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**Response to:**

**Before She Sleeps**

**(by Bina Shah)**

Last week, we finished the reading and discussion of Bina Shah’s Sci-Fi novel ‘Before She Sleeps’ in our STS class. The novel presents some really interesting characters, and there are few aspects that we can actually relate to our local context as well.

Panah, the ‘sanctuary’ for the women of Green City in the novel, initially came off as a noble and scientifically genius creation, a high-tech safehouse for the women where they can live with their own rules. But as we went on, we realized that Panah itself had many issues, and these issues were actually very similar to what women were facing in the Green City. We learnt about the broken lives of the women living in Panah, along with their lies and secrets, and their desires that they were hiding from each other.

I think all the problems with Panah came from its very foundation. Ilona, one of the founders of Panah, actually worked for the Perpetuation Bureau before Panah was created, and she was the same women who wrote the Handbook for Female Citizens of the Green City. In my opinion, Ilona believed that the only role of women was as affection providers for men, and a resource to fulfil their desire. This belief shows both in her handbook and the rules she created for the Panah. Ilona and Fairuza did not start Panah just to support women, it was a business for them. Panah was not a place for all women, it was a place for special women, recommended by their contacts, who could earn favors of powerful men.

When Lin took over, we saw that she had the sense of companionship for the Panah women, and tried to help them. But Lin did not realize the problems with Panah and its rules until it was too late, and the realization could not help the women anymore.

One thing that I found really problematic, was Bina’s view about the male-on-male sexual attacks, common during and after the war period, in the novel. She said, “It was an inevitable part of life in Green City; the absence of women caused more harm than the authorities let on,” it feels like according to Bina, men felt sexually attracted to other men, just because there were not enough women for them to fulfil their desires, which in no way sounds logically or scientifically plausible.

I found Ilona as the character closest to Bina herself, apparently rebelling and taking action against some norms of society, but also turning a blind eye towards many other, and in fact supporting them. Ilona talked against Green City and how it was taking away women’s rights and freedom, but then set rules to dictate the lives of women in Panah, totally disregarding their own consent and desires. Bina took up the feminist cause in this novel, but then her explanations for issues like non-binary sexuality expressed her support for the typical conservative views of our society.

If I am to compare my experience with this novel and all the other readings of the course, the difference is very clear. I feel that reading other authors gave me knowledge about many issues existing in the current scientific world, but it was hard to relate to many points. On the other hand, Bina Shah’s novel discussed many issues of our own society. Also, we learnt how writers can transfer their own wrong views through fictional characters and stories, the class discussions on this reading gave us a chance to understand and critically analyze all such issues with this novel.