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Literary Women and Literal Causes: Decolonized Bodies in a Selection of
Novels from East and West

By

Mona Omar Kazzaz

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

Student Name: Mona Kasrag I.D. #: 200102151

Thesis Title: Literary Women and Literal Causes: Decolonized Bodies in a Selection of Novels from East and West

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Department: English

School: Arts and Sciences

The undersigned certify that they have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis and approved it in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

Master of Arts in the major of Comparative Literature

Thesis Advisor's Name <u>George Sadek</u>	Signature 	DATE: <u>26 / 6 / 15</u> <small>Day Month Year</small>
Committee Member's Name <u>Nada Saal</u>	Signature 	DATE: <u>26 / 6 / 15</u> <small>Day Month Year</small>
Committee Member's Name <u>Luma Njeer</u>	Signature 	DATE: <u>26 / 6 / 15</u> <small>Day Month Year</small>
Committee Member's Name	Signature	DATE: / / <small>Day Month Year</small>

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Dedication

I dedicate the first two lines of this poem, composed in 1865 by Walt Whitman, to Dr. George Sadaka who has supervised the writing of this thesis with incredible patience and unflinching support

O Captain! My Captain!

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won

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Literary Women and Literal Causes: Decolonized Bodies in a Selection of Novels from East and West

Mona Kazzaz

Abstract

The analogue of land (ard) and women (aard) has always assumed different poetic and political hues. However, this analogue may often be dehumanizing to women because it dispossesses them of 'self' and constructs them in a surreptitious symbolic semblance with expropriated property and colonized terrains. If decolonization is possible for land, why should it not be possible for the body of a woman? This thesis attempts to redefine not only what it means to have biological male and female bodies, but also what it means to have a masculine or a feminine gender in Eastern and Western cultures. Through a methodological configuration of feminism and postcolonial literary theory, I embark on a comparative study of three novels: *The Story of Zahra* by Hanan Sheikh, *Who's Afraid of Meryl Streep* by Rashid Daif and *Cat's Eye* by Margaret Atwood. The purpose of this study is to draw on literary women for literal purposes pertaining to women's rights and roles.

Keywords: Colonization, Decolonization, Body, Gender, Patriarchy.

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Introduction

He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other (de Beauvoir, 6).

The consideration of the body as an ‘other’ to the mind may be as age old as the consideration of a woman as an ‘other’ to a man. The two antique considerations may seem to have worked in tandem as they may have served the construction of the woman as a ‘body’ and therefore an ‘other’ to man and to anything that possesses a mental, creative, or formative value. My thesis is set on deconstructing this misogynistic perspective towards women and their bodies as it attempts to reveal many significant facets about the role that the woman may play through her body to help her overcome the colonial-like patriarchal supremacy that has objectified and dehumanized women in East and West for many centuries.

Feminism has always offered a reading into the female problem, but the suggested solutions for women often come vague or culturally inapplicable. In my thesis, I join the literary theory of feminism with postcolonialism to suggest that one hope for oppressed and ‘othered’ women may be a decolonization strategy whereby women struggle to achieve sovereignty of ‘self’ allegorically as any postcolonial nation struggled in the past for the same purpose. It is not the scope of my thesis to argue that postcolonial nations may or may not have become successfully or fully postcolonial. However, I build on the technicality of a “de” (in decolonization) as a force of opposition that works towards reaching a “post” (also in postcolonialism). By this token, it becomes more possible to use terms like de-masculinization and post-masculinization of women. In a post-masculinist world, a woman stops being an ‘other,’ and she becomes ‘self’ to herself.

Simone de Beauvoir's egalitarian feminism that I employ in this thesis seeks to dismantle male power by considering the female body not as a limitation because it suffers from menstruation cycles and pregnancy among other impediments, but as a tool that provides women with a special perspective otherwise unknown to and lacking in men. De Beauvoir seeks in her book *The Second Sex* to answer this question: What is a woman? She asserts that woman is 'other' to the man who has long ago defined what it means to be human. This means that a woman lives with a facticity that her gender is oppressed. Her facticity, or her social and biological life that she has no control over, limits her freedom. In this formulaic construction, the man becomes 'subject' and the woman the 'object' that man possesses. According to de Beauvoir also, "the fact of being a human being is infinitely more important than all the singularities that distinguish human beings" (de Beauvoir, 763).

Postcolonial literary theory may be helpful when joined together with Feminism in one configuration that identifies injustice and that defines struggles. Edward Said, the second philosopher whose ideas I utilize in this thesis, seeks in his book *Orientalism* to know the origins of the Orient's descriptions that have appeared in Europe in the nineteenth century. His book presents a study of how Europe creates its 'other' with the sole purpose of dominating it, and how knowledge of the 'other' and domination of this 'other' go together. Just like de Beauvoir examines differences between males and females, Said extends this notion to reveal more about the "West" versus "East." To him, institutional knowledge is not a universal truth but rather a European construction of cultural and geopolitical differences between 'self' and 'other.' In this respect, both women and the Orient are "othered" subjects. It may take women to assert their 'self' and

their discourse what it took (and maybe still takes) the Orient to assert its won “self” and its own discourse.

The title of the thesis is *Literary Women and Literal Causes: Decolonized Bodies in a Selection of Novels from the East and West*. I choose this title to overshadow the concern of this thesis in examining from a literary perspective the life of three fictional women Zahra, Rashud's wife and Elaine within the specificities of time and location. Kelley Griffith in her book *Writing Essays about Literature* argues that literature “is often referred to as “imaginative literature”; it features invented material that does not exist in the real world” (Griffith, 19). However, as much as literature is fictitious, it is simultaneously true to life’s events since it features characters whose experiences may be didactic and cathartic to the reader. Griffith believes that “even though works of literature are “fictional,” they have the capacity of being “true.” This paradox creates one of the most pleasurable tensions in literature: its imaginative and stylized properties (fictionality) against its commentary on the human condition (truth)” (Griffith, 21). Said also believes that novels foreshadow, in a fictitious way, the decolonization of the ‘other’ that is to come in the real world, since British novels may have acted as “adumbrations of the actual world in which the novels and narratives take place” (Said, *Culture*, 74). Novels, while reflecting the real world, may give possible solutions to how to decolonize the female body. They depict twentieth century women, like Rashud’s wife, who are bold enough to leave their husbands. In addition, Said argues that novels construct for example “Magwitch (the protagonist in the novel *Great Expectations*) and Dickens not as mere coincidental references in [British] history, but as participants in it” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xv). Moreover, de Beauvoir argues that literature should deal “with the most

singular experiences to communicate the universal dimensions of the human condition” (Tidd, 99).

To delve into the study of literary women, I have chosen to examine Hanan Sheikh’s *The Story of Zahra* (1986), Rachid Daif’s *Who’s Afraid of Meryl Streep* (2001) and Margaret Atwood’s *Cat’s Eye* (1988). These novels feature women who, owing to their bodies, move from the powerlessness of a situation that patriarchy imposes on them to a powerful situation that they construct for themselves. Instead of performing the prescribed gender roles that their Lebanese and Canadian patriarchal cultures expect from them, these three women subvert the prescribed gender roles after strenuously negotiating them with their controlling surroundings. *Zahra* in *The Story of Zahra* and Elaine in *Cat’s Eye* start off as victims of the colonial and patriarchal realities of their lives, less so with Rashud’s wife in *Who’s Afraid of Meryl Streep* because she is a victor from the start of her marriage. Still, the fact that all three women have freed themselves from patriarchal assumptions at the end of the novels may be a proof of the chance that life could give to each and every woman in order to break away from the shackles of enslavement or subjection to society’s norms championed by men.

The methodology chapter of the thesis answers the following questions: How does patriarchy colonize the female body, why does patriarchy colonize the female body, and what are the implications of this colonization on women? I try to answer the ontological question of whether the fixed patriarchal truth to the female body can sustain the passage of time. I study the weaknesses of male-oriented epistemology that has colonized the female body, whilst leaving the male body free from examination because it is by definition a superior body. In addition, I elaborate on the notion that knowledge of

the female body is solely constructed according to inherited ideas and customs. This means that we may replace the patriarchal view of the female body by another one that would be more correct.

Chapter one of the thesis studies *The Story of Zahra* and what it means for Zahra to be a Lebanese Shiite woman who is different from the norm of the 1970s. Historical background information about the novel shows us that Hanan Sheikh depicts in Zahra a woman who struggles to break free from her oppressive environment. Her mother is not the ideal woman who takes care of the household or of the family. Her father is a Hitler-like despotic man with whom she makes little contact. Her brother is a thug who turns to the militias for self-definition during the Lebanese Civil War. Having no back up from her family that she can use to trace a safe life, Zahra turns to her uncle in Africa who also fails her because he is fighting his own demons: those of not being able to successfully achieve in 1961 a coup d'état that was supposed to bring down the President of the Republic Fouad Chehab and that may have helped her uncle to live in the Lebanon of his dreams. She finally turns to romantic relations that she thinks may save her from her lot. Her relationships with Malek the broker and with Majed her husband prove to be complete disasters because she performs in them a feminine role of lover and wife that goes beyond her convictions. Finally, she finds her 'self' in her relation to the sniper of the neighborhood because he is a man who defies all definitions of normalcy and adequacy she has spent all her life negating.

Chapter two deals with Rachid Daif's novel entitled *Who's Afraid of Meryl Streep*. The novel is a narration of the daily life of an odd couple, Rashud and his nameless wife, and the problems of marital life they face. In this chapter, I criticize

Rashud's outmoded behavior but I do not applaud his wife's behavior. To me, Daif intentionally creates in Rashud's wife a female whose reaction to her husband's oppression is exaggerated in order for him to open society's eyes to the female condition in the Arab world and to where former repression may have lead women. Said argues in *Culture and Imperialism* that the " "New World Order" [suffers from] redolent self-congratulation, [...] unconcealed triumphalism, [and] grave proclamations of responsibility" (Said, *Culture*, 17). I can see the same attitude in Rashud's treatment of his wife when he congratulates himself on being able at certain times to keep his wife's life in check. Rashud also wants to implement in his household a life style that has become too outdated for any woman living in the twenty-first century to accept. Paula Haydar and Nadine Sinno contend that "Rashud finds himself disarmed and disillusioned in a globalized Lebanon that has witnessed the shifting of gender roles, not just the proliferation of new media and information technology" (Haydar and Sinno, xii). His rebellious wife deconstructs Rashud's safe haven by pointing at its flaws every step of the way. Unable to adjust to the demands of this century and to give his wife the physical and social freedom she requires, he criticizes her and argues that even Meryl Streep, the American actress, may not have behaved in fiction like his Arab wife behaves in reality.

Chapter three deals with Margaret Atwood's novel *Cat's Eye*. Remarkably, Atwood confesses the fact that Betty Friedan, (author of the 1963 book entitled *The Feminine Mystique* that I briefly discuss in the methodology chapter), and Simone de Beauvoir, (author of the 1949 book entitled *The Second Sex*) have both greatly influenced Atwood's writing. Both books have been accredited for starting a second-wave feminism. Whereas first-wave feminism has contented itself with winning the right to vote and the

right to property for women, second-wave feminism has heralded a totally different level of demands for women: their reproductive, sexual and legal rights. *Cat's Eye* is a novel about the suffering of Elaine Risley at the hands of her three girl friends named Grace, Carol and Cordelia. The triumvirate of girls targets Elaine and makes her the butt of jokes whose body needs to be improved because it does not fit the requirements of the 1950s male white urban Canada. Coming from the wilderness and spending the majority of her childhood in the outback because her father is a researcher who specializes in entomology, and being ignorant of the way these girls conform so well to the binary gender demands, she struggles to fit in but fails miserably. The only time she stands up for herself is after seeing, or after imagining she is seeing Virgin Mary, a female saint who empowers her to fight back against the three girls' and injustices.

This thesis attempts to cast light on the detrimental condition of the female body in the East which may have not changed for centuries due to the backwardness of the some phallo-centric mentalities. Although women in the West may have enjoyed a relatively more lax lifestyle, much needs to be done by these eastern and western women to assert themselves. De Beauvoir believes that, biologically speaking, women “experience their body as facticity rather than as contingency: this means that women do not choose how they ‘exist’ their bodies because their embodiment has been pre-defined by patriarchal society. Woman’s relationship to her body is therefore culturally produced” (Tidd, 56). The women I tackle in this thesis are hampered by the burden of pregnancy, by being care-takers for the family, by being prohibited from working in the public arena, and by being obliged to perform gender roles that do not fit their ambitions for a free life. These women expect and these novels envisage a female decolonization.

Chapter One

Methodology: A Configuration of Feminism and Postcolonialism

In this chapter, I embark on a methodological configuration of feminism and postcolonialism that may be taken as an argumentative backbone for my thesis. My selected novels are not colonial/postcolonial as far as the historicity and the generic geopolitical constructions of the latter are concerned. Nevertheless, since postcolonial discourse and scholarship have attempted to find concrete solutions for the problems that result from colonialism, and since feminism may not always be strong enough as an engine of change in some non-Western countries because of religion's stronghold on people's lives, I anchor feminist criticism with postcolonial topoi to envisage a certain decolonization for women. Noticeably, colonial discourse is contingent on 'othering' colonized subjects, cultures, and races in the same sense that patriarchal discourse is contingent on 'othering' women in terms of gender, roles, and expectations.

I. The Historicity of Feminism

Feminism is an attempt to defy inherited patriarchal representations and constructions of women. The beginnings of feminism are anchored in religion and date back to the medieval period with the author Jane Anger publishing her defense of the feminine gender in *Jane Anger Her Protection For Women* in 1589. She argues that Eve is superior to Adam since Eve is the second and hence amended model, evidenced by the fact that since God made Adam from filthy clay, "God made Eve from Adam's flesh [...] that she might be purer than he"(Walters, 9). In the seventeenth century, independent congregations like the Quakers contend that God's " 'Inner Light' knows no sexual

distinction” (Walters, 10). The eighteenth century testifies to Mary Wollstonecraft publishing in 1792 *A Vindication of the Rights of Women: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* in which she argues that “most of the struggles of an eventful life have been occasioned by the oppressed state of [her] sex” (Walters, 33). She argues that women feel inferior because they learn to act ‘feminine’ in order to fit the fantasies of males. Interestingly enough, it is also two men who champion women’s rights back then since these rights benefit men too: William Thompson in 1825 published his *Appeal* and John Stuart Mill in 1869 published *The Subjection of Women*. Thompson reprimands the fact that married women are slaves due to their reproductive capacities while Mill confirms that a relationship in which the male sex dominates the female is unnatural.

The early twentieth century brings equality in divorce for men and women under the 1923 Matrimonial Causes Act in the United Kingdom. Virginia Woolf publishes in 1929 *A Room of One’s Own* in which she describes how she is mistreated in Cambridge because she is a woman. In this book she contends that “women’s writing should explore female experience [and that] gender is not predetermined but is a social construct and, as such, can be changed” (Carter, 1967). At the same time, other women fight for the right to abortion through the Abortion Law Reform Association in 1936 in the United Kingdom.

Second-wave feminism emerges after the Second World War. The Declaration of Human Rights in 1947 and the three conferences the UN calls to between 1975 and 1985 acknowledge the diversity of women’s needs, classes and backgrounds. Simone de Beauvoir publishes in 1949 *The Second Sex* and reasons that man creates and shapes culture while woman is “always and archetypally Other” (Walters, 98). Her book rejects

any feminism that depends on an idealization of feminine qualities like frailty and gentility because these traits forbid women from contributing to the public sphere. Betty Friedan's 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* launches "second wave" feminism. It challenges the idea that American suburbs' housewives live a blissful life; on the contrary, they "lead restricted lives" that are far from providing them with a self. Friedan also believes that the media ideologically indoctrinates women into believing in certain stereotypes of femininity (Walters, 102). I compare and contrast between these women and Arab/Middle-Eastern women. I also discuss trends in feminism (initiated by Nawal El-Saadawi and Fatima Mernissi) in section iv of this chapter, entitled "The Feminism Sector of My Methodology."

