrative forms, including silencing, objectification, and peripheralization. Accordingly, the intersectional analysis reveals that this exclusion is not superficial but becomes pervasive with the interplay of gender and other factors like race, class, and colonialism in the context of war, exile, and displacement. However, the male narrator in the novel does not merely act as an eyewitness to other exclusionary processes; he becomes an instrument of gender power relations that the novel seeks to explore. This scenario thus becomes part of the wider discourse of the essential scholar-critic observation that,

while the novel subverts imperial and race-based narratives, this subversion is ensnared in the contradiction of gender hierarchy. Therefore, this study proposes that an intersectional approach is essential not only for an enriching analysis of Nguyen's novel but also for subverting certain norms of political subversion in literary texts. In the end, this paper has shown that intersectionality is not merely a theoretical instrument but an indispensable critical framework to reveal the intricacies of identity and power in postcolonial literature today.

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