

Task 2: Compare the excerpt from the article to Fatou's fate in Zadie Smith's short story "The Embassy of Cambodia," paying particular attention to the themes of isolation and loneliness and the reasons for them.

In the short story "The Embassy of Cambodia" by Zadie Smith, Fatou's life offers a poignant illustration of isolation and loneliness. Both contexts depict the isolation of individuals that prevails in our society. While they share similarities, they also exhibit distinct characteristics that set them apart.

Regarding the circumstances of George Bell's life, the author reports that George Bell, like many New Yorkers, lived "in the corners of society" (see l. 31). This aspect corresponds to Fatou's situation as well. Fatou, an immigrant from Ivory Coast, is employed as a domestic worker for the Derawal family (see p. 14). The Derawals own two mini-markets (p. 12, line 18), but despite having the financial means to pay Fatou a living wage, they refuse to pay her in cash. In order to cover her expenses, they retain her salary (see p. 14). For this reason, Fatou finds herself trapped. Despite having free time to go out, she has no money to spend on activities. Furthermore, her employment at the Derawals' entails cleaning the house, doing laundry, and cooking for the family. Since she works full-time at their house, her spare time is scarce. Fatou always seems stuck in menial jobs, not only at the Derawals' but also in Italy, where she was employed as a toilet cleaner (see p. 22). The solitary nature of these professions leads to her isolation. Just like George Bell and many others, Fatou seems to live in the shadows of society, out of which she is not able to escape.

The author asserts that George Bell dies carrying secrets that are now concealed due to his death (see line 45). Even though Fatou is still alive and able to confess her secrets to someone else, she appears very secretive, using her Christian faith and swimming for solace. While thinking about her stay at Carib Beach as she swims at the health centre, Fatou is reminded of how she was raped by a Russian tourist. The tourist begged her not to come forward about the incident, and thus he did not face any repercussions for his crime (see p. 21). Fatou sees the devil disguised as the tourist. Swimming serves as a coping mechanism for this trauma, which becomes evident by her swimming even faster (see p. 21). She does not talk about her issues with Andrew, which is why he does not know about her "sin" (p. 22, line 20). She hopes to erase it by becoming a Christian. Fatou hopes for a sense of purification; however, she still feels doubt. Fatou foolishly believes that she would never feel sad again (see p. 22).

Another secret of hers is the exploitation by the Derawals, including physical violence from Mrs. Derawal slapping her, as well as emotional violence from the children calling each other "as black as" or "as stupid as" Fatou (see p. 14). She is unable to come forward about their disrespectful behavior due to her vulnerable position as an illegal immigrant. For this reason, her exploitation remains concealed, similar to the secrets of people like George Bell, leading to her isolation.

Regarding George Bell's family, the article reveals that he died alone and had no connection to his family members (see l. 54). This theme of isolation and lack of social contacts becomes evident in Fatou's story too. Fatou and her father, both originally from Ivory Coast, worked at Carib Beach Resort in Accra. Just like Fatou, her father was compelled to do menial work. Fatou describes how her father had to hand burgers to tourists in the hotel (see p. 20). Her father organized her difficult and costly passage to the UK, likely paying large sums to smugglers. However, he is not present at the time the story takes place, and Fatou does not seem to be in contact with other relatives either. Apart from the Derawal family, her social

interactions are limited to her friend and fellow churchgoer, Andrew Okonkwo, with whom she regularly meets in a Tunisian café. Andrew is the only person with whom Fatou is able to discuss historical or theological topics, such as the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia or the so-called "Big Man Politics" in Nigeria (see p. 23). Her only hobby, swimming at the health centre, is solitary as well. Fatou commits theft by taking the Derawals' guest passes (see p. 12). She does not seem to have any connections at the health centre, as she describes that the majority of those patronizing the centre are usually decades older (see p. 11), and she has only been there five or six times (see p. 11, l. 8). This serves to illustrate that Fatou's isolation derives from her financial exploitation as well as her solitary hobby, causing the lack of meaningful social connections. Moreover, the author explains how no one mourns the lives of people such as George Bell since their deaths occur unwatched (see ll. 25-26).

Similarly, tragedies in Fatou's life seem to be ignored by society too. The Derawal family, despite being immigrants themselves, consider Fatou a second-class citizen. They were able to become successful and prosperous, which becomes evident by them owning two mini-markets (see p. 12). They abuse their power: The pinnacle of their merciless and unjust treatment is the unjustified dismissal of Fatou (see p. 25). Mrs. Derawal is not concerned by the fact that Fatou is now homeless since she has to leave as soon as possible (see p. 26). Even while Fatou is waiting at the bus stop for Andrew, it becomes apparent that not only the Derawals ignore her, but the residents of Willesden too. The narrator reveals that many of them notice Fatou sitting on the ground and worry about her well-being. They apparently "assume the worst" (p. 27, l. 20) but do not show enough courage to come forward and help her. Their complete ignorance of Fatou and their egocentric way of living by ignoring all issues that do not concern them personally further exacerbate Fatou's isolation.

However, Fatou's and George Bell's situations exhibit distinct characteristics, as Fatou is not entirely lonely. When Fatou explains how she believes that Africans are born to suffer more than other nations in the Tunisian café, Andrew consoles her and tries to explain how most people only care about those close to them (see p. 16). Furthermore, he appears supportive after Fatou's employment is terminated, offering her a place to stay and the prospect of a new job (see p. 26). This serves to illustrate that Fatou experiences alienation, but unlike George Bell, she is not entirely alone due to the support of her friend, Andrew.

In conclusion, it can be said that Fatou's story, as well as the life of George Bell, exhibits several parallels, including the lack of social contacts and being invisible to others. However, Fatou is not entirely alone, as shown by her friendship with Andrew.

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