In the section entitled Othering Women in Postcolonial Discourse of this chapter, I will discuss how the West misrepresents the Orient as despotic and immoral. However, in this part of the argument, I would like to suggest that the West describing itself as just and moral is also a misrepresentation since, as the above mentioned paragraphs testify, Western women's historicity speaks of arduous struggles against Western male patriarchy. In nineteenth and twentieth century Britain, gender inequality brings tension between British men and British women, causing women like suffragette Emily Wilding Davidson to die for the right to vote. On Derby Day in 1913, she hurls into the course of the race and knocks over the horse of King George V. She later dies of her injuries. Behind the veneer of Western superiority and high morality lays a whole web of injustice and immorality that Western men commit towards Western women. Therefore, in my discussion of the motif of decolonization of women's body, I would be targeting some women of the West who may need decolonization in the same intensity as some women

of the East. The West needs a decolonization of patriarchal constructions on its own, again equally as the East. I mean decolonization here as a paradigm and not as a practice.

Across the world, and especially women in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region have had to combat patriarchy and its myths about the female body. Women in the MENA region fight two evils: the first evil is the distorted practices of their native countries towards them. The second evil they oppose is Western feminism that considers MENA region women inferior to Western women in the same way that men consider women inferior. Western feminism knows little about the way these women's lives " may be complicated by deep-rooted local beliefs, by practices arising out of class differences, caste, religion, ethnic origins; and also by the legacy of colonialism" (Walters, 119).

II. The Historicity of Postcolonialism

Moving to postcolonialism, it is the name and knowledge that comes from Asia, Latin America and Africa. By the dint of the word, postcolonialism indicates the time and discourse that come after the period of colonialism, but which also may have led to decolonization as the necessary political precursor of postcolonialism. The Bandung Conference of 1955 "indicates the origin of [political or worldly (as opposed to the textual and the literary)] postcolonialism as a self-conscious political philosophy" (Young, 17). The conference gathers nations that have gained their independence from the imperial power and that desire to abandon all servitude to the west. These nations start the non-aligned movement, which is a third party that is neither Western nor that of the Soviet bloc. Anti-colonial movements aspire to reach a state whereby "those in the west, both within and outside the academy, should take other knowledges, other

perspectives, as seriously as those of the west” (Young, 20). These movements want to change the hierarchy that puts cultures of the “third world” below cultures of the first and second world, thus objectifying “third world” countries and people who live there. This is why postcolonialism studies the world from below; from the peripheral denomination of the powerless.

Postcolonialism, in politics as well as in discourse, is important because it evaluates the cultural practices of colonialism. It also tries to change the fact that some non-western people feel spoken for, that the interests of the colonized come last and that these colonized live in “a world that exists *for* others” (Young, 1). Important figures in postcolonialism are Franz Fanon who in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) looks at how colonialism disempowers the natives and makes them feel inferior. *Black Skin, White Masks* that Fanon publishes in 1952 proposes that blacks have to wear the white culture’s mask to be able to deal with the inadequacy they feel due to the color of their skin. He calls for ‘*revolutionary violence*’ to counteract the violence of the colonizer. Another prominent figure of postcolonialism is Edward Said who argues in 1978 in the book *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* that according to the West, the East is ‘Other’ to the West, feminine and unable to rule itself: the “Orient features in the western mind as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (Said, 3). Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) introduces the idea of the native’s mimicry of the colonizer. He proposes also that the hybridity of culture makes the colonizer and the colonized interdependent, hence negating the purity of racial and national identity. Bhabha is also known for presenting the concept of “ambivalence.” According to Bhabha, the colonized subject feels ambivalence towards the colonizing power that he benefits from but that

destroys his national identity. Finally, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) urges readers not to see the writing of the women of the so-called Third-World as separate from metropolitan culture but as part of this culture. I will refer to these last three authors gradually in this chapter.

III. Othering Women in Feminist Discourse

As gathered in the above exposé, the notion of ‘othering’ marks a common denominator between Feminism and Postcolonialism. In postcolonial discourse, othering is the “process by which imperial discourse creates its ‘others’ ” (Ashcroft, 171). Colonial discourse transforms the differences of class, race or sex into an ‘otherness’ or a deviance from anything it deems ‘normal’. Nineteenth century post-Enlightenment Euro-centric and prejudiced anthropological, historical, political, and artistic theories make the European civilized world an absolute type. These same theories “portrayed the people of the colonized world as inferior, childlike, or feminine, incapable of looking after themselves and requiring the paternal rule of the west for their own interests” (Young, 2). Similarly, in the case of women, Simone de Beauvoir examines this process and argues that patriarchal discourse ‘others’ and subordinates women by describing them as departing from the male norm on many levels. On the social level, some women are different from men and so they are ‘other’ because they may often be treated as slaves to men. In many places and cultures in the world, some men socially marginalize women and make them feel they are the inferior gender that is submissive, through discipline, to patriarchal rules of conduct: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (de Beauvoir, 296). In this statement, de Beauvoir argues that sex is different from gender and that existence precedes essence in importance. She also suggests that gender

differences are seen as hierarchical oppositions where the masculine is made as the norm and the feminine is thereafter positioned as the 'Other'. The words 'become' and 'woman' need extra scrutiny. Does a woman 'become' her gender only when she accepts to comply with the gender rules? Some women 'become' their gender when men or culture force them to become their gender. Gender is the way biological sex differences "are used to inform behaviours and competencies, which are then assigned as either 'masculine' or 'feminine'" (Pilcher and Whelehan, 56). This definition of gender does not benefit, nor does it humanely promote the feminist cause because it makes gender appear as opposed factions competing for power. Can any female character in the novels under examination notice the artificiality and the oppressive nature of her gender and not become her gender? With what consequences can she accomplish the revolutionary task of not becoming her gender?

For de Beauvoir, femininity is not defined by women's deficient biology, with biology meaning the "body as a natural entity that determines inequalities or differences between women and men" (Pilcher and Whelehan, 6). Femininity is also not defined by a lack of intellect in a woman. Here de Beauvoir speculates that femininity is the product of a civilization that victimizes the woman because of the physiological specificity of pregnancy, giving birth and breastfeeding a child. This means that a woman's anatomy, that is the form or structure of her body, does not determine her gender; she is either slowly and painfully enslaved into her gender at the hands of patriarchy and phallogocentric language, or she masters her gender by having agency over it and by considering it one particular facet of her identity that opens and is open to endless possibilities. The body is thus a cultural situation that should be reinterpreted differently

from the way it has been historically inscribed as having two poles: the masculine and the feminine body. Elaine Showalter in 1979 coins in her essay "Toward a Feminist Poetics" the term gynocriticism. Gynocriticism examines the female's fight for identity, the social construction of gender, and the development of new ways to analyze women's literature, based on female experience rather than on male patterns and theories.

On the economic level where both cultural economy and political economy are concerned, de Beauvoir observes that some women may be treated as different from men and as 'other' because they are dependent on men for their livelihood. Through her Marxist feminism, de Beauvoir demonstrates that men are the bourgeois ruling class and women are the proletariat inferior class. On the emotional level, some women are seen as different from men, because they take satisfaction in the infantile feeling of irresponsibility. They are raised without actively assuming their existence, without aspiring to become 'self' and they are resigned to this fate. On the biological level and because of their sex, some women are believed to be 'othered' by men because men see them as sexed human beings whose bodies have wombs that reproduce children and perform sexual acts only. Women may often be led to feel that they were created only for satisfying the erotic needs of men. Worse still, men do not acknowledge the fact that they need women in order to satisfy their physical desires and their desire for progeny: women are "the inessential in front of the essential" (de Beauvoir, 6). To illustrate, for decades in Europe and since the eleventh century western society has linked women to their bodies by contending that families whose daughters cannot be wedded or "who disposed of 'unnecessary' or unmarried daughters [shut] them away in convents" (Walters, 6). de Beauvoir contradicts this opinion and declares that 'species-being' is not only the way

human beings live their bodies the way society's rules dictate, but also the way historical developments inform people's understanding of their bodies.

IV. The Feminism Sector of My Methodology

Julia Kristeva on the other hand contends that language operates in the signifying process in two modes that are different but intertwined just like 'self' and 'other' are. Kristeva's topoi of the symbolic and the semiotic are the first methodological corner stone I employ in my dissertation. To start with, Kristeva observes that language is not static but is part of a dynamic signifying process where bodily drives are released. The first mode in the signifying process is the symbolic, the realm of culture, the mind and consciousness. In *Desire in Language*, Kristeva argues that "the symbolic process refers to the establishment of sign and syntax, paternal function, grammatical and social constraints, symbolic law" (Kristeva, 7). It is the mode of signification that uses logical words that have clear meaning. It is the conscious way of expressing one's needs with as little ambiguity as possible. It adheres to the strict rules of syntax and has seemingly unshakeable patriarchal and cultural values when it comes to the distinction between the masculine and the feminine gender. As such, I observe the symbolic as embodied in *Cat's Eye* in Cordelia, Elaine's friend. Cordelia picks on the fact that Elaine's behavior does not fit the rigorous gender norms of the 1950s and tells Elaine not to hunch over, not to move her arms as she pleases, and to stand up straight because people are watching her. Unless Elaine complies to Cordelia's orders that teach Elaine how to "become a woman," Cordelia who stands for the paternal law and the symbolic mode will never consider Elaine feminine (de Beauvoir, 296).

The second mode is the semiotic. Kristeva describes it in *Desire in Language* as what “refers to the actual organization, or disposition, within the body, of instinctual drives as they affect language and its practice” (Kristeva, 18). In *The Story of Zahra*, the semiotic is the realm of nature that links Zahra to her mother. It makes Zahra long for a place in the village “where previously it was only [her] mother, the wind and [herself]” (Sheikh, 8). The semiotic also is the bodily where Zahra looks for comfort next to her mother as they both “instinctively glued [them]selves to the wall [...] and a current of fear ran through [them] as if [they] were wired together” (Sheikh, 3). The semiotic mode is the one that deals with Zahra’s feelings towards her mother. She is so attached to Fatmé that, at the sight of the mother with her lover, she “would squat like an old woman and cry out so loud that the whole world and even outer space might have heard [her]” (Sheikh, 9). Instead of using words, Zahra discharges her fear of abandonment when her mother directs her attention to her lover with a powerful cry. Hearing Fatmé sing to her suitor would also cause distress to Zahra since it alarms her to the growing distance between her and her mother.

In *Cat’s Eye*, Elaine’s move to Toronto from the wilderness is a move to the suburban space of the symbolic where people live according to the strict rules of culture. During Elaine and her friends’ visit to the ravine that runs near the city of Toronto, they find a used condom and think: “even finding this thing is dirty,” let alone using it (Atwood, 81). Seeing the condom is a traumatic experience for these girls because it is what society rejects and considers a disruption to the social order, a threat to the values of civilized urban society. This condom is abject and ‘other’ because it causes disgust in the girls, which allows the semiotic, the realm of nature and the bodily to constantly erupt

and threaten the symbolic, the realm of culture or the purportedly respectable city life. Far from being extreme opposites as dualistic thinking dictates, the semiotic and the symbolic may often be intertwined.

The abject is also what takes humans back to the semiotic stage, where the body of the infant is interconnected to the maternal body and where, for the mother and baby, there is no difference between ‘self’ and ‘other’ for either one. In *The Story of Zahra*, the mother organizes a tryst with her lover in the presence of her daughter Zahra. Hearing footsteps coming their way and fearing it might be Zahra’s father looking for them after having trailed them, the mother’s “fingers [squeeze Zahra’s] mouth” (Sheikh, 3) to prevent her from talking lest the stranger entering the room hears them. The mother is in fact forcefully taking Zahra back to the semiotic, pre-linguistic and pre-Oedipal stage that both mother and daughter have shared before the Oedipal linguistic symbolic stage begins. This is how Zahra’s mother, in a literary fashion, decolonizes her feminine language from patriarchal control. In this semiotic stage, Zahra and her mother have been as close as when Zahra was in her mother’s womb, and Zahra misses this union which no longer exists. She wishes she could relive it in the present. Yearning for her mother who is busy with her lover, she says: “I wanted to draw her towards me, to draw myself close to her, to touch her face and have her eyes peering into mine. I wanted to disappear into the hem of her dress and become even closer to her than the navel is to the orange!” (Sheikh, 8) She represses this desire to go back to her mother’s womb because this desire is abject.

Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak’s notion of the ‘subaltern’ is the second point I emphasize. It questions the cultural differences between western colonizing and

non-western colonized women. According to the West, the subaltern woman is slave to the *sati* Indian tradition and to her husband even after his death. She dies at the funeral pyre by consciously burning herself after becoming a widow. The West ‘others’ Indian society when it condemns *sati*, a culturally specific form of social expression in India. The West intends to “civilize” India by abolishing *sati*. The West also wants to save Indian women from what it considers a form of slavery to the unfair social norms and to Indian men. What is remarkable is that neither Indian men nor the West ask Indian women to express their personal opinion about *sati*. Some of these Indian women consider *sati* a blessing that allows them to reach a high social rank. It is done as an expression of love whereby the wife follows her husband to the other life because she can’t live without him in this world. It embeds the “Romeo and Juliet” paradigm in its own unique way.

In the Arab world, a woman may not always fare better. The patriarchal discourse of slavery is so intricately embedded in society that a woman does not only approve of it. In some cases, she voluntarily chooses to physically sacrifice herself since it is her only option. Zahra’s death at the end of the novel *The Story of Zahra* may be seen as a form of self-sacrifice. Ironically, unlike the *sati* which the British attempt to abolish, Zahra finds no one to rescue her and to forbid her from dying. Worse than physical death itself, society in some other cases pushes a woman who resists patriarchal representations to consciously become a social outcast since her life-style is at odds with that of society. Rashud’s wife in *Who’s Afraid of Meryl Streep* may be one perfect example of being a social outcast and “other” when she takes refuge in watching Western TV channels because they showcase movies that embody the uninhibited life style she dreams of.

In addition, Spivak observes that the colonial white man feels a questionable urge to “save brown women from brown men” (Spivak, 93). Could patriarchy also have the same questionable urge to *save* a woman *from* herself? Could a woman’s mission to civilize her nation, in an incredible twist of fate, reach a point where *she* saves a man from his own evil self, and thus have a reversal of the gender binary where there is always a knight in shining armor saving the damsel in distress? Could Western and Eastern women save themselves and become ‘self’ to themselves? My thesis attempts to answer these questions. Reaching only this far in my argument, my quick and simple answer is yes. In order for Western women to save themselves, they may want to lessen the complicity between them and Imperialism. Western women may also want to stop claiming that they speak for all women like western imperialist or sometimes cosmopolitan discourse claims talking on behalf of all races. In order for Eastern women to save themselves, they may want to speak for themselves about their differences from Western women and their difference among themselves also in terms of class, religion, culture, language and nationality.

