

Towards an Ethical Representation of Others: Camilla Gibbs' *Sweetness in the Belly*

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ABSTRACT

The issue of ethics in representation of others is a new direction in studies about representations. Although all claims to the authenticity of representations have lost their validity, especially after the poststructuralist intervention, it is still theoretically deemed possible to think of representations of others which show some measures of ethicality. The present article argues that Camilla Gibb's novel, *Sweetness in the Belly*, in which the Canadian non-Muslim Gibb represents the Muslim people of Ethiopia is one such representation. The article, mainly drawing on theories of representation, maintains that the novel's conditions of production and reception make it an example of a representation of others that strives toward ethicality. It is then suggested that although Gibb's text does not totally escape the embodiment of some colonial discourses, it can still, to a great extent, be considered an ethical representation of others due to some evidence, including the professed intention of the author, some narrative strategies in the text, the author's awareness of discourses of power, implied in the novel, and finally the reception of the novel by the readers and critics, which further manifests its success in combating the stereotypical images of its objects of representation, the Muslim people of Harar.

Keywords: Authenticity, colonial discourses, ethics, hybridity, realist fiction, representation of others, *Sweetness in the Belly*

INTRODUCTION

Representation in general and representations of others in particular have always been problematic subjects. In confronting any representation, whether fictional or nonfictional, one can always wonder how authentic it is or how much truth it holds. In spite of the fact that poststructuralists have

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rightly warned us against essentializing truth and searching for absolute truth, we can still wish to have some representations which are closer to reality than others. As Livingstone put it, “we can surely say that some representations, like some maps, are more or less adequate, more or less authentic, than others” (Livingstone, 1998, p. 18). This desire to come across such representations is almost frustrated when we notice that many critics, as it will be further discussed later, argue for the impossibility of authentic representations. However, it is noteworthy that some writers who have attempted representations of others, to varying degrees, have at least passed the test of ethicality of their representations, even if the authenticity of their works have been challenged. Ethics, which according to Peter Singer in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, is concerned with “what is morally good or bad, right or wrong” (Singer, 2018, Ethics article, para. 1), has a direct relation to truthfulness, no matter how relative it might be, as in being ethical, one feels it a moral obligation to be as authentic as one can. In other words, a less discussed side of any representation is the ethical aspect of it, which even complicates the issue of authenticity in representation as it raises the question as to how much effort the writer has put into offering a representation which can be considered a moral rendering of some reality in the outside world. In this paper, I intend to argue that Camilla Gibb’s realist novel, *Sweetness in the Belly* (Gibb, 2006), is an example of the representations of others which manifest the writer’s endeavor to be as ethical and resultantly

as authentic as possible. In other words, we can still pinpoint some representations which are better, and Camilla Gibb’s novel is an example of such cases of better representation of others. In fact, Camilla Gibb, in her realist fictional work, offers a case of the representation of others which is not completely authentic, similar to many representations; nevertheless, it shows a great measure of being ethical, and, as a result, becomes one of those better representations which Livingstone expects. In what follows, after some theoretical deliberations, it is argued why Gibb’s work can be considered a case of an ethical representation of others—an ethical representation which is not thoroughly authentic or positive.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research aims to make a case for the ethicality of representation of others in *Sweetness in the Belly*. Therefore, as an important requirement, first some literature in relation to the concepts of representation and authenticity of representations, especially the representation of others, is reviewed. Then, the notion of ethicality in relation to representations is probed into and some factors which can be considered as contributing to having ethical representations are discussed. As a final step, through a close reading of Gibb’s novel and a survey of its circumstances of creation and reception and against this theoretical background, it is argued that Gibb’s novel can, to a great extent, be described as a text which offers an ethical representation of others.

Representation

Mitchell asserted that “representation is an extremely elastic notion which extends all the way from a stone representing a man to a novel representing a day in the life of several Dubliners” (Mitchell, 1995, p. 13). Stuart Hall, a prominent scholar of cultural studies, defined representation as “an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It *does involve* the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things” (Hall, 1997, p. 15, emphasis in original). Stressing throughout that meaning is produced through representation, Hall (1997, p. 24); referred to three main approaches to representation of meaning through language: the reflexive approach in which language was believed “to *reflect* the true meaning as it already exists in the world” the intentional approach which focused on the speaker or the author and held that “it is the speaker, the author, who imposes his or her unique meaning on the world through language” (Hall, 1997, p. 25); and the constructionist approach according to which “neither things in themselves nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language. Things don’t *mean*: we *construct* meaning, using representational systems—concepts and signs” (Hall, 1997, p. 25, emphasis in original).