Spivak also argues that “anti-colonial nationalism assumed a bourgeois character and was thus perceived by many to reproduce the social and political inequalities that were predominant under colonial rule” (Morton, 2). In the Middle East and under patriarchy, the father, husband, uncle or bother should protect the woman’s body from any possible danger. This body is usually equated with a motherland that the men of the nation should also protect from outside invasion. In *The Story of Zahra*, Zahra challenges her uncle Hashem’s nationalism by refusing to let him sexually exploit her body like he exploits Lebanon with his unpatriotic revolutions. He fails to protect both his motherland

and Zahra's body. He is not the national hero who protects his motherland since his coup d'état in his teenage years, triggered by a nationalism that seeks to dominate and cancel the 'other,' fails. He is not even the family hero who protects his niece, since he makes sexual advances to her when she visits him in exile in Africa. Hashem belongs to a group of nationalists (the Syrian Social Nationalist Party) who are at war with different groups for hegemony over Lebanon. He also fights other men in Zahra's life (her husband Majed and her paramour Malek) to control her body, as if Lebanon and Zahra's body belong to him. When he acts in this way, Hashem becomes equivalent to the chauvinistic imperialistic culture he seeks to dismantle: "a decolonizing culture, by becoming monist in its rhetoric, identifying with religious or national fundamentalism, may tend to take over the hegemonic function of imperial culture" (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia, 85). Both bourgeois anti-colonial nationalism that fights colonization and the native elite that demands independence are male representations of male interests. This is why the situation of women under colonialism or after independence is relatively the same.

Fatima Mernissi, a Moroccan feminist argues that male clerics manipulate Islamic jurisprudence in order to 'other' women. According to her, *nushuz* is what a woman in the Arab world is accused of due to her "rebellion against marital control" (Mernissi, 193). Mernissi explains that Muslim commentators think *nushuz* means "a refusal [by women] to obey their husband in the matter of the sex act. [...] It is a way of showing hatred [*bughd*] and opposition [*i'rad*] to the husband" (Mernissi, 156). This rebellion is so dangerous it entails a man to use violence against a woman, thus making her feel 'other,' inferior and a slave to a man because he allows himself to rebuke her. Violence against a woman makes her feel 'other' to herself as well since it makes her lose her self-

respect. Interestingly, Islamic religion details the causes of both a man's *nushuz* to a woman and woman's *nushuz* to a man, but social norms misrepresent privileges when they condemn the latter and condone the former. Mernissi observes that the male elite wants to negate the egalitarian message of Islam and the Arab nationalist ideology that comes with it. Men, "confronted with laws they did not like, tried to distort them through the device of interpretation. They tried to manipulate the texts in such a way as to maintain their privileges" (Mernissi, 125). Abu Hurayra is the companion of prophet Muhammad and one of the most important Sunni Hadith narrators. Religious texts like Abu Hurayra's that eliminate a woman from the *qibla*, because of the polluting nature of her body and because she is considered a distraction, eliminate her from everything—namely "from the sacred dimension of life, as from the nationalist dimension, which defines space as the field of Arab and Muslim ethnocentrism" (Mernissi, 69).

A life-long Egyptian advocate of women's rights, Nawal El Saadawi also argues that patriarchy has 'othered' Arab women since Jahiliyya or "The Age of Ignorance" of divine guidance, which is a tribal system based on slavery. She contends in her book *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* (1977) that slavery has been abolished ages ago for all classes and races but not for women: "among all the forms of property protected by man, woman comes first" (El Saadawi, 123). El Saadawi agrees with Mernissi on the fact that the patriarchal system does not acknowledge the "Prophet's early teachings [that] were directed against the class system based on slavery, and [that these teachings] defended the rights of the poor and of women" (El Saadawi, 121). El Saadawi also concurs with Mernissi on the fact that the orthodox version of Islam based

on the Shari'a law restricts the power and freedom that women have enjoyed in the early stages of Islam.

To conclude, 'othering' a Middle Eastern woman according to Mernissi and El Saadawi is heavily based on the woman's body and the place of this body in the public/private dichotomy. Both theorists think that according to Islam's orthodox and patriarchal definition in the Middle East, the female body and sexuality have the capacity to induce chaos (fitna) in society. It is a definition that encourages men in the Arab world to relegate women to the domestic private sphere in order to control their sexuality. This ossified way of thinking and sexual hierarchy bans women from the university, the workplace, and other spaces they have no right to access. Progressive Islam and secularism are the answers to such feminist aches. In addition, both Mernissi and El Saadawi call for a progressive egalitarian Islamic agenda that lessens the power of clerics over the interpretation of religious texts because these male-dominated explanations "other" women by keeping them in a subordinate position because of their gender.

'Othering' the East according to both scholars also means that there exists a necessity for an Arab rebirth after years of colonization in order to be free from foreign domination. Arabs need to set up comprehensive socio-economic modifications in order to free the Middle East from neocolonial forces acting on it the same way military colonial powers have done ages ago. Once this is done, the situation of Eastern women will change from being 'others' to being 'selves.' Mernissi and El Saadawi want women to participate in politics in order for them to become powerful individuals and rule, be it in their own house or in the public arena. Finally, Mernissi assert that the West essentializes Muslim women and El Saadawi adds that "Western imperialism and

reactionary Islamic jurisprudence and customs [work together] to maintain the inferior status of women” (Majid, 110). In my selection of novels Mernissi’s and El Saadawi’s arguments buttress the female characters against the “othering” machine of culture and religion.

V. Othering Women in Postcolonial Discourse

Moving to the discussion of ‘othering’ women in Postcolonial discourse, one finds that Orientalism according to Edward Said refers to the “European stereotypical representations of the East” (Young, 80). These representations depict a Middle Eastern woman for example who usually has “a name, a family, a voice, and a history [as] an ‘Oriental,’ a universal, generic ‘Arab Woman’” (Young, 80). Said professes also that the West has always judged the Orient as eccentric and its women as showing “supine malleability” (Said, 206). The encounter between Flaubert and Kuchuk Hanem is symptomatic of this type of Orientalism that Said describes as having “encouraged a peculiarly (not to say invidiously) male conception of the world” (Said, 207). How do colonialism and patriarchy intersect? Flaubert is Western, male and stands for the culture of the colonizer. He holds in his hands the power to represent and ‘other’ Kuchuk Hanem and her Eastern culture. She may be seen as a prototype of both the colonized and the oppressed female who cannot represent herself for the Occident and for her people and who supinely waits for Flaubert and Western men not only to culturally represent her, but to physically possess her as well. Middle Eastern women may be conjoined with Kuchuk Hanem in a corollary of misrepresentation in such away that just as the Western Flaubert misrepresents Kuchuk Hanem, the latter is not even well-represented by her native or Eastern menfolk.

If the direct colonization of the Arab countries has purportedly ended centuries ago, patriarchy has definitely not ceased to play a colonial-like role. Malek in *The Story of Zahra* makes Zahra behave the way many Arab women behave, namely through patriarchal representations that depict her as compliant to man's will. Malek is just another powerful colonizer and Zahra is just another powerless Kushuk Hanem. She is under his physical masculine domination, a passive prey in the love act, which he does not mind as long as he has his way with her: "He wasn't at all vexed by my passivity while he was kissing me or as he made love to me" (Sheikh, 33). Just like the West subjugates the colonized Eastern nations, Malek who represents the Arab macho mentality of many men in the Middle East, renders Zahra passive by morally enslaving her into a relationship with him that she cannot end. Zahra thinks about her sexual life with the married broker Malek in terms of oppression rather than in terms of freedom. It is humiliating to her to be under Malek while he penetrates her and this is why she "hold[s the memory of] the narrow bed in the garage room where he has lain on top of [her] far away" (Sheikh, 30).

To sum up, Said's *Orientalism* argues that the West constructs the Orient in a string of ideas that do not depend on the truth about the Orient. The West's 'othering' of the East depends on whatever negative aspects the Occident wants to expel from its self-image: "the Orient has helped to define Europe or the West as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (Said, 1). Similarly, the paradigm of sexual difference constructs a woman in a string of ideas that does not show any truth about women. On the contrary, it reveals masculine superiority by considering the masculine as the absolute type. A man 'others' a woman too because he seeks "to stabilize her as object and to

doom her to immanence since her transcendence is to be overshadowed and for ever transcended by another ego which is essential and sovereign” (de Beauvoir, 29). The relation to the ‘other’ for Kristeva is evident when, during pregnancy for example, things get complicated for some women because they have to build a relation with the baby that is neither wholly ‘self’ nor wholly ‘other’. These women may refuse a pregnancy that locks them in the immanence of their body. Spivak indicates that the non-western is ‘other’ to the western institutions that want to civilize it by cancelling cultural practices like the *sati*’s age-old tradition.

VI. Decolonizing the Self

If every colonization is followed – supposedly and hopefully- by decolonization, can this be true of Middle Eastern women who are colonized by the patriarchy of their own cultures? Concerning the decolonization of cultures, Said argues that the West needs to stop ‘othering’ cultures that are different from the mainstream and predominant Western counterparts. In *The text, The World, and The Critic*, Said contends that this can be done when we acknowledge that “criticism is worldly and in the world so long as it opposes [the Orientalists’] *monocentrism* in the narrowest as well as the widest sense of that too infrequently used notion: for monocentrism is a concept I take in conjunction with ethnocentrism” (Said, 22). This means that the material context of the text, or the political, social, and cultural aspects of the text make up its worldliness. In addition, the purpose of a humanistic study according to Said is to change clichés and presuppositions about “us” and “them.” It is “a crossing rather than maintaining barriers” (Said, 337). Instead of thinking about cultures, like the patronizing Orientalism does, as a difference that creates hostility between grand Eurocentric narratives and Eastern narratives, Said

urges a difference that creates hybridity and a will to allow other narratives to be heard. Similarly, grand patriarchal narratives need to give way to women's narratives to be heard too. Said's comment functions within a literary framework, but it may be borrowed to apply to extra-textual practices.

This is relevant to my thesis if we consider that, at the heart of monocentrism and ethnocentrism, colonialism has not always had a totally destructive impact on colonized nations. Said studies

Orientalism as a dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shaped by three empires: British, French and American in whose territory the writing was produced. [Said's] whole point is to say that we better understand the durability of saturating hegemonic systems like culture when we see that their internal constraints upon writers were productive, not unilaterally inhibiting" (Said, 15).

In fact, it is impossible to discredit the British Empire's productive impact on Canadian women writers like Margaret Atwood and the French Empire's productive impact on Lebanese women writers like Hanan Sheikh. The same applies to American neocolonialism's or globalization's impact on Lebanese male writer Rachid Daif whose novel is written by a man to highlight the problems of eastern women.

All three authors produce texts that showcase women resisting the society that 'others' them. However, a quick comparison between the three fictional women reveals that Sheikh's Zahra in *The Story of Zahra* is not as lucky as Elaine in Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and Rashud's wife in Daif's *Who's Afraid of Meryl Streep*. Zahra, a Middle Eastern Muslim woman living in a traditional patriarchal family dies in her attempt to escape the oppression of "not [being] born, but rather becom[ing], a woman" (de Beauvoir, 296). Elaine escapes the same oppression after years of patriarchal control thanks to being highly educated and having a profession of her own: She is an accomplished painter who

earns her own living. Elaine also breaks away from any essentialist notions of women's nature that de Beauvoir deems mythical and socially constructed and says: "I am not Woman, and I'm damned if I'll be shoved into it" (Atwood, 376). While Rashud's wife escapes oppression by traveling abroad to flee from the dictator Rachud, in Zahra's case even leaving Lebanon and being relocated in Africa does not prove to be a good idea. Escaping the patriarchal system embodied in her father in Lebanon, she faces two patriarchs in Africa, Hashem her uncle and Majed her husband. Zahra is not economically independent either, and she lacks a proper education and a professional career that she may use to buttress her decisions. While Rashud's wife is determined and unwavering about her convictions, Zahra is emotionally unstable. Most importantly, while Rashud's wife has no sense of herself as a gendered being, Zahra senses her gender as inferior and this contributes to her oppression.

Women's narratives in the twentieth century are only starting to emerge. Said in *Orientalism* condemns the "exteriority of representation" of Orientalists' texts because these texts describe the Orient to the West in order to change "a threatening Otherness into figures that are relatively familiar" (Said, 21). What is indelible according to Said is that these representations are substantially artificial, not real depictions of the Orient. They have been for so long "governed by some version of a truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would" (Said, 21). Women have been denied self-representation for ages too. This is why men used to do it for women the way men want. In a postcolonial world, it is not only important that writers like Hanan Sheikh represent themselves in their novels, it is also evident that male authors like Rachid Daif write about women from the perspective of women because they often more than some women

want women free and emancipated. This representation takes women away from the filiative process that restricts them to the traditions of birthplace and nationality and places them into the affiliative process where women are open to different "social and political convictions, economic and historical circumstances, voluntary effort and willed deliberation" (Said, 24).

Homi Bhabha, unlike Said who is interested in studying differences between colonizer and colonized, is interested in examining how the colonizer and colonized are similar. In the case of racial difference, Bhabha notices that the colonizer wants to stereotypically fix the colonized 'other' because the colonizer is torn between two contradictory feelings towards the colonized: the 'other' fascinates him and simultaneously scares him. This is why, according to Bhabha, the stereotype is the fetish that is needed to express and control conflicting feelings. On the one hand, the colonizer may feel the pleasure of being in command, which aggressively controls the colonized 'other.' On the other hand, the colonizer may feel tension and neurosis because the colonizer is always anxiously studying his own motives, identity and 'self.' In *The Location of Culture* (1991), Bhabha argues that the fetish "gives access to an 'identity' which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defense" (Bhabha, 74). In this situation, the colonized and colonizer's self is not stable and there is no real essence to their identity. On the contrary, their identity is a process of continual negotiation and change between the two in order to create new forms of power.

The same applies to the male-constructed stereotypes of sexual difference that 'other' women. The stereotype is similar to the fetish because they "both link what is unfamiliar and disquieting (sexual difference) to that which is familiar and accepted

(fetish object/stereotype)” (Childs and Williams, 127). Rashud in *Who’s Afraid of Meryl Streep* makes a fetish object or a stereotype out of his wife’s virginity, which she should have because she is sexually and anatomically different from him and because he is obsessed with the sexual purity of women. Rashud oscillates between delight in what is familiar and fear of what is unfamiliar. On the one hand, he is delighted at what is familiar: he knows that all Arab women should be virgins on their wedding nights and that, being her husband, he should be the one to deflower his wife as the Middle Eastern tradition dictates. On the other hand, he is fearful of what is unfamiliar: the fact that his wife is not a virgin on her wedding night.

To summarize this chapter, I attempt to show in this thesis who, among the three female protagonists, *successfully* accomplishes the scathing task of “becom[ing] a woman” (de Beauvoir, 296). De Beauvoir speculates that femininity is a male projection of everything the male rejects in himself. She also states that a woman is stereotypically considered ‘other’ because of the specificity of her body. If any of the three protagonists becomes her gender, she will become it because she has conformed to society’s patriarchal rules, which is a huge sacrifice that not all women are ready to make. Said argues that the strength of the Western colonial and patriarchal discourse is not only ideological, decorative and superstructural but practical also in that it makes the Eastern and female ‘other’ act in ways that fit Western and male expectations. However, Western and patriarchal discourses have weak points that the ‘other’ uses to destabilize these discourses. Kristeva asserts that the semiotic feminine mode is powerful enough to break the surface of the symbolic masculine mode. Spivak moves away from Said’s “Self-Other dichotomy in favor of an ethical response to the lives and struggles of oppressed people

in 'The Third World' " (Morton, 38). Mernissi and El Saadawi refuse the ultra-conservative explications of Islamic religion and of the hadith. They call for a secular civil society that may protect individual freedoms and bring back women to the political arena the way they were in the early Islamic community. Bhabha also examines how the fetish is at the same time an approval and a disavowal of the sexual difference of the 'other.'

In my opinion, many of these views of women in the West and in the Eastern Islamic world are detrimental to women's advancement in society. Unbeknownst to men, these notions are dangerous to them also because they pay the price of tying women to them socially, culturally and economically, instead of allowing these women to help them fight life's problems. In the chapters that follow, I expand and elaborate the methodology through performing a close reading of the three selected novels in order to pinpoint some of the ills women live and how they have managed to reduce them.

Chapter Two

Intrinsic Colonialisms and Decolonizations

And a voice rises from deep inside me and cries, “Help me!” Footsteps and voices move closer and then recede. . . . And I begin to scream as the pain leaps up to my neck. “Help me!” (*The Story of Zahra*, 213).

I begin this chapter with an analogy of political and psychological colonialisms. Political colonialism is supposedly followed by decolonization. The psychological colonialism of women is also—hopefully—followed by a decolonization. Colonialism is the predomination of a purportedly superior nation over another. Borrowing colonialism as a paradigm, I argue that the subjugation of the powerless ‘colonized’ woman to the power of the ‘colonizer’ man is one way of reading subjection and envisaging liberty. I contend in this chapter that the patriarchal system is too strong to be easily destabilized, even if women like Fatmé and Zahra have transgressed it on numerous occasions and in numerous ways.

In the above-mentioned quotation, Zahra desperately calls for anybody’s help in order to save herself after the sniper whom she loves kills her. It is the same call for help that Fatmé has performed years before Zahra to save herself from her unhappy marriage to Ibrahim. *The Story of Zahra* implicitly warns Middle Eastern women who seek to decolonize their bodies from patriarchal assumptions that they, like Zahra, may die. Death is a strong statement against the oppression of women. It is a warning and a wake-up call to put the human condition in alert. In this novel, I contend that just like orientalism, out of misrepresentation, constructs the Orient as degenerate and the orientals as needing the help of the West to save them from themselves, patriarchy also depicts women as having a tenuous moral sense and needing men’s help to save them

from themselves. In the case of Ibrahim and Fatmé in *The Story of Zahra*, Ibrahim attempts to save Fatmé from herself when he beats her after doubting her unfaithfulness to him. He thinks that his backlash to her infidelity helps her go back to what he considers to be the straight path. Zahra remembers her father Ibrahim trying to extract a confession from his wife as to the truth of her amorous relation with another man in this manner: “My mother was sprawled on the kitchen floor as my father in his khaki suit, his leather belt in one hand, was beating her. In the other hand he [holds] the Qur'an as he demands, “Swear! Swear! Show me!” ” (Sheikh, 15) He dominates her by beating her violently with his belt, an image reminiscent of another Qur'anic one that dictates the painful flogging of the sinner who has committed adultery with a hundred stripes. He also brandishes in his other hand the holy book to remind her that in the Qur'an that represents God's word, adultery is punishable by stoning. He enacts to her how she ought to plead God that she will not be stoned, and that if he does stone her, the Qur'an gives him the right to do so. Ibrahim enslaves not only the mother, but also the daughter. The Qur'an advises that other believers should witness the punishment of adulterers. While Ibrahim disciplines Fatmé directly with the patriarchal power of his belt, he also disciplines Zahra by proxy since she watches the fight. Used in this manner, religion, which is held by men as the monopolizing stewards of its administration and its interpretation, becomes more powerful and frightening than the sword which some Muslims have used ages ago to disseminate the message of Islam.

The problem with Ibrahim is that he wants Fatmé to conform to the idealized image he and many other men has of a woman as pure, chaste and belonging to the private realm exclusively, while she wants to be a woman free to affirm herself as she

pleases. De Beauvoir declares that “patriarchal civilization [asks a woman to] defend her virtue, her honor; [...] whereas any blame visited upon her conqueror is mixed with admiration” (de Beauvoir, 395). Fatima Mernissi argues in *The Veil and The Male Elite* that many have criticized Prophet Muhammad himself for “not setting up boundaries between his private life and his public life, which allowed his wives to be directly involved in the affairs of the Muslim state, [and which] little by little turned against him” (Mernissi, 172). Mernissi observes that the Prophet himself becomes subject to slander when his wives go public and take part in the politics of the state, which is an honorable task for women. Middle Eastern men like Ibrahim would not like to see themselves in this position, let alone that, unlike the Prophet’s wives, Fatmé goes public to meet her lover.

Borrowing the notion of the ‘subaltern sati’ from Spivak, I argue that Fatmé can be appropriately understood in terms of a desperate sati. Far from being a lustful woman, Fatmé is a slave to the rules and traditions that make matrimonial separation not socially recommended. In the heat of the argument between her and Ibrahim, she tries to burn herself alive as Zahra “entered the kitchen and smelled the petroleum, saw her [mother] pressed against the cupboard, squirming in [the father’s] grip as she tried to free herself, wailing, “Leave me be! I wish to die”” (Sheikh, 15). Fatmé may have exaggerated her reaction in order to save herself from Ibrahim’s tight fist. She also may have behaved that way because, deep inside, she really wants to sacrifice herself by committing suicide, as a ‘homo sacer’ gesture of ridding herself from the patriarchal order that forbids her from divorcing the man she doesn’t love and marry the one she loves. Fatmé’s father is like many men in the Arab world who consider that it is scandalous for a woman to demand divorce. He deters her from divorcing, even though in Islam divorce is abhorred albeit

allowed. Fatmé's father gives more power to social norms and forbids Fatmé from divorcing, all the while justifying himself by saying that religion doesn't approve of it and asking Fatmé to feel remorseful for asking to divorce. Fatmé "would mention the word "divorce" every time [she] visited [her father] in his tobacco booth, and always he would reproach her [sic], "For repentance, Fatmé. Acknowledge God. Repent, my daughter!" " (Sheikh, 26) Hanan Sheikh, through the novel, seems to inspire the idea that social traditions ought to demystify divorce, which may discourage women like Fatmé from committing adultery, and which may prevent society from deeming her an immoral woman. Unlike the sati that the British claim to have saved from Indian traditions, Fatmé doesn't find anyone to save her from Ibrahim's beating. Not even Zahra can approach them because she "was afraid of [her] father, as afraid of the blows he dealt [Fatmé]" (Sheikh, 15).

Zahra's fate is not better. Just like the 'subaltern sati' chooses to die at the pyre because traditions expect her to, Zahra despises her husband Majed and knows that she "*freely and willingly* [emphasis added] have returned to this trap" because she has no other option (Sheikh, 108). In fact, it is an obligation rather than a choice for her to remain married to Majed. In the love act, she likens Majed's violation of her body to snails crawling over her that she cannot prevent even if she uses "knives [and] burning fires" (Sheikh, 112). Whereas the 'subaltern sati' is ready to burn herself alive for the sake of Indian traditions, Zahra is ready to burn herself alive (again in a homo sacer scene) in order to rid herself of Muslim and Lebanese traditions. During her marriage, she muses: "I was waiting for someone to save me. I could not save myself. Might my uncle save me? He seemed my only hope. He had saved me the first time, but now things were

taking their course” (Sheikh, 108). It is sad to see that Zahra asks one man to save her from another man while “men should be suspect, for the men are at once judge and party to the lawsuit” according to Poulain de la Barre (de Beauvoir, 21). It is also sad to see that Majed and Hashem know that the stress on Zahra is so huge they can predict she “had killed herself” out of despair, without them taking drastic measures to change anything (Sheikh, 89). Similar to the ‘subaltern sati,’ Majed “expected to find her body enveloped in flames” when Zahra doesn’t answer his banging on their house’s door (Sheikh, 89).

Furthermore, just as orientalism constructs the Orient as timeless because orientalist “assumed an unchanging Orient,” the Lebanese oriental patriarchy dramatized in these novels also depicts women’s gender as timeless, out of history and trapped outside of modern development (Said, 96). Zahra needs to perform a specific and prescribed gender role in her household in order to please her husband, and this role has not changed since the dawn of time. Fatmé instructs her on how to:

play the coquette, be flirtatious and coy. How I ought to run up to my husband the minute he came in at the door and kiss him on the cheek. How I ought to take a bath each evening, and every night wear a different gown and spray cologne on my body, and maybe put a flower in my hair and stop going barefoot, while never answering him back in a loud voice (Sheikh, 203).

Because patriarchy represents women, and especially mothers, in ways that are ideal far from realistic, three problems arise from this passage. Fatmé falsely presents herself to Zahra as a woman who has accepted in a submissive way to reproduce patriarchal rules and who tries to pass them on to her daughter so that Zahra avoids any undesirous friction in her marriage. Second, what Fatmé describes in this passage applies to how she has behaved with her lover, not with her husband, which depicts marriage as an institution

not worth investing oneself in. Third, by initiating Zahra to these regulations, Fatmé enforces on Zahra the patriarchal law that she herself has disobeyed by being a promiscuous woman. Still, Zahra sees marriage as inevitable in a Middle Eastern girl's life: "The day must come when I marry" (Sheikh, 31). Instead of picturing her wedding day as a fulfilling day, she represents it as an inevitable task that she and other girls in the Middle East have to perform because they have a feminine gender. She cannot be blamed or deemed mentally sick for thinking that way when Majed, a Middle Eastern man himself, "considers Zahra merely as merchandise of which he is the sole proprietor. He could care less about her welfare or feelings or about creating a true exchange of love and tenderness that could have saved her from the madness arising again in her" (Accad, 48). She feels she is destined to "appear [feminine,] weak, futile, docile. [She] is supposed not only to make herself ready, but also to repress her spontaneity and replace it with the studied grace and charm taught to her by her elders" (de Beauvoir, 359). This function gives Zahra less space where she can exercise her subjectivity and freedom of action, leading her to feel that she has only limited resources within her and causing her to refrain from affirming herself as a subject like a man does. The narrator speaks up Zahra's mind concerning men's conception of women as "docile, [and as] not rival[ing their] own importance" (Sheikh, 29).

In addition, building on the model of colonialism as not just productive but also reproductive, I argue that patriarchy in this novel is self-perpetuating through males who cause it to continue to exist, and through females who blindly abide by males' rules. Fatmé's reproduction of patriarchy as in the above-mentioned passage proves that it is a system of representations that is hard to break. It makes women want to back it up instead

of dismantling it because it works against them. Even under such strenuous conditions, Zahra keeps the desire to decolonize her body alive and thriving since she “wanted [her] body to be [hers] alone,” which is one way of saying that women can inscribe themselves as subjects by resisting and negotiating patriarchal roles (Sheikh, 93). Majed controls Zahra’s productive and reproductive body since he wants her to “help [him] with [his] work, [and] bear [his] children” (Sheikh, 88). According to de Beauvoir “marriage incites man to a capricious imperialism: the temptation to dominate is the truly universal, the most irresistible one there is; to surrender [...] the wife to her husband, is to promote tyranny in the world” (de Beauvoir, 482). Majed also wants to be “the owner of a woman’s body that [he] could make love to whenever [he] wished,” and this subjugates Zahra the weaker to Majed the stronger (Sheikh, 83). Moreover, just as a slave belongs eternally to its masters, when Majed discovers that Zahra is deflowered, he discusses the matter with her uncle Hashem, as if the body they debate belongs to them as private property, and not to Zahra. This behavior encapsulates the image of the body of the woman as the slave of patriarchy -a systematic enterprise that men continuously reinvest themselves in. This means that if Zahra escapes her father’s control in Lebanon, she faces her uncle and husband’s power in Africa.

In addition, just as the discourses of orientalism and colonialism create fictional assumptions and homogenize orientals as murderous and violent Arabs, the Middle Eastern patriarchal system homogenizes women by robbing them of their individuality. When Majed and Zahra marry, the former describes their wedding night as if he were reciting an already-written script of what usually happens between all married couples on that night. He pictures it as follows: “On our wedding bed, [Zahra] stretched out,

avoiding my eyes. I felt her annoyance. This is how it should be. Girls are always irritable on their wedding night: fear and pain commingle” (Sheikh 83). In this respect, De Beauvoir voices the fact that “the girl, [supposedly] brought up in a state of ignorance and innocence, had no ‘past’ while her fiancé had ‘lived’; it was for him to introduce her to the facts of life,” and this is what Majed expects to find in Zahra (de Beauvoir, 478). But Majed discovers that Zahra has already experienced these facts. This is how she is distinct from many other Arab women who are coerced to wait for their wedding night to be deflowered by their husbands. Instead of accepting her singularity, he feels Zahra’s past is an attack on his sexual honor or (‘ird) so he calls her: “Cursed woman! Daughter of a cursed woman” (Sheikh, 84). According to El Saadawi, “there is a distorted concept of honor in our Arab society. A man’s honor is safe as long as the female members of his family keep their hymen intact” (El Saadawi, 31). This mentality “has much less to do with sexual puritanism and more so with a crisis of masculinity” (Massad, 320). Majed is even horrified at the idea of having his mother know that Zahra is not a virgin. Feeling “no barrier to [his] penetration,” he says: “I saw nothing; the sheets remained white. Not even one drop of blood [...] I thanked God that my mother was far away, far from this mess, and could not ask to see the stained sheets so that she might display them to Zahra’s mother, to the neighbors and relatives” (Sheikh, 86). This is how “in the patriarchal regime man became master of woman” (de Beauvoir, 186). The practice of the white sheet has been taking place since the dawn of time. King James’ Bible states that the married girl’s parents “shall display the cloth [that the couple slept on] before the elders of the town. If, however, the charge is true and no proof of the girl’s virginity can be found, she shall be brought to the door of her father’s house and there the men of the

town shall stone her to death” (Deuteronomy 22:13-21). In the Middle East, a woman’s worth, her honor and the honor of her family are related to her virginity. She and her family are shamed if “the very fine membrane called ‘honour’ is torn before her wedding night” (El Saadawi, 25). El Saadawi criticizes reducing women to “this fine membrane [that] must be capable of bleeding profusely, of letting out red blood that can be seen as a visible stain on a white bed sheet the night a young girl is married” (El Saadawi, 25).

However, women decolonize their bodies in numerous ways. Said argues that whereas “the filiative scheme belongs to the realms of nature and of “life,” affiliation belongs exclusively to culture and society” (Said, 20). Zahra breaks away from filiative identifications to decolonize her body. To Hashem, his blood ties to Zahra justify his closeness to her. In fact, she is “[his] own flesh, blood and bones” and her face resembles “both her mother’s and [his]” (Sheikh, 69). Zahra’s “mother is [also] daughter to [Hashem’s] mother”(Sheikh, 71). This filiation generates Hashem’s sexual violation of Zahra’s body. Hashem links this closeness to the idea of homeland that he has failed to conquer in the past and that he dreams of conquering in the present through his physical contiguity to Zahra. All he wants is to appease the harshness of his exile: “Why don’t you let me cling to you and help me to forget this time in limbo” (Sheikh, 72). In order to remain close to her and to Lebanon through her, Hashem also dreams of marrying Zahra, had she not been his niece. From her part, Zahra affiliates herself and finds rescue with the taboo notion of incest in order to flee Hashem’s advances and to avoid this relation with him. She is also a brown woman set on saving brown men from themselves. When she confronts her uncle and tells him that she is sick because of his behavior towards her and the gruesome act he was about to do, all he says is: “What are you saying, girl? What

behavior?” (Sheikh, 41) This rhetorical question and his inability to look her in the face, suggest that he is unable to justify his deed and that he even regrets it, which may save him from repeating it in the future.