In the discursive approach to representation, the other variant of the constructionist approach, influenced by Michele Foucault, meaning is “constructed within discourse” (Hall, 1997, p. 44). When

it comes to representation of people, we can think of three forms of representations: our representation of people from a different social location to our own, our representation of people from the same social location as ours, and our representation of self. By social location, following Mohanty (1984), I mean the cultural, ethnic, class, racial and religious backgrounds of people as it will be explained, the connection between the source of a representation and the truth or falsehood of that representation is not strong and, indeed, there are no representations which are unproblematic.

Representing or speaking for people from different social locations to our own can be problematic because of the role of social locations in determining our knowledge of the world and our experiences (Mohanty, 1984). People from different social locations, as also argued by the postpositivists, can have different knowledge about the world and different interpretations of their experiences. Therefore, representations of people which are based on universalist assumptions or on our own experiences affected by our particular social locations are not necessarily true. However, these arguments do not mean that if one is from a certain culture, one can represent the people of the same culture with no problem. People with similar social locations do not necessarily have the same experiences or knowledge of the world as each other. Not only are there many sub-cultures in all cultures but there are individual differences between people within any culture (Narayan, 2000). In other

words, people with similar social locations can have different conceptualization of reality as realities are mediated by discourses. Even self-representations cannot give a true picture of the self as there are many mediatory forces, discourses and ideologies that affect the way we might represent ourselves, and that we may not be aware of (Alcoff, 1991).¹

¹Based on the above discussion, we might come to the view that we perhaps need to be more cautious when talking about the authenticity of representations, especially the authenticity of the accounts of 'native informants'.² Granting authenticity to the accounts of some people from a culture means disregarding the perspectives of others from the same culture (Kaplan, 1996, p. 187) and disregarding the mediatory discourses and ideologies affecting that representation. In other words, non-natives who represent us should not be our only suspects.

It seems that representation becomes a less problematic field if we focus on the discourses constituting representations rather than their truth or authenticity based on their sources and the knowledge of the sources of 'reality' (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 215). Although we need to acknowledge that there are few representations that are wholly fabricated and have no basis

in some external reality, we also learn through especially postpositivist theories that realities are mediated by discourses and ideologies. In other words, examining the discourse or ideology embodied in a particular representation and then analysing/criticizing that discourse is much safer than examining the truth or authenticity of a representation. Examining the discourses entails analysing the power relations implicated in that discourse, the predominance of the discourse and the effects of that discourse on the represented. In fact, the effects of representation need to be considered as even more important than the source, the truth or the authenticity of it. Linda Alcoff also argues that the central point in representation is not the source of representation, but the effect of representation (Alcoff, 1991, p. 28). As she put it, "source is relevant only to the extent that it has an impact on effect" (Alcoff, 1991, p. 29). Instead of focusing on the source of the view we should see what the effects of the view are "on material and discursive practices through which it traverses and the particular configuration of power relations emergent from these" (Alcoff, 1991, p. 28-29). If representations, for example, keep on stereotyping and dehumanizing the subjects of representation, then we need to question them.

If we focus on discourses, then, we can perhaps argue that anyone can represent anyone else's and her own identity and experience. We need, of course, to be careful not to take any representation, of self and other, as pure truths about the subjects of

¹ a brilliant discussion of the problems of self-representation and of speaking for others, see Alcoff (1991).

² The term, 'native informant', was first used by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her book *A Critique of Postcolonial reason: Toward a history of the vanishing present* (1999).

representations, as all representations are complicated processes involving selections and omissions of different ‘realities’, selections and omissions which are based on power relations, discourses and ideologies.

The representation of identity and experiences is apparently never free of problems. However, this does not mean that representations need to be abandoned. As Spivak (1990, p. 63) commented, “as long as one remains aware that it is a problematic field, there is some hope”. Linda Alcoff also argued that if the person who represented was conscious of “the particular power relations and discursive effects involved”, representations become less dangerous acts (Alcoff, 1991, p. 24).