As this chapter is entitled “Intrinsic Colonialisms and Decolonizations,” it is always important to draw on colonial and postcolonial theory to illustrate a Feminist argument and show how women decolonize themselves. Both Said and Bhabha observe that colonial discourses stereotypically deem orientals as backwards in order to legitimate the colonization of their lands. Contrary to Said who is criticized for not paying attention to the resistance of the colonized, Bhabha specifically studies this point and argues that the binary of colonizer/colonized is rather fluid, not static. He considers that the aim of the colonial discourses’ stereotype to fix the oriental is never met because the stereotype itself is flawed from the start: it is ambivalent in that it simultaneously disavows and installs difference. According to Bhabha, the colonial discourses’ stereotype moves in two opposite directions. On the one hand, it wants to secure the identity of the colonized in order to assimilate him under colonial modes of representations. By the same token, patriarchal discourses function in the same manner. Patriarchal discourses try to bring women within or inside male understanding by constructing them as an object of male study, which may lessen women’s radical otherness in male’s eyes and disavow their difference from men. For example, in order to understand Zahra’s erratic behavior and so interpret the unfamiliar into familiar terms, Majed attempts to depict her as knowable and explicable. He disavows her difference from him by discarding her full-fledged neurosis as a slight matter of “changing moods [which] had never stopped [him] or made [him] alter [his] mind about [them] marrying. It was normal for a woman to be moody at the

outset. [He] felt sure that, as she grew used to [him,] so things would change” (Sheikh, 83). He even thinks all women are subject to mood swings at the beginning of their wedded life, which makes Zahra not different from other women as well. On the other hand, the colonial discourses’ stereotype sustains a sense of difference between the colonizer and the colonized. Patriarchy works in the same fashion. Men portray women as beyond or outside male comprehension because women are odd eccentric creatures, which is a stereotypical way of installing women’s difference from men. For example, Majed cannot fathom “why had [Zahra] accepted [him] in marriage if she had been so frightened at not being a virgin? Why had she married [him]? Did she think [he] would never realize the truth? Did [he] appear to be stupid” (Sheikh, 88)? This string of questions proves that he is perplexed.

The last question Majed asks himself testifies that the stereotype is also “*both* an aggressive expression of domination over the other *and* evidence of narcissistic anxiety about the self” (Huddart, 43). If Majed ever finds answers to the questions he asks himself in the above-mentioned passage, he would be able to aggressively dominate Zahra by knowing her past history and by knowing how she thinks. As long as these questions remain unanswered, Zahra would have the upper hand in the relation because she would be causing him to suffer from a plethora of doubts that he remains unable to clarify: “(that word “but,” it seemed, needed to be included in every thought and action)” (Sheikh, 88). The word ‘but’ in this sentence doesn’t only mean that Zahra has destabilized the stereotype of virtuous woman, but also that Majed anxiously studies his own motives and doubts his own decisions when it comes to keeping Zahra or divorcing her, which undermines his patriarchal power. This is how “Flaubert’s situation of strength

in relation to Kuchuk Hanem” and Majed’s powerful position in comparison to Zahra’s can be overturned (Said, 6).

Because Zahra is not a virgin, Majed is worried about two details. He broods on the shame he will feel if people know that he has accepted to go on being married to a deflowered girl. Middle Eastern men like Majed rarely accept to wed a girl who has lost her virginity, either in a previous marriage or, worse still, in an out-of-wedlock relationship as Zahra has done. In addition, Majed considers the fact of Zahra not explaining her loss of virginity to him before their wedding as a bitter pill to swallow. He doesn’t want her to “take [him] for a halfwit” (Sheikh, 84). He thinks that Zahra “duped [him] from the beginning,” that her parents have known about her virginity loss, and that they “had made a fool [and an idiot] of [him]” (Sheikh, 86). Majed’s goal is to fix his knowledge about Zahra and about the anatomy of her body once and for all in order to dominate her. He simultaneously wants to narcissistically feel the pleasure of superiority if he ever compares himself, as a colonizing man, to her as a colonized female. But this aim is forever deferred because his patriarchal discourse is unstable and ambivalent. All of this takes place because Majed cannot accept the fact that Zahra might not be that different from him. If he does, he would be weakening the binary thinking of patriarchal discourses that he benefits from so much.

Patriarchy also defines and fixates women, which dooms them to the immanence of their bodies. Patriarchy also contends that a Middle Eastern woman ought to be ready for her husband at all times and to give herself to him unconditionally, even if he forces himself on her and even if he knows that she refuses him: “[Majed] drew close and began to make love to [Zahra], not knowing whether she would turn her face away. An hour

went by and she was still as rigid as wood” (Sheikh, 88). Zahra’s relationship to Majed is so lacking in terms of emotions that it doesn’t allow her “soul to cry out like a woman surrendering to a redeeming love” (Sheikh, 34). But some women can reinvent themselves at every moment and in ways that may be contradictory to men’s teachings, even if it means being considered disobedient, a *nashez*. Mernissi argues that according to the prominent Persian scholar and exegete of the Qur’an al-Tabari whose interpretation I find outmoded

Al-nushuz means that the wife treats the husband with arrogance, refuses to join him in the marital bed; it is an expression of disobedience [*al-ma’siya*] and an obvious unwillingness to any longer carry out what obedience to the husband requires. It is a way of showing hatred [*bughd*] and opposition [*i’rad*] to the husband (Mernissi, 156).

The problem with al-Tabari’s definition is that it relates to a particular period in a particular place, and may not apply to all women in the twentieth century who seek transcendence from these ancient beliefs. In addition, al-Tabari is a male commentator of the Qur’an who has worked with the context of verse 34 sura 4 of the Qur’an that says “so righteous women are devoutly obedient.” He also “felt it necessary to clarify it and limit the verse’s scope in order to be certain that it did not constitute a pretext for *fitna*, violence among Muslims” (Mernissi, 156). But how can a female be sure, beyond a shred of doubt, that his interpretations are objective? The female characters I discuss in this thesis represent a female human rejection of the male-centered conception of female *nushuz*.

A new dimension of feminine identity is motherhood. What is its relation to the semiotic? Book two entitled “The Torrents of War” describes Fatmé’s anguish at the idea of her son Ahmad being a fighter during the Lebanese Civil War that has spanned from

1975 until 1990. Fatmé does not know where Ahmad is, and when Zahra asks her “Why, Mamma? Why?” [...] she moans, with tears in her eyes, “Oh, my daughter, oh! [...] Oh, my poor boy!” (Sheikh, 131). The interjection ‘oh’ that Fatmé uses is “an evocation of [motherly] feeling or, more pointedly, a discharge of the subject’s energy and drives” (McAfee, 15). Book two also describes Zahra’s situation. Hearing the rockets exploding in the vicinity of their apartment, Fatmé and Zahra cling to each other and “[shout] out together as if [they are] once again as close as orange and navel” (Sheikh, 136). Zahra at that time must be thirty years old, with a history of troubled relations between her and her mother that verge at times to hatred. Still, the semiotic remains a major component of Zahra’s psyche. She remembers: “As [my mother] sat down next to me I found myself burying my face in her shoulder as I cried for fear and love. She hugged me, enveloping me in her arms, and said, “Tomorrow we go to the village. Don’t cry, my darling” ” (Sheikh, 137). This event shows that the bond that connects mother and child may be hard to break, even when the child reaches adulthood like Zahra. As Roger Allen succinctly puts it: “The linkage [between mother and daughter] is expressed through the orange and the navel, one that reflects not only a close proximity in general but also the particular fetal bond that connects mother and child” (Allen, 236). In this respect, both mother and child-females as they are-lapse into the semiotic when everything in the symbolic about them seems to be oppressive and life-taking.

What’s more, some women may feel that “the perpetuation of the species” is an inner need that they actively want to pursue (de Beauvoir, 501). Some other women, however, refuse motherhood altogether because it is a patriarchal construct complicit with men’s needs to fix women as mothers. These women may decolonize their bodies by

proving that “maternity is [not] enough in all cases to crown a woman’s life” (de Beauvoir, 536). Wanting to defamiliarize maternity in order to see it from a new perspective, de Beauvoir claims that pregnancy is a horrific process lacking in female agency, “a parasitic body [that] should proliferate within [the female] body; the very idea of this monstrous swelling frightens [the female]” (de Beauvoir, 336). Fatmé may have imagined herself in that stance, which pushes her to have a self-induced abortion because she wants to speak from a position that is outside the limitations of patriarchy and of the latter’s portrayal of motherhood. She refuses that men dominate her body through the discourse of the sanctity and sacredness of motherhood. She wants to be the master of her own body rather than its slave. She experiences “happiness almost jumping from her glistening eyes [at the sight of the aborted fetuses because she] didn’t want to have children by [Zahra’s] father” (Sheikh, 26). De Beauvoir argues that “children are a source of delight only within a balanced frame of reference which includes their father; for the neglected wife they become a heavy burden” (de Beauvoir, 489). Fatmé exacts retribution on her husband’s ill treatment by letting the “set of [aborted] twins, girl and boy, [live] but briefly in a porcelain soup dish” for Ibrahim to see (Sheikh, 25). She also decolonizes her body by challenging the natural link society makes between women and motherhood. To de Beauvoir, pregnancy is not an activity a woman consciously chooses. To Fatmé also, pregnancy is immanence, “stagnation, [...] constraint and contingency,” and a natural function a woman passively accepts (de Beauvoir, 29).

Fatmé is the perfect example one can use to show that motherhood is not always exemplary and that “the child is [not] sure of being happy in its mother’s arms” (de Beauvoir, 538). De Beauvoir wants to correct the monolithic representation of female as

maternal desire only. Between mother and child, there is a relation that can easily veer to tyranny, which makes us believe that Fatmé has never wanted to become a mother, and that she is oppressive to Zahra because she refuses to perform such a demanding role. Fatmé obliges Zahra to go with her on her romantic rendezvous as a cover up, and when Zahra feels the need to throw up out of fear because she knows what she witnesses is terribly wrong, her mother scolds her and says: “How painfully tiresome you are, girl. You’re the absolute limit!” (Sheikh, 7) I agree with Joseph Zeidan who argues that Zahra “feels emotionally abandoned by her mother on [her] outings [with her lover] as well as at home” (Zeidan, 206).

In addition, Zahra feels her mother has rejected her, that her mother has expelled her from the semiotic and its motherly reassurances when “the man [Fatmé loved] became the center of her life, and around him was nothing but flying embers” (Sheikh, 9). It is useful here to bring in the arguments of Kristeva who undoes the patriarchal culture that essentializes the concept of mother, that makes it an absolute concept, an abstraction, and an eternal inscription on the female body. She sees the maternal as *jouissance*, as a relationship between the dyad of mother and child that doesn’t concern neither the mother alone nor the child alone. Kristeva’s point is to say that the concept of mother by itself does not create motherhood, and that the mother feels she is a mother in connecting with her child, not outside this relation. The only connection that Fatmé has with Zahra is that of needing her daughter as a cover up to her illicit love affair. Fatmé considers motherhood a “mobile part of [her] being that comes and goes depending on whether [she is] in relation or not to the child” (Kaplan, 41). This is why Fatmé is Ahmad’s doting mother. Her preferential treatment of Ahmad is obvious when: “Every day, as we sat in

the kitchen to eat, her love would be declared: [...] she serves [Zahra's] brother Ahmad, [...] searching carefully for the best pieces of meat" (Sheikh, 11).

Finally, Said's criticism of the "widely influential model of the oriental woman" has informed many women and has enticed many others to rebel against it (Said, 6). Gender politics in Zahra's relationships to men have been based on an unequal power structure where men have chosen Zahra rather than the opposite, and where, "from beginning to end, [she] had been a mere spectator" (Sheikh, 114). Zahra has not chosen to be in a sexual relationship with Malek and this is why she has "remained passive" in it (Sheikh, 33). It has been done in fear of what her father might do to her in case he finds out: "He would not hesitate, even if it meant him spending the rest of his life in prison. He was capable of severing [her] head from [her] body" (Sheikh, 31). In the interview I have conducted with Hanan Sheikh, the author has stated that "Zahra changes her personality to please Malek who only sees her as genitalia or ('awra)." (interview – November 26, 2014). Zahra adjusts to Malek's patriarchal expectations by moving from "Zahra the mature girl who says little; Zahra the princess; [...] Zahra the stay-at-home [to] Zahra- a woman who sprawls naked day after day on a bed in a stinking garage, unable to protest to anything" (Sheikh, 40).

Majed also has chosen Zahra to be his wife because he wants to save himself from "having to go to Lebanon to look for a wife. [He]'ll save the cost of travel and trousseau, for [he's] heard that brides here do not expect a trousseau as they do back home" (Sheikh, 73). Her sexual relation to Majed also begins in fear of what he might do to her in case he finds out she is not a virgin. In both experiences, Malek and Majed expect Zahra to be "supine[ly malleable]," without at the same time thinking there is anything wrong with

the idea since she exists as an object to their pleasure only (Said, 206). They colonize Zahra by denying her the knowledge, discovery and experience of her own body.

The only time Zahra lucidly chooses is when she finds herself “climbing the stairs to find [the sniper] and feeling life start to revive in [her]” (Sheikh, 146). On the one hand, I object to Evelyn Accad saying that Zahra’s visits “divert and prevent him from killing” (Accad, 55). On the other hand, I agree with Joseph Zeidan arguing that “Zahra and Sami are equals in this relationship [where] she is in a position of power over her body and sexual activity” (Zeidan, 216). Zahra asks

What was I here for? Before I came, he would have been picking out his victim’s head as targets, and after I left would be doing the same. Why, every day, did I sneak down that street of death and war and arrive at his place? Could I say I had been able to *save* [emphasis added] anyone, even in those moments when we met and had intercourse? But I couldn’t even consider these to hold a reprieve from death for anyone. My visits only replaced his siestas (Sheikh, 160).

Actually, Zahra’s purpose here is not to save anyone else but herself from the thirty years of abuse at the hands of a string of men she has known up until this moment. This idea contradicts Accad’s that, “like others in the war, Zahra is a victim” (Accad, 56). Zahra releases her fear of males when war transplants her father Ibrahim, the epitome of male command, to the South where he can enjoy peace away from the war-torn Beirut. He is now “shrunken, lacking the Hitler-like moustache and with no watch in his trousers” (Sheikh, 152). She saves herself when she chooses a man who “understood [her] needs,” even if he is a sniper (Sheikh, 152). It may be that he apprehends her needs precisely because he is a sniper who: “has scorned the loss of [her] virginity once, twice, and hundred times” (Sheikh, 161). Next to atrocities that war inflicts on the human body such as “an amputated leg,” or “an eye that had turned to liquid,” or “a severed hand lying

there in resignation and helplessness,” and next to the number of souls being lost in war, talk about the specificity of women’s body become trivial (Sheikh, 135). The loss of her virginity becomes a minor detail in her life and not something that defines her because “war has made [...] convention [...] irrelevant” (Sheikh, 161). This is how, in terms of gender, hers becomes equal to man’s gender.

Zahra also releases her fear from social norms in which boundaries she has always moved since war “has swept everything away, for the rich and for the poor, for the beautiful and for the ugly. It has kneaded everything together into a common dough” (Skeikh, 184). Only then can she free her body and emit “cries as [she] lays in the dust, responding to the sniper’s exploring fingers, [cries which] contained all the pain and sickness from [her] past” (Sheikh, 153). She is no longer the woman curled up in the safety of the bathroom “hugging [her]self and holding [her] breath as if always trying to return to the state of being a fetus in its mother’s womb” (Sheikh, 154). Her cries resemble those a newborn baby pronounces at the moment of its birth. She is a woman reborn because she appropriates her body and because her body matters.

To depict Zahra as a martyr because she has been raped several times and because she dies at the hands of the sniper she loves at the end of the novel may not be wholly accurate. On the contrary, Zahra is a woman who wins her war with the patriarchal rule. Even though her death is self-victimizing, and even though one may think this is the end of all women who trespass patriarchal and religious boundaries, my contention is that Zahra has won her ‘self’ by refusing to eternally be the objectified ‘other.’ She enacts a desperate decolonizing scene by fully pouring herself unto death. She unites through her

death a strong statement of the decolonization of women from despotic and dehumanizing patriarchies.

Chapter Three

A Disintegration of the Masculine Empire: The Feminine Is Back with a Vengeance

“I did not want my mother to find out before the details of the situation had been sorted out. It would be embarrassing for her to see her son beaten down and in such a weak and powerless position” (*Who’s Afraid of Meryl Streep?* 34).

The above epigraph points out to the other side of the coin, which is going to be revealed in this chapter. My argument aspires to unveil the countertype of Middle Eastern men colonizing Middle Eastern women. Spoken by Rashud, the epigraph shows the fragility and precariousness of his position as a Middle Eastern man compared to his wife’s. It may also point out to the dissolution of a masculine empire that has governed the behavior of women in the Middle East for centuries. Whereas Zahra in *The Story of Zahra* has been submissive to the patriarchal discourse that has colonized her body until right before her death, Rashud’s wife in *Who’s Afraid of Meryl Streep?* is a rebel from the onset of her marriage to him. In Rashud’s eyes, she is a disobedient *nashez* because she is in a state of constant “rebellion against marital control” (Mernissi, *The Veil* 193). She is also a *nashez* since she refrains from having sexual intercourse with him. She leaves the marital house without his permission and she is not faithful to him. She also disobeys him by sleeping at her mother’s house, while he wants her to stay with him at their apartment as any newly married couple does. But the word *nashez* may apply to either spouse when either one is perverse. In fact, Rashud hasn’t left any stone unturned in order to achieve some kind of sexual satisfaction with his wife “from fellatio [to masturbation] to anal penetration” (Jarrar, 285). In an interview with the French literary magazine *Transfuge*, Rachid Daif asserts that the majority of his novels have one

recurring theme: “the confrontation between the East and the West that takes place in bed” (*Transfuge*, September 2006). Whereas the East is viewed as weak, feminine and exotic, the West is deemed strong, masculine and rational. It is also in bed that the powerful (generally eastern and western) male dreams of shackling the body and the sexuality of the powerless (generally eastern and western) female. Some men even believe that some women, because of their inferior gender, find it pleasurable to be dominated by men because it is a sign of women’s fragility and need for protection.

It is important to note that in this chapter, as in previous ones, I do not undertake any moral condemnation of the behavior of the novel’s characters, especially that of Rashud’s wife. I agree with de Beauvoir denouncing Plato’s sexist idea that says if women want to be equal to men, they need to live and train like men. What de Beauvoir wants is for men and women to be equal, to validate their sexual difference but to hinder this sexual difference from informing women’s subordination to men. I believe that Rashud’s wife extreme emulation of men and subversion of her prescribed gendered role is not an act of spitefulness towards her husband. It is the result of the Arab world turning deaf ears to women’s eternal liberation demands. Employing cultural theory for purely critical purposes, my first argument is that Rashud’s actions are counterproductive. Sadly, the more he forcefully tries to prove that he is his wife’s powerful colonizer, the more he emerges as her powerless colonized and ‘othered’ victim, and the more he empowers her. In addition, instead of eliciting in the reader of the novel a chivalrous image of manhood and ardor, he projects a sexist image when he tries to own his wife’s body, which makes him a victim of his antique views. Marriage has always been seen similar in some points to colonialism, especially in its attitude towards the ‘feminine’ colonized --as opposed to

‘male’ colonizer. Rashud at times asks himself whether his wife has married him “so she could get divorced and free herself from the chains put on her as a single woman?” (Daif, 69) It is also women who suffer from servitude to men in the first place, and to their bodies that lock them in the immanence of pregnancy, maternity, and menstruation in the second place. All this pushes Rashud’s wife to save herself from his patriarchal power by explicitly refusing it from the start because she doesn’t consider him the “head of the household.” The second argument I embark on comes as a consequence to the first: When women like Rashud’s wife strive to control their bodies in crucial issues of virginity, female sexuality and pregnancy, they become ‘selves’ to themselves. My third argument attempts to explicate the fact that Rashud’s wife is often mistaken for a westerner since she embodies all the strengths of the West: she is courageous and strong. Opposite to her, Rashud embodies all the shortcomings of the East: He acts in a cowardly manner and is weak. His plight pictures him as an irredeemably emasculated man.

Within the same parameters that allow us to see colonialism as constructing binary oppositions between an inferior East and a superior West, we can also observe the dichotomy between men and women which adds to the arguments raised against patriarchy. In this dichotomy, women are given a subservient role as men’s ‘other.’ Antithetically, Rashid Daif’s novel presents to the reader a married couple whose pre-packed and gendered roles have been reversed: Rashud’s wife inflicts on him the powerlessness that we usually see women endure in the Arab world. The Indian sati is a helpful motif which may be appropriated as a paradigm that helps understand the struggle in the Middle East. In fact, the ‘subaltern sati’ Hindu tradition dictates that a woman ought to burn herself alive after her husband’s death because she is not worthy of living

without him governing her, which I find preposterous. Etymologically speaking, “the literal meaning of ‘sati’ is not ‘widow burning’ but ‘good wife’ ” (Parker, 257). Although Rashud and his wife may not well be aware of sati, Rashud’s wife is anything but the ‘good wife’ he wants her to be. A ‘good wife’ is usually “deprived of her magic weapons by the marriage rites and subordinated economically and socially to her husband” (de Beauvoir, 207). Rashud’s wife decolonizes her ‘self’ from all these male assumptions by making him, instead of her, squirm in agony at her abandoning him. On the one hand, I do not believe that Rashud’s wife is a good role model for Middle Eastern women to follow in order for them to decolonize their bodies. On the other hand, I believe that Rashid Daif means to show an exaggerated situation where the reversal of roles may make men conscious of women’s plight. Rashud “was writhing in pain from her having left [him]. [He] was burning atop a flaming ember, as if all the love songs had been written for [him]” (Daif, 42). This is the same way one would behave after being metaphorically burnt with scorching fires. Can this feeling push Rashud to sense the physical and emotional aches that inflict a woman when her husband deserts her? Still, in the midst of his weakness, his masculine pride prevents him from acknowledging that his ‘colonizing’ days are over. He fantasizes:

I’d been forced to change my opinion because [these songs] struck me right in the heart! But that didn’t mean I’d been weakened. On the contrary, in order to come out of my predicament a winner, I had to derive strength from that pain. It was the only way to prevent what had happened the day before from being repeated in the future and becoming a habit of hers, to leave me like that whether she had a good reason or not (Daif, 42).

De Beauvoir argues that “doubtless the winner will assume the status of absolute” (de Beauvoir, 10). The world has mostly belonged to men, and altering this false idea is what Rashud cannot come to terms with. To him, men emerge victorious out of any war.

To borrow the notion of the ‘subaltern sati’ a second time, I use it in reverse to relate the story that Rashud narrates to his wife. Rashud’s nameless male friend has deflowered his own girlfriend. Failing to make up his mind and marry her, the girlfriend dumps Rashud’s friend and weds another man after “sew[ing] up her hymen” (Daif, 55). On their wedding night, the husband “noticed a tiny thread stuck to his penis, which made him wonder, so he asked her about it. At that moment, he was so anxious he seemed like he was about to burst into flames [sic]” (Daif, 55). These two examples show that the victor/victim binary may be destabilized since fires now consume men instead of women. India and the Middle East are two different geo-cultural denominations. Nevertheless, if we take the image of a weak woman being burnt in India to find its countertype with Rashud’s wife, we may see how women may use some other flames to burn their husbands alive.

Unable to physically colonize his wife, Rashud is unable to colonize her selfhood as well. Rashud is ecstatic about the idea that his wife is the person who “carries his name and is linked to him by that name” (Daif, 81). One way of controlling her is through the Name of the Father, this patriarchal privilege that eclipses a woman’s family name, and hence her identity, under that of her husband after marriage. Rashud’s wife lacks a first name also, which shuns her entry into the symbolic realm of culture and hence into civilization. He refers to her at times as his wife, to mean that in the marriage bond she exists only through him, and not as a separate human being. According to de Beauvoir, “male and female stand opposed within a primordial *Mitsein*, and woman has not broken it” (de Beauvoir, 19). At other times he refers to her as his woman, to mean that only her physicality and her feminine nature are of value to him. His aim is to “imprison her in her

sex” (de Beauvoir, 35). Another time he refers to her as “my wife-the powerful! The almighty! The most cunning!” to recall the stereotype of a woman being deceptive (Daif, 83). In this primordial bond between a man and a woman, Rashud wants to exist as a presence and as a ‘self,’ while his wife, like many other women in the world, should exist as a prototype, a nameless absence and as an ‘other’ that he represents like Flaubert has represented Kuchuk Hanem ages ago. Just as he objectifies his wife by rendering her nameless, his mother-in-law ridicules him by calling him Rashud, not as a term of endearment but to diminish his sense of overconfidence in his masculine power. The argument of being nameless finds a remarkable equivalence with Kristeva’s arguments of “abjection” and “nothingness.” Kristeva discusses Mlle De Belliere du Tronchay and argues that

The most spectacular, and perhaps the most pathological, of these explorers of nothingness is undoubtedly Louisa of the Nothingness, for that is what Melle. de Belliere du Tronchay, in the seventeenth century, asked to be called. [She abandons] her prestigious “name-of-the-father” to nullify herself, while at the same time nullifying paternal authority (Kristeva, *The Sacred*, 37).

Kristeva believes that Mlle De Belliere du Tronchay has cancelled the name-of-the-father from her being because she is a mystic whose body is a void, a *nothing*. The situation of Rashud’s wife may be seen as quite different from that of Mlle. De Belliere du Tronchay first because Rashud’s wife has a body that she values so much she considers it as *the thing* that guides her every move. Rashud’s wife also has not chosen to be nameless, and hence voiceless. It is Rashud’s choice to render her nameless and thus to prevent her from existing as a ‘self.’ In Rashud’s eyes, she is a non-person and she has no independent social identity. She is immanence, an absence that cannot be represented unless she is connected to the male through the filiation of being his mother, his daughter or his sister.

In addition, by not naming her, Rashud's behavior is interpreted psychologically as if he wants to take his wife back to the semiotic where the world is not a representational space, and where persons and objects have no names. In an interview I have conducted with George Sadaka, he contends that Rashud seems to be dragging his wife back into the realm of the semiotic where she is merely "a body that he can own, manipulate, and control." Sadaka also observes that "in response to the wife's utter chauvinistic manipulation by Rashud, she attempts to wo-manipulate him through her adamant defiance" (interview—June 6, 2015). In addition, Rashud's not naming his wife may be seen as a blessing in disguise. Her lack of name is surely representative of a female "I" that males in the Arab world have the power to repress. Unbeknownst to him, this same lack of name is also representative of any female "I" in the Arab world that can rebel against male domination and be victorious at the end.

I move to the discussion of the notion of *zina* and its relation to rape. In Islamic law, *zina* relates to the sexual relation that occurs between two individuals who are not married. My contention is that the seamstress's brother accuses Rashud of rape to save his sister from being accused of adultery. According to Mernissi, *zina* is "(fornication), an illicit sex act" (Mernissi, *The Veil* 60). When Rashud meets the seamstress so that she may sew curtains for his bedroom, he "kept wondering how [he] could possibly help her!" His sinister rationale is that "there was some sort of a cry for help in her eyes that had caught [his] attention (Daif, 21). Just as the colonizer whose 'mission civilisatrice' is to rescue the colonized from deprivation, Rashud fantasizes himself as the savior of the neighborhood's spinster seamstress; as her knight in shining armor who is more than ready to establish his colony of pleasure on her body (Said, xvi). Rashud even imagines

that, had he been her father or her brother, he would have beaten her like many Arab women are beaten or even killed at the slightest suspicion of their unrestrained sexual activities. In reality, Rashud is the powerless victim of the cry for help he has seen in the seamstress's eyes. He has no choice but to surrender to her appeal, take her to his house under the pretext that the curtains need fixing, and attempt to rape her. She consciously follows Rashud home, knowing that the curtains are brand new and not in need of mending. In this case, both Rashud and the seamstress may be seen as 'zina' makers.

On the other hand, the seamstress's brother thinks otherwise because he constructs the 'zina' act that his sister commits with Rashud as rape for which Rashud is the sole responsible. In this way, her brother allows her to walk scot-free, while Rashud is indicted with rape, which is a major crime in the Arab world since it relates to the brother's sexual honor. El Saadawi argues that in the Arab world a girl who engages in out-of-wedlock affairs "is liable to be punished with physical death, or moral death," but the brother punishes Rashud and acquits his sister (El Saadawi, 24). In addition, article 562 of the Lebanese "penal code offers reduced sentences to male perpetrators of "honor crimes," " but the brother fines Rashud with five thousand dollars in order not to press charges against Rashud for the crime of adultery (Kelly and Breslin, 257). This reversal of the gender binary presents an evolution and a drastic change in men's points of view because it pictures some men who are ready to side by women. It also sets a contrast between these men who are ready to forgive women their mistakes, and men like Rashud who are uncompromising. What's more, it points out to the fact that the days when honor has been exclusively attached to women preserving themselves are long gone. In the literary past, women who have had unlawful affairs have been obliged to wear the

shameful scarlet letter “A” (the symbol of adultery) on their gown and have been called adulteresses. In contemporary nonliterary Middle Eastern cultures, social opinion links women’s honor to men controlling their sexual appetites, lest these men want to be called rapists.

Still within the scope of the main argument in this chapter, Rashud may also be seen as a victim of the notion of *fitna*. Islam is the religion to which the dressmaker belongs: she “shielded herself [...] by pulling her scarf down her forehead as far as possible and lowering her head” (Daif, 19). In Arabic, *fitna* is derived from the word *fatina* or “*femme fatale* who makes men lose their self-control” (Mernissi, *Beyond* 31). According to Islamic Hadith discourse, a woman is the ultimate “source of danger to man and to society on account of her power of attraction or *fitna*. Man in the face of such seduction was portrayed as helpless [sic], drained of all his capacities to be positive or resist” (El Saadawi, 136). Rashud describes the light of *fitna* that the seamstress possesses in her eyes as

a light that flashed intermittently. When I ran into her on the street, I wondered why her parents allowed her to leave the house with that light, that cry for help, lurking in her eyes. I thought her father and brothers must hit her constantly because she was always letting on about things that should remain hidden, which made me sad (Daif, 21).

Indeed, Rashud believes that this woman’s sexual desire is so unmet that her eyes, considered erogenous zones, expose her lust. The Muslim theologian Ghazali, who follows the Shafi’i jurisprudence school of Sunni Islam, believes that “the look is the fornication of the eye” (Mernissi, *Beyond* 141). In addition, just like a double-edged sword cuts both ways, the seamstress’s eyes not only reveal her feminine lasciviousness that disarms Rashud. Her eyes are also powerful enough to objectify Rashud with their

gaze. In another reversal of the gender binary, Rashud feels that the seamstress “was stripping him naked” with her eyes (Daif, 20). The penis and the male eyes’ gaze lead men to fornication since the eyes give pleasure to the male observer as much as the male sexual organ does. According to Mernissi, when the “Prophet was asking God to protect him from the most virulent social dangers, he asked for help in controlling his penis and his eye from the dangers of fornication” (Mernissi, *Beyond* 141). Instead of Rashud looking lustfully at the seamstress the way men usually do, it is she who employs her eyes “like a scanner or a copier” in order for her to imagine how Rashud and his wife sexually enjoy one another (Daif, 19). Rashud believes that the seamstress envies him and his wife for being newlyweds and at the onset of their physical relationship, an idea that causes her to blush, not out of shyness but out of craving for such a relationship.