Ethical Representations

Now that the ever present problem of representation, and in particular, authenticity in representation, has been discussed, we can move to a less problematic side of representation which is the ethicality of it. It seems that if having an authentic representation is almost an unachievable goal, having an ethical representation is a more plausible goal to strive for. Now the question is how we can measure or verify this adherence to ethics. In this article, the researcher has posited three factors for evaluating the ethicality of a representation: the intention of the writer, the conditions of the production of the text and the conditions of reception of the text. In what follows, these issues with regard to *Sweetness in the Belly* have been scrutinized and investigated.

Collins English Dictionary thus defines ethics: “the philosophical study of the moral value of human conduct and of the rules and principles that ought to govern it” (Brookes & O’Neill, 2017). Drawing on this and similar definitions, three factors contributing to an ethical representation are examined. As to the first factor, the relationship between ethics and the intention of the writer, it is noteworthy to say that being ethical is in direct relation to morality, and being moral, arguably, as some critics such as Elizabeth Anscombe have maintained, is an act of intentionality (Anscombe, 1981). Based on this premise, judging the ethicality of representation very much has to do with judging the attempts of the writer, within his/her means, to act morally and ethically while writing. The next two factors in relation to the ethicality of representations have been borrowed from Shady E. Cosgrove (2009), who, in his analysis of fictional representations, mentioned two equally important considerations for an ethical representation: the way the representation was produced and the way it affected the objects of representation as well as the readers. In relation to the first consideration, the conditions of production, especially in the case of realist fiction, it can be mentioned that the notion of accuracy is of utmost importance. A fictional representation which has any claim on realism should present information which is based on some measurable truth in the real world. For instance, a realist story about France should not introduce German as the main language of French people. This point, of course,

can be extended to more subtle issues in relation to the subject of representation. As to the second consideration, which is the issue of the conditions of reception, the main concerns are how the ones who are represented are affected by this representation and what conceptions about the represented ones are created in the minds of the addressees. In this regard, we can refer to Pat Sikes and Ivor Goodson (2001, p. 90) who, in relation to historical representations stated, the “key ethical consideration is how the research affects the people whose experiences, perceptions, behaviours, attitudes, or whatever, are the focus of the study”. Alcott’s (1991, p. 26), statement, when she says that “one must look at where the speech goes and what it does there”, also rightly emphasizes the fact that representations can have positive or adverse effects on their audience. This point of theirs is very much applicable to realist fictional representations as well. In short, an ethical representation, as argued in this article, can be described as one which shows the sense of responsibility of its author, both in its process of production and in its process of reception, and, at the same time, its author has the intention of being fair in his or her representation at any cost. An ethical representation shows the conscious awareness of its creator about the whole process of representation: before, during and after. In the above discussion about the authenticity of representations, the significance of the writers and readers’ awareness of discourses of power was

stressed. Here, it can be further argued that if sincere attempt at morality is combined with the awareness of dominant discourses and power relations, there is even greater possibility that the outcome is a more ethical representation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Ethical Representation and *Sweetness in the Belly*

In what follows, I will argue that *Sweetness in the belly* is eligible for being considered an ethical case of representation of others as it shows the above- discussed qualities.

Here a short synopsis of the novel is provided. *Sweetness in the Belly* is the story of Lilly, a woman who had lived her life in Morocco, Ethiopia and Britain. When she was a child, her English father and Irish mother left her to the care of Great Abdal, a Sufi spiritual leader in Morocco and went on a trip from which they never came back. The orphaned Lilly had to leave Morocco after a few years due to political unrest and went to Harar in Ethiopia. In Harar, she adapted to the way of life of the Muslim people there and became the local Quran teacher. There, she fell in love with Aziz Abdelnasser, a medical doctor, who had modern views about the practice of Islam. The political turmoil, this time in Harar, caused Aziz to send Lilly to London though he himself stayed in Harar. In London Lilly lived as a refugee with other refugees from Africa, and worked as a nurse, all the while waiting for Aziz. After 17 years of waiting, she came to know that Aziz had died in a battle. The

broken Lilly went through a long period of recovery until she managed to return to normal life and even to think of love again.

The first claim of this paper is about the intention of Gibb, the Canadian non-Muslim author, to be ethical, moral and fair in her representation of others, the Muslim people of Ethiopia. As it will be discussed throughout this article, Gibb has consciously used some narrative strategies which contribute to the fairness and ethicality of the representations of others she offers in this novel. Still, an even more significant evidence about Gibb's intention to be ethical is her direct assertion as to why she started writing this novel. After she received her PhD in anthropology from Oxford University with a thesis on the subject of Harari people and culture, she felt that she had not done the justice to these people and their lives through her PhD thesis. In this regard, she said, "Part of what depressed me about my thesis was that I felt all the humanity had been expunged in the name of bigger theoretical statements. All the colour and texture and flavour of the place was missing. As were the people and their stories, the things that moved me while I lived there for a year with a local family" (Moore, 2005, para. 6). Thus, she herself asserted that an important motivation for her to start writing this novel was doing justice to some people through her writing or being ethical in her representation of them.

Here the discussion about the ethicality of this novel proceeds with the issue of reception of this work and then it moves on to the process of production of this novel.

Still, as it will be contended, the arguments about the conditions of reception and production cannot be neatly separated from each other. As to the point of the context of the reception of this work as well as the effect of her representation on the objects of representation, the Muslim people of Harar, it can be said that, as many reviews of the novel testify, this novel, unlike many dominant representations of Islam in the West, gives a more complex and less vilified representation of Islam and Muslims of Ethiopia. Particularly, her representation is against the current representations of Islam in the West, which malign Islam and emphasize the point of imposition of Islam and Islamic rules on women. This novel, conversely, focuses on the willingness of the Muslim woman protagonist of the story, Lilly, to embrace this religion, affirms her agency, depicts how her religion contributes to her reaching "psychic health" (Ameri, 2018, p. 7) and finally shows some people who live harmonious, organized and peaceful lives mostly due to their religion, Islam. The way some reviewers have described the novel in relation to its representation of Islam and Muslims, indicates that they have noticed a different representation of Islam being articulated by a Western writer. This novel has been called "an exquisite homage to Islam" (Evaristo, 2006), as a novel that "captures the intricate beauty of Islam through the eyes of a true pilgrim" (Leask, 2006, p. 166), and "a poem to belief" (Kirkus Reviews, 2005). It has also been said that the text "transcends the boundaries that are defined by the

propaganda-makers that pit Islam and the West against one another” (Stone, 2005, par. 9). It has been further stated that “through the white figure of Lilly, Gibb deculturalizes Islam and reveals the vibrant possibilities it affords—a fact often forgotten in today’s political landscape” (Vasanthakumar, 2005, para. 7). As the quotations testify, various critics agree that the Western Gibb has offered a comparatively positive representation of Islam in *Sweetness in the Belly*. Such a representation can be considered ethical because it does not denigrate the religion and lifestyle of a people, and, as a result, definitely does not contribute to the creation of negative images of them; rather, it challenges the stereotypical renditions of their lives. Therefore, it is very close to truth to say that this novel is a case of representation of others with possibly positive effects on the lives of these others. Such an unlikely representation, which is against the current, might run the risk of not becoming the best-seller as this novel, which is published in the West, does not satisfy the expectations of its predominantly Western readers, who are used to negative and stereotypical images of Muslims and their creed, especially as popularized by Western media. Then, it can be further claimed that a representation’s being against the popular current, in spite of the costs, has an important mark of ethicality, and this novel emphatically has this quality.

Interestingly, this text shows awareness of other diminishing representations about Africans and Muslims; in other words, the text itself draws the readers’ attention

to the fact that there have been degrading representations such as Richard Burton’s book, which have humiliated Ethiopians. In the novel, there are direct quotations from Richard Burton’s book, *First Footsteps in East Africa; or, An exploration of Harar* (1856). As an example, on page 215 of the novel we read, “Burton called the place ‘a paradise inhabited by asses.’ He denounced the people as ‘religious fanatics,’ ‘bigoted,’ ‘barbarous,’ ‘coarse and debauched,’ ‘disfigured by disease,’ with ugly voices: ‘the men’s loud and rude,’ ‘the women’s harsh and screaming’” (Gibb, 2006, p. 213). Lilly was shocked by these descriptions, and when she read about Burton’s boasting about “being the one to break the guardian spell said to protect the city and its people” (Gibb, 2006, p. 213) and also about Burton’s seeking “to tear away the shroud of Islam and render the Harari people naked” (Gibb, 2006, p. 213), she reacted by saying that “But he didn’t break the guardian spell. . . . Islam was within and all around us” (Gibb, 2006, p. 213). In other words, the novel itself draws our attention to the misrepresentations, and, assigning to Lilly the role of an insider, shows her as criticizing the negative representations for their not being true. The novel pinpoints the distress of Harari people because of this misrepresentations by letting Nouria, the Harari woman, said to Lilly, “Maybe one day you will write another farenji [foreign] book and tell the truth,” (Gibb, 2006, p. 213). *Sweetness in the Belly* is that ‘farenji’ book which offers a representation which is very close to the truth of what the author has experienced about the life of the Muslim

people of Harar, a representation which offers the beauties as well, embodying a discourse with uplifting effects on the lives of Muslim Ethiopians. As discussed earlier, in representations, the discourses embodied are of utmost importance and should be the center of any critic's attention.