Speculating that men’s fearless demeanor is only an outer shell that they use to cover up a deep-seated fear of the female body, I argue that Rashud simultaneously considers his wife’s virginity as a source of fascination and fright. According to Bhabha, the colonizer utilizes the stereotype to point to the inferiority of the colonized. In the same manner, Rashud believes that his wife’s female body is inferior to his male body. In addition, thinking that he is ‘self’ to himself, Rashud is in reality ‘other’ and alien to himself. Rashud colonizes his wife’s body when his monolithic discourse about virginity makes him mistakenly feel that he controls and is in charge of his wife’s virginity, which may make him ‘self’ to himself. In fact, when he discovers that his wife is not a virgin, he feels he is obliged to reconsider all his inherited ideas about virginity, which may make him ‘other’ to himself. He remembers that

When my friends and I were at the peak of our youth, we weren’t *preoccupied* with the issue of virginity. We were just *turned on* by it. [...] We never discussed

this issue when we were young because remaining a virgin until marriage was the *assumption*. There was no need to point it out, the way one did not point out something as natural as breathing (Daif, 57).

Rashud is nostalgic to a past era when patriarchal discourse was able to produce a woman's body as a knowable structure, just like "colonial discourse produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an "other" and yet entirely knowable and visible" (Bhabha, 101). Rashud believes that in older times, virginity was not a source of anxiety as it is to him now because it has been "one of those spots [a woman] protects with such vigilance" (Daif, 106). Moreover, virginity has been a source of excitement because Rashud and his friends have been aroused by the idea of "opening" a woman. It was the assumption that a female is a virgin and that she sprawls naked on the bed waiting in submission for her husband "to ambush [her] like a wild beast and brutally deflower her, fiercely tearing up her hymen" (Daif, 55). It also was the assumption that a male should show his masculine prowess and "should tear [his wife] up and break her and violate her, but with chivalry and integrity, not like a barbarian" (Daif, 55). De Beauvoir voices her concern about the fact that the "erotic vocabulary of males is drawn from military terminology [and that in males'] sex excitement there is a flavor of heroism" (de Beauvoir, 396). This active heroism (mis)represents men as superior to the women who are (mis)represented as passively inferior.

Twenty-first century Lebanon and sexual liberation movements challenge Rashud's inherited views of female sexuality. Contemplating the idea that virginity has recently become minutiae causes Rashud so much stress. He cannot prevent himself from asking his wife if making love to her for the very first time after their marriage is too painful, knowing that it may anger her because it means he doubts her virginity. He is

caught between two contradictory feelings. He feels pleasure that, “as a man, [he] possessed great power and potency” that allows him to deflower his wife (Daif, 68). At the same time, he is anxious about two issues: the truthfulness of his wife’s virginity, and his own reaction to knowing that she has stitched her hymen before marrying him. Has her cousin deflowered her with his finger when he was sixteen and she was just a nine-year-old innocent child? Rashud is ready to act like a gentleman and forgive her if she has been the victim of her cousin preying on her. El Saadawi professes that girls can even tear their hymen “by repeated riding on a bicycle or a horse” or by any trivial accident that has happened to them in their childhood (El Saadawi, 25). Or has losing her virginity happened seven years later by means of a conscious and full-fledged sexual relationship between her and this cousin? In this case, if Rashud accepts to go on with the marriage, it would seem as if he is accepting another man’s “leftovers,” just like Lebanon, belonging to what is pejoratively called the third world, has been made up of what was left over from the first and second world (Daif, 104). This is an idea he categorically refuses. He is unwillingly caught in a period of undecidability that collapses the binary of virgin/whore in his mind. He is unable to classify his wife neither under the category of innocent virgin nor under that of cunning whore. This aporia, this resistance to being divided into binary oppositions, this moment of doubt in his own judgement and in his wife’s values is what decolonizes her body and this is how Rashud’s patriarchal text has always already deconstructed itself. He also doesn’t stomach the idea that his wife is a woman with whom another man has had a short physical relationship because it affects his ego. He contemplates the situation in this manner:

For so long, I had not been able to sleep at night worrying I might run into some man who had known her as I had known her or possibly more, and I worried he

would know about me even though I did not know about me even though I did not know about him and he would be laughing at me secretly, mocking me, and feeling superior to me because he had refused to marry the woman I had been proud of marrying (Daif, 101).

The passage quoted above means that Rashud thinks that his wife's virginity is important only because he links it to his self-esteem. Virginity in itself may be meaningless to him. It is the social construction of women's gender that links their virginity to men's masculinity that also worries him the most: If "another man has penetrated her, he's penetrated me, too" (Daif, 81).

In addition, the word assumption in "we never discussed this issue when we were young because remaining a virgin until marriage was the assumption" is more slippery than Rashud thinks (Daif, 57). While he uses it to mean that virginity in his youth has been expected and taken for granted, the word assumption can also mean that virginity is a supposition, a tentative hypothesis. This second meaning turns the notion of virginity on its head. It points to the fact that Rashud's biggest mistake is living in the twenty-first century without reconsidering all the questionable essentializing truths about virginity that he has ever believed in up until now, which makes him a victim of the patriarchy he defends so much. It also points to the fact that the patriarchy that 'assumes' all women to be virgins on their wedding nights is the same patriarchy responsible of pushing these women to trick their husbands. These women perform a hymen reconstruction surgery to avoid the scandal of arriving to the wedding night deflowered. What adds insult to injury is that when Rashud's wife complies and goes through the painful procedure of stitching her hymen, Rashud feels duped and later asks her: "So how come you bled, then? Where did the blood come from the night we had sex for the first time?" (Daif, 82) What should

have been a genuine exchange of love and affection on the couple's wedding night turns into a horrific and staged performance of prescribed "moaning and screaming" and bloodletting in order for Rashud to prove to himself that his wife is an honorable virgin (Daif, 56).

Moving the discussion to the cultural representation of virginity, Rashud sees himself as "just a simple man asking that life give [him] the minimum: a virgin" (Daif, 84). As if virginity were a commodity, Rashud considers that a "man should receive his wife's body in perfect condition. It should be complete" (Daif, 105). In her criticism of Daif's novel, Samira Aghacy states that "Rashud's strong belief in virginity is related to his narcissistic feelings and his conviction that he deserves "to open" a woman" (Aghacy, 159). I add that this idea is symptomatic of a typical male-oriented perspective of virginity that Rashud's wife deconstructs by objecting to girls sewing up their torn hymen before marriage and by "saying that a lot of girls nowadays refuse to do that and wouldn't marry a man who didn't accept them the way they were" (Daif, 51). Rashud's wife, on the one hand, controls self-representation by being vocal about a girl having the right not to "arrive at the marriage bed an intact virgin" (Accad, 21). How can Rashud be sure that his wife has not had previous sexual relationships if she possesses an elastic hymen? Rashud, on the other hand, believes that virginity "is a precious gift" that a woman must save for the right person, who is definitely her husband (Daif, 56). Instead of thinking about how women ought to save themselves *for* their husbands, Middle Eastern men may want to think about how they ought to push women save themselves *from* outdated customs. This mindset may hinder what Accad calls "overrating of the hymen" from remaining a rule in the Arab world (Accad, 22).

As this chapter is entitled “The Disintegration of the Masculine Empire: The Feminine Is Back with a Vengeance,” my contention is that Daif portrays in the novel a patriarchal system that has become too weak to victimize a woman by making her coition secondary to her ability for procreation. On the one hand, just like the West constructs the Orient in derogatory ways to buttress the West’s sense of strength, Rashud constructs his wife in derogatory ways that buttress his own sense of manhood and fatherhood. On the other hand, his wife undermines the patriarchal system that asks a woman to bypass her sexual pleasure once she becomes pregnant because she equates her sexual gratification with her life: “Why would she deny herself that? For whose sake? Mine? I was not the kind of man she would sacrifice for, especially not with *her pleasure*, with *her life*” (Daif, 61). According to Rashud, he has the right to enjoy his body by engaging in all types of sexual positions, but considers his wife’s body an incubator only, and one that exclusively hatches baby boys to the detriment of baby girls. De Beauvoir contends that a “woman is penetrated and fecundated by way of vagina,” which makes female anatomy a woman’s own nemesis (de Beauvoir, 394). Without the least care for his wife’s sexual enjoyment, and zeroing in the love act on the best way that guarantees he impregnates his wife with a boy, Rashud

would always pull her pelvis toward [him] as much as possible when [he] came in her, and plunge as deeply into her as [he] could, to shorten the distance between the tip of [his] penis and the ovum- so the male sperm cells would get there before they perish and gave the longer lasting female ones a chance to surpass them (Daif, 60).

Rashud’s wife seems to behave in opposition to Freud’s promulgation of the idea that her gender determines her personality and that “anatomy is destiny” (Freud, 210). This idea dictates that motherhood is one of the building blocks of women’s gender. Devaluing

procreation, Rashud's wife aborts the baby and divorces Rashud to evade a disappointing sexual life that results in an unwanted pregnancy. She seems to be different from many other Arab women because, while these women believe that their pregnancy anchors men in a married life that men dislike, she uses abortion to free herself from Rashud.

Rashud's wife refuses "to put up with so much" sexual deprivation like the old generation of women has done before her (Daif, 111). She seems to be asking the following question: What about her own *jouissance*, her sense of being whole, what Kristeva calls "total joy or ecstasy," or the right to use her body the way she wants? (Kristeva, 16) In order for Rashud's wife to say "*j'ai joui*," she needs to deconstruct the patriarchal law that allows her body to be possessed by her husband in the sex act and by the fetus growing in it in case of pregnancy (Daif, 73). This way, her body may mean differently to her than it means to Rashud. It may become a "free-floating signifier" without a stable or singular meaning that patriarchy dictates (Parker, 78). Before anybody else takes pleasure in her body, she wants to enjoy it herself. She cares little about the society that wants her to sacrifice her sexual pleasure for the sake of keeping the social order's status quo in the hands of males.

In this last section of the chapter, I attempt to create a link between men's seminal fluids and women's menstrual blood in order to disprove the age-old rule that only female bodies, with their tendencies to menstruate, are polluting. Kristeva condemns the fact that "a system of classification, and not the substance itself, decides what is filthy or not" (Kristeva, *The Sacred* 92). De Beauvoir also wants to draw attention to the fact that the social context fabricates menstruation at certain times as a curse, and femininity as signifying inferiority. It also constructs women as earth that men's semen plough. By the

same token, the social context values seminal fluids for their generative powers, which bestows on men, like God, the power to create. Rashud by the end of the novel desperately seeks to regain his power and subdue his wife. In the middle of their love act, he asks his wife “to take [him] in her mouth” as a sign of her passivity, inferiority and degradation (Daif, 105). The following scene tends to remind us of slave owners forcing their own will over their vassals. Rashud thinks to himself: “Either she is going to take me in earnest as her husband, or she was going to stay the same- taking things lightly and not *obeying* [emphasis added] me at all, sleeping at her parents’ whenever she felt like it and spending all her time there without taking my wishes into consideration at all” (Daif, 107). Rashud’s wife eventually accepts, after he forced her, to take him in her mouth not out of weakness, but because she wants to construct herself as a colonizing ‘self’ and she wants to construct him as a colonized and feminized ‘other.’ To give Rashud a taste of his own medicine, to mistreat him the same way he mistreats her, she “sprang like a lunatic and pressed her mouth against mine not to kiss me, but to feed me my own semen! “Taste yourself!” she said” (Daif, 107). This incident causes Rashud to feel that he has “been exposed to rape” and that he has been emasculated just like the colonized Arab may feel when the West has occupied his land almost a century ago (Daif, 108). Worse still, Rashud realizes “he has been sullied and defiled,” which proves that his seminal fluid is as polluting as women’s menstruation blood (Daif, 143). Rashud’s wife cannot fathom why is menstrual blood considered a shameful physiological singularity of her body, while Rashud’s seminal fluid is considered a praiseworthy physiological singularity of his body. She cannot also understand why menstrual blood is so devalued and frowned upon when, without it, there is no possibility for her to conceive the baby

that Rashud longs for so much. If believed, this idea would dictate unfair conclusions: Lifeblood is usually sacred, but the female menstrual blood is filthy because it emanates from the vagina. Kristeva contends that her “western ancestors began by ridding themselves of filthy substances: excrement and other waste products, but also blood, especially menstrual blood” (Kristeva, *The Sacred* 92). Rashud’s wife overturns this idea by cherishing her period and by considering Rashud evil for impregnating her and preventing her from menstruating.

Rasud’s wife wants to undermine the idea that only women’s bodies and their fluids may be polluting. In *Le Rapport d’Uriel*, Julien Benda describes semen as soiling for both sexes. According to Benda, the love act, “involving the pollution of one person by another, confers a certain pride upon the polluter, and some humiliation upon the polluted, even when she consents” (de Beauvoir, 396). In previous sexual encounters between Rashud and his wife, she behaves like a man when she delimits her body as clean and proper like a man’s body and warns him against dirtying her with his semen after ejaculation: “You better not have gotten me dirty!” (Daif, 7) She also behaves like a man does when Rashud’s seminal fluids bother her and she rushes to exclude them from her body by washing up immediately after making love. This gesture is known about men and not about women. Men wish to separate from their own fluids, these fluids being dangerously feminine because they remind men of the fluidity of women’s menstrual blood. This is how Rashud’s wife challenges the gender binary. Rashud’s wife shows him that his fluids may be as repelling as hers since she “evaded [his] fluid as if it were pure filth” (Daif, 3). She also thinks little of the procreative powers of these fluids. Repeatedly and “with her hand, she got [him] where [he] wanted to go,” without allowing him to

emit his semen inside her (Daif, 3). Instead of welcoming his semen as if it were a sacred gift to her impure body like many women in the Arab world are expected to do, she wastes his semen. She thus grants herself the position of colonizing superior and grants him the position of colonized inferior.

Rashud's wife "starts being the one who does it" by spilling back his own semen in his mouth to pollute him (Daif, 107). Can her act help Rashud condemn his own actions towards her and contemplate effecting some change in the way he and many other men perceive women's bodies and act aggressively towards it? Or is a moderate behavior only for women? Like the French colonizer has occupied Lebanon for years, Rashud believes that he occupies his wife's body when he impregnates her: "Where was she going to run to, after all, with me inside her, in her belly, in her womb?" (Daif, 75) Like the colonized who have sacrificed their lives to break free from the shackles of servitude to colonialism, Rashud considers his wife's only way out from her marriage to him as "death, nothing short of that" (Daif, 76). My contention is that for someone who is thirty-five years old and who has spent the better days of his life believing in obsolete values, change is hard. These principles endow Rashud with superiority and power, and even if it is a decaying power, he is not willing to relinquish it and he is not willing to listen to his wife, for as Ashcroft asks: "What is it, we might ask, that would make power listen?" (Ashcroft, *Edward Said*, 37) Rashud may be unable to change because whole artilleries of misogynist men back him up in his distorted and old-fashioned views.

In addition, whereas Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew* has successfully domesticated his wife Katherine into obeying him, Rashud has dreadfully failed to do so. The verb 'obey' in the phrase where Rashud says his wife is "not obeying [him] at all"

has religious connotations that need in-depth explanation (Daif, 107). Rashud and his wife probably belong to either the Christian or the Muslim religion since Rashud says his wife is a “member of [his] own religious group” (Daif, 62). Rashud alludes to the Christian religion by saying that the husband is “the head of the wife” (Daif, 90). He intentionally ignores the Epistle to the Galathians, the ninth book of the New Testament, that clearly states: “there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” He also alludes to the Muslim religion by saying that once the woman obeys her husband, “all the angels in heaven would be pleased with her” (Daif, 49). Again, he purposefully ignores Prophet Muhammad’s saying that “women are the twin halves of men,” and not inferior slaves who obey their superior masters.