In relation to the subject of discourses, it is important to note that the writer of this novel, as a PhD holder in anthropology is expectedly well-versed in the theories of Humanities, including the concepts about power and discourses and othering. Gibb's highlighting of the case of Richard Burton's text indicates Gibb's underlining the issue of representation and discourses and the opportunities and threats that they provide, the points which as an academician she knows and she shares through her work with the readers. In this regard Hannah McGregor stated, "Gibb does not unproblematically produce a consumable version of Harari culture for the sake of a white readership; instead she uses fiction as a medium through which to theorize cultural otherness and problems of representation" (McGregor, 2009, p. 101). In Gibbs's work, academia and the world of fiction mingle, and the result becomes an even more ethical representation which bears the fruits of the thoughts of many scholars in Humanities throughout the ages. In other words, Gibb's moral attempt to represent is an informed attempt of an academician, and it gives more weight to the ethicality of her work.

When we focus more precisely on the condition of production of this novel, there are important issues which point toward

the ethicality of representation in the novel. First, there is strong claim to the accuracy of information about Ethiopia and Muslim people of Harar provided in this novel. Camilla Gibb, as mentioned before, wrote this novel after she completed her PhD in social anthropology in Oxford University, for which she needed to do some field work. She, therefore, spent a year among the people of Ethiopia, living with Harari people in their houses. As explained before, Gibb herself believed that her novel complemented her PhD thesis as the PhD thesis could not do justice to the experiences that she had in Ethiopia. In other words, this novel is partly the result of the extensive research of a scholar through library work and field work. As Lisa Grekul pointed out, "Gibb's extensive, first-hand research and scholarly essays on Ethiopia" are points that cannot be missed in appraising this novel (Grekul, 2010, p. 1). Cosgrove (2009, p. 135), as referred to earlier, considered research an essential feature of an accurate and ethical representation, no matter whether it was fiction or nonfiction. The circumstances of creation of Camilla Gibb's novel, as discussed, compellingly suggest that this criteria has been taken into consideration.

Another reason why this novel can be considered an ethical representation is that, in the novel, beauties and possible flaws of Harari culture were depicted alongside each other, a point which we could relate to the issue of accuracy of information. In other words, unlike many colonial and oriental texts which draw on the "exotic appeal of cultural difference" (Whitlock, 2007, p. 55)

and “turn the literatures/cultures of non-Western world into saleable exotic objects” (Huggan, 2001, p. 10), no romanticizing or exoticizing of this culture happened. The text graphically described circumcision of young girls and segregation between sexes, and shows Lilly’s horror at such sights. The result of presenting Harar and its people in this light is that a complex and nuanced picture of the lives of Harari Muslims is produced which is neither absolutely good nor absolutely bad. Still, stylistically speaking, the positive attributes and descriptions outnumber the negative ones, so much so that the overall impression can be a more positive one. McGregor in this regard also emphasized the point that the text resisted the commodification of others through representing Lilly as a hybrid character. An important case in making her the hybrid character was her being raised and educated by both Mohammad Bruce, the European scholar and Sheikh Jami, the Muslim sufi. While she was immersed in Sufi practices of Harar, Mohammad Bruce “supplemented” her “diet of Islam with doses of other realities” (Gibb, 2006, p. 248). In relation to Lilly’s hybridity and the issue of commodification of others, McGregor stated, the text “resists the dangers of the commodification and exoticization of otherness by theorizing the subject’s negotiation of hybridity, the relationship between diaspora and homeland, and even the anthropological methodologies in which Gibb was trained” (2009, p. 112-113). Lilly in Hommi Bhabha’s words, was “the *in-between* space—that carries the burden of

the meaning of culture” (2004, p. 56). Lilly as an in-between character was constantly negotiating the boundaries of identity and the notions of self and other:

My white face and white uniform give me the appearance of authority in this new world, though my experiences, as my neighbours quickly come to discover, are rooted in the old. I’m a white Muslim woman raised in Africa, now employed by the National Health Service. I exist somewhere between what they know and what they fear, somewhere between the past and future, which is not quite the present. I can translate the forms for them before kneeling down and putting my forehead to the same ground (Gibb, 2006, p. 9).

Therefore, the static orientalist image of the inferior or exotic East is challenged or destabilized partly because as the focalizer of the novel, Lilly, occupies the liminal position of an Easterner and Westerner at the same time.

Against the type of representation of others that this novel has and in a way as a challenge to its being an ethical representation, Lisa Grekul raised the point that Gibb’s work shows the signs of colonial discourse. As she says, Gibb “ultimately, albeit subtly, reinforces the very values which she explicitly eschews” (Grekul, 2010, p. 2). Grekul further adds that “Reinforcing the binaries it seeks to dismantle (self/other, colonizer/colonized, white/black), the novel illustrates the

deeply-entrenched nature of colonial discourses” (Grekul, 2010, p. 2). She rightly argued that Lily was the privileged character in the novel, and in many cases, she was positioned as the superior one to the Africans. She was the educated, versatile person in all situations and, many times, she was the morally superior one as well, and it was eventually in London, The Western metropolis, where she found her peace of mind, found her roots and settled down. Grekul finally concluded:

While there is no question that *Sweetness in the Belly* attempts to challenge colonial discourses of “race” and identity, the novel ultimately illustrates that these discourses are too deeply-entrenched to be easily and effectively deconstructed, especially in the context of a realist narrative: in the end, whiteness remains, as it must, a category of superiority and privilege. (Grekul, 2010, p. 20)

In response to Grekul’s point, some arguments can be raised. Indeed, we cannot deny the embeddedness of some discourses in the minds of the Western writer and also the readers of this novel who might be of different backgrounds, and the colonial discourse of the superiority of the ‘whites’ is one of them. However, it is also true that in spite of Lily and others’ awareness of her whiteness, as already discussed, through her representation as the in-between, hybrid character, the distinctions are blurred and her whiteness is also challenged. Therefore,

the very colonial discourse of the superiority of the white ones loses its strength and the hybrid “transnational” character of Lily (Santesso, 2013, p. 135) gains the reader’s sympathy not because of having the European root but because of having roots in different cultures of East and West with all their complexities and nuances. Moreover, as discussed earlier, it can be argued that there is enough evidence of the conscious use of different strategies in the novel by the author to convince us that deliberate defiance of oriental discourses is at work in the novel. Gibb seems to have won a measure of success in her fight against the undeniably embedded colonial discourses in her and her readers. The evidence of this success is all the reviews and feedbacks that she has received, and it seems that in these reviews, the explicit discourse of validity of the lifestyle of Muslim Harari people rather than the implicit colonial discourse of the superiority of whites has been noticed more.

CONCLUSION

Representations of people’s lives and cultures, in fictional and nonfictional forms, have always been made throughout history and the controversies about their validities have also been going on incessantly. The present article attempted to maintain that in spite of the problems of representation, of authentic representations and especially of authentic representation of others, suggested by the scholars in the field, there still exist some texts which we can call more or less ethical representations of others, and then it was claimed that Camilla Gibb’s *Sweetness*

in the Belly can be considered an example of such texts. As it was argued throughout the article, this claim is based on a number of elements in the contexts of production and reception of the novel; however, it is not far from truth to say that Camilla Gibb's professed intention as well as her academic background in humanities have had the greatest roles in this regard. Gibb, impressed by the culture of Harari Muslims, intentionally endeavored to redress the insensitive negative representations of these people through creating a more nuanced and more balanced representation, a point stated and implied in the paratexts and text of the novel. Moreover, her novel betrays the knowledge of a scholar in theories of humanities which critically look at equity issues in human societies, including theories in relation to race studies, hybrid identities and discourses of superiority and inferiority, and this knowledge and the extensive field research she has made are aptly applied to the creation of a fiction which is fair and ethical in the representation of others. The reception of the novel, as explained in the article, further suggests that the novel has contributed to the combatting of the reductionist images of some people who have a long history of being stereotyped; in other words, the aura of the ethicality of the novel has had real repercussions in the real world. It is still emphasized that an ethical representation, for the reasons already discussed, is not necessarily a completely truthful or positive representation, and *Sweetness in the Belly*, likewise, is neither

all too positive nor thoroughly authentic. All in all, Gibb's *Sweetness in the Belly* can be given the credit for approaching the ideal of being an ethical representation of others and needs to be appreciated for that.

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