Rashud is insidiously selective of the religious rules that buttress his own points of view, all the while neglecting those that defend women. Knowing that his wife has aborted his child, he calls for God’s help and says in disbelief: “Oh, my God” (Daif, 112). If Rashud were Muslim, over and above his invocation of the patriarchal and symbolic name of God, he could have called for the feminine notion/nomination of God and say “Oh, my God, Oh Rahman Oh Rahim,” since the root of the words Rahman and Rahim that come from the Arabic “raham” allude to what in English means womb. Ibn ‘Arabi, the Andalusian Sufi mystic and philosopher, asserts that language symbolically joins women’s position to that of God. The highest form of divine existence is *’adhat ’al’ilahiyya* or feminine divine essence. If Rashud were Christian, he could have called for Virgin Mary’s help. As I will demonstrate in the following chapter, Virgin Mary has promptly helped Elaine when the latter finds herself in distress, without even Elaine asking for it. My contention is that Daif intends to raise red flags at what takes place at

the heart of many Middle Eastern Christian and Muslim couples: Men enslaving women in the name of God, by clinging to distorted patriarchal interpretations of sacred texts. I also believe that Daif seems to be asking that religion be open on independent reasoning and personal interpretation of the holy texts (ijtihad) and that marriage, among many other institutions in the Middle East, be secularized in order to change many local realities that torture women. Edward Said believes in the “secular critical consciousness” that may put even the wisest religious interpretations in both Christian and Muslim faiths under scrutiny, with the objective of saving women from an unjust lot (Said, 24). Said believes that in a secular world, one should continuously question one’s action by asking: “whose interests it serves, how it jibes with a consistent and universalist ethic, how it discriminates between power and justice, what it reveals of one’s choices and priorities” (Said, 89). Said echoes in this respect Daif who argues in a phone interview I have conducted with him that “the human being is of the essence” (interview –January 23, 2015). This may imply that it is not necessarily religion that brings Rashud and his wife together. Religion does not seem to play a positive role in bridging the couple’s many gaps. This is not to say that religion never does, but a humane understanding of each other’s physical and emotional needs and aspirations may also successfully do the task.

Rashud’s wife believes in decolonizing her mind and her body from patriarchal constructions of gender differences, with the main beneficiary to her action being herself. She seeks to loosen up the filiative and natural bonds she may have with her spouse or her baby and targets affiliation, which is a more culture-oriented relationship where she actualizes herself. Twenty-first century women refuse philosophical dogmas and religious orthodoxies and believe that all “human beings must create their own histories” because

all humans have individual opinions they would like to voice (Said, *Orientalism*, xx). Had Rashud not clung to outdated misogynist traditions of men being masters and women being slaves, had he followed his wife's lead in freeing himself from these conventions, and had he not obsessed over the possibility or the fact that "matters were out of [his] control," he would not only have allegorically saved himself, but his marriage and his unborn baby as well (Daif, 35). Unfortunately, just like a leopard cannot change its spots, Rashud has been faithful to his old-fashioned ways from the beginning until the end of the novel.

Chapter Four

The Metamorphosis: From Colonized ‘Other’ to Decolonized and Decolonizing ‘Self’

“I worry about what I’ve said today, the expression on my face, how I walk, what I wear, because all of these things need improvement. I am not normal, I am not like other girls. Cordelia tells me so, but she will help me. Grace and Carol will help me too. It will take hard work and a long time” (Cat’s Eye, 130).

In this chapter, I start with the idea that Canada, Elaine, the female body, Catholics and the strangers in Atwood’s novel *Cat’s Eye* may be seen as the abject and colonized ‘other.’ This argument works towards elucidating the theme of ‘decolonization,’ or the theme of freeing oneself from the colonial condition where one group has power over another group. Kristeva states that the abject is a more radical alterity than the semiotic. It is the abnormal, “what disturbs identity, system, order [...] the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4). The protagonist in the novel is Elaine whose girl friends expose and subject to the task of becoming a woman. Unfortunately for her, this task is intrinsically linked to and cannot be completed before Elaine goes through a ‘double colonization.’ The phrase ‘double colonization’ refers to “the fact that women are twice colonized- by *colonialist* realities and representation, and by *patriarchal* ones too” (McLeod, 201). To start with colonialist realities, I argue that Miss Lumley the British teacher acts as a colonizer who brainwashes the Canadian Elaine into believing that the British culture is superior to the Canadian one.

Miss Lumley is Elaine’s intimidating British teacher who “rules by fear” just as the imperial British forces have done for years in Canada (Atwood, 84). Miss Lumley

belongs to a group of “white women [who may be seen] as epitomizing the West’s perceived higher moral and civil standards” (McLeod, 201). This is why Miss Lumley has the capacity to tell the British history and conceal the Canadian one. Said argues that “the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism” (Said, *Culture*, 23). Miss Lumley represents Britain that has kept its stronghold over the once-colonized Canadian land even after the British Empire’s dissolution and the creation of the Dominion of Canada in the 1920’s. She defines the colonized nations like Canada and its inhabitants as abject and inferior because the British construct the Canadian as different, peripheral, and therefore as “other” to the British who are the imperial center. This gives the British the power to perform a “distribution of geopolitical awareness” (Said, 12). Opposite to Miss Lumley, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in Tony Blair’s government, Robin Cook, has stated that the notion of Britishness and the idea of a pure Anglo-Saxon society is a fantasy. In a speech delivered in April 2001, he has considered that:

London was first established as the capital of a Celtic Britain by Romans from Italy. They were in turn driven out by Saxons and Angles from Germany. The great Cathedrals of this land were built mostly by Norman Bishops, but the religion practiced in them was secured by a succession of a Dutch Prince. Outside our Parliament, Richard the Lionheart proudly sits astride his steed. A symbol of British courage and defiance [sic]. Yet he spoke French much of his life and depended on the Jewish community of England to put up the ransom that freed him from prison (Guardian Unlimited, Thursday April 19, 2001).

However, Elaine is obliged as a child living in the 1950's Canada to sing at school what promotes British identity the most: the national anthem “God Save the King” and “Rule, Britannia!” The refrain of “Rule, Britannia!” goes: “Britons will never be slaves!” Contemplating these lyrics, Elaine thinks: “Because we’re Britons, we will never be

slaves. But we aren't real Britons, because we are also Canadians. This isn't quite as good" (Atwood, 86). Elaine, as a Canadian, is "other" to the British Empire because when she says Canadians are Britons, she is conscious of the fact that they aren't "real Britons"; they are in fact "other" to the "real Britons." This casts doubt on Miss Lumley's teaching and knowledge, which in turn undermines her power as a Briton.

Instantaneously and progressively, Elaine will perceive the way Miss Lumley defines the Canadians as 'questionable,' which may help her decolonize her national identity from British representations.

In addition, the British colonial power creates in Canadians an awareness of an inferiority complex within which Elaine is made to think that being Canadian is not as good as being a Briton, and that this degrading fact "has its own song" (Atwood, 86). She notices with a deep sense of inferiority that "The Maple Leaf Forever" is a national Canadian song, written by a Canadian songwriter, but from a British perspective. This point of view is considered "an accepted grid for filtering through [Canada] into [British] consciousness" (Said, 6). Elaine discovers from this situation that the gap between "us" the Canadians and "them" the British is an absolute and unbridgeable gap. The colonizing powers trivialize the Canadian past because they deem the precolonial era as an uncivilized period worthy of neglect and look at Europeans as the initiators of progress. This is what Miss Lumley, the epitome of Englishness, means when she tells Elaine's class that: "Before the British Empire [...] the Indians in Canada ate the hearts of their enemies in the heathenish belief that it would give them courage" (Atwood, 86). Miss Lumley recalls the practices of Canada's Indians as barbaric in order to justify British imperialism, to picture it as a social mission, and to paint the Canadians as the not only

‘other’ but also as ‘demonic other,’ which means that they are not only different but also evil in their difference from the British norm. In reality, it is a “cultural form [that] predominates over others; [...] the form of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as hegemony” (Said, 7). Elaine can neither associate herself with Canadians the way Miss Lumley represents them, nor can she see herself as typically British. Under the pretext of civilizing Canada, colonialism causes Elaine's national identity to be doubled and hybrid. Moreover, teaching students how to make snowmen for Christmas decoration, Miss Lumley has a “recipe for symmetry: everything has to be folded, everything has two halves, a left and a right, identical” (Atwood, 141). She also “knows what the conventions [of Christmas parties] are and pays her own rigid tributes to them” (Atwood, 141). Ironically, she disregards this need for balanced proportions when she aggressively defines England as superior and Canada as inferior. While major political conventions and treaties have been rectified and amended a countless number of times, Miss Lumley finds herself unable to change the customs of a Christmas party for children.

The notion of the abject carries defiance to western binary oppositions and points to their fragility, and this is where the colonized can break in and decolonize themselves. Elaine, Mrs Finestein the Jewish neighbour, Mr Banerji the Indian student and Miss Stuart the Scottish teacher may all be seen as abject ‘others’ from the Canadian perspective. Gina Wisker in her book entitled *Margaret Atwood: An Introduction to Critical Views of Her Fiction* calls Mrs Finestein, Mr Banerji and Miss Stuart “the three magi” (Wisker,103). This appellation refers to the Biblical Magi who are three foreigners coming from three different geographical and cultural areas, without one area

undermining the other, to worship Jesus. Elaine later on paints them as *The Three Muses*, elevating them thus to the status of gods that inspire her art as positively as can be.

The first ‘magi’ I discuss is Mrs Finestein and her infant baby Brian. The previously mentioned Jewish community of England that Richard the Lionheart relies on to bail him out of prison is devalued in Canada because it is the abject ‘other.’ Before getting to know the Jewish Mrs Finestein and her baby Brian, Elaine has enjoyed listening to two men on “The Jack Benny Show” and has “no idea that the first one is supposed to be black and the second one Jewish” (Atwood, 235). Others think that the first man’s race and the second man’s ethno-religious group ought to change the way Elaine perceives them. But Elaine innocently thinks that they only “have funny voices” (Atwood, 235). Elaine also keeps the nickels Mrs Finestein gives her for taking care of Brian “in an old tin tea caddy with a picture of the desert on it, palm trees and camels,” which is a sign of acceptance of the oriental ‘other’ (Atwood, 147). Elaine doesn’t only baby-sit for Mrs Finestein, she also takes her advice when it comes to fashion. Elaine also reads to baby Brian Finestein before tucking him into bed *The Little Engine That Could*. It is a didactic children’s book that teaches the value of hard work and optimism in a xenophobic world that may negatively judge Brian later on for being a Jew, and thus a stranger to the mainstream Christian Canadian culture. Carol criticizes Elaine for baby-sitting for Brian and tells Elaine that “Jews are kikes,” which is a derogatory word used to mean Jews (Atwood, 148). When first setting foot on Ellis Island and being asked to sign entry forms with a cross, Jews would refuse because they link this cross with that of Christianity. They would sign with a circle, for which the Yiddish word is *kikel*. Carol also asks Elaine for a turn to wheel Brian. When Elaine refuses for fear that the girls

would harm him because he “has a new dimension” being a Jew, Carol sarcastically answers: “Who wants an old Jew baby anyway,” and Grace adds in a puritanical way: “The Jews killed the Christ” (Atwood, 149). These two girls’ reactions in the twenty-first century to Mrs Finestein and her baby may be seen as similar to the extermination of Jewish and Gypsy women in the twentieth century to prevent them from giving birth to new offspring. Mrs Finestein and baby Brian destabilize the Canadian religious identity that knows no identity other than Protestant Christianity. De Beauvoir argues that “the Eternal Feminine” corresponds to [...] “the Jewish character” (de Beauvoir, 12). Just as Christine de Pisan discusses in *The City of Ladies* the calamity of being born a woman, hierarchical society teaches baby Brian the importance of not being born a Jew. Elaine decolonizes herself and the Jews by refusing the binary logic of categories: She is suspicious of the idea that Christians may be better than Jews, and of the idea that patriarchal women’s stronghold on her may be eternal, which gives her at the end of the novel the opportunity of being at peace with herself.

The second ‘magi’ I elaborate on is the Indian Mr Banerji who “sounds like the BBC News” (Atwood, 143). Unfortunately, this does not give him the benefit of not being considered the abject ‘other’ in a mainly white and western Canadian setting. Before explicating how Mr Banerji is the abject ‘other,’ I would like to point to the fact that the deadly hierarchy that makes the Canadian Elaine inferior to the British Miss Lumley is the same hierarchy that makes the Indian Mr Banreji and anyone who is not Canadian inferior to the Canadian themselves. Miss Lumley’s need for a pure British national identity, and the Canadians’ mirroring of this ideology is a stark reminder of the Indian caste system that requires a rigorous social ordering on the base of ritual purity.

Two thousand years ago, the law-giver Manu has dictated a system in the Dharma Shastra, the cornerstone of the Hindu religion, that all humans are born into one of four large categories. People must stay into their caste until their death. It is indeed ironic that, in the 1920's, the British in India have done their best first to free the subaltern sati from what they see as a form of slavery, and second to dethrone the apartheid system that prevents people from climbing the social ladder, while their country has been the hotbed of discrimination towards the 'other' for centuries (*The UNESCO Courier*, September 2001). The British and the Canadians may be seen as worse than the Indians they are fighting. Mr Banerji has found in Canada a racial system that may be more lethal than his native Indian caste system. After a long stay in Canada, he returns to India since "they wouldn't promote him," despite his qualifications (Atwood, 314). Elaine thinks "there's a lot behind *they* (not *we*), and *wouldn't* (not *didn't*)" (Atwood, 314). By *we* she means to say that her parents are not racist individuals like those in charge of promoting Mr Banerji, and by *wouldn't* she means that even if there has been a possibility of promoting Mr Banerji because of his good work, his western supervisors will not allow it to happen because his race is inferior to theirs. Said contends that the colonizer constructs his difference from the colonized by setting up a system in which " "they" were not like "us," and for that reason deserved to be ruled" (Said, *Culture*, 11).

Mr Banerji doesn't have Christmas back in India and has never seen the snow before. He feels awkward in the Risley's residence even though Eliane's mother has already explained to her and to her brother beforehand where Mr Banerji comes from. Mr Banerji senses that the differences between the Risley family and himself are so numerous that nothing he can say or do can overcome his oddity: "He's afraid of us. He

has no idea what we will do next, what impossibilities we will expect of him, what we will make him eat” (Atwood, 143). But Elaine decolonizes India and Mr Banerji by thinking he “is very beautiful, with his brown skin and brilliant white teeth and his dark appalled eyes” (Atwood, 143). She thinks that way because she and Mr Banerji are alike: “He’s a creature more like myself: alien and apprehensive,” and this is why both do not fit in (Atwood, 143). After her encounter with Mr Banerji, she thinks to herself:

I divide the people I know into tame and wild. My mother, wild. My father and brother also wild; Mr Banerji wild also, but in a more skittish way. Carol, tame. Grace, tame as well, though with a sneaky vestiges of wild. Cordelia, wild, pure and simple (Atwood, 144).

By wild she designates the persons not touched by the constraints of society and by tame she means the persons affected by the shackles of culture. Both her and Mr Banerji share

anxiety, and fellow feeling. [She wishes] to see how he is managing, how he is coping with his life, with having to eat turkeys, and with other things. Not very well, judging from his dark, haunted-looking eyes and slightly hysterical laughter. But if he can deal with whatever it is that’s after him, and something is, then so can I. Or this is what I think. (Atwood, 176).

What is after her is the feeling of being a stranger to the girls’ world that Grace, Carol, and Cordelia are so skillful at. What is after him is the feeling of being a stranger in a strange land, an eerie sensation similar to the one that the English-Born Canadian Susanna Moodie has felt more than two hundred years ago when she first moved to Canada as a settler. Sitting at the Risley’s having lunch, Mr Banerji feels the same sentiment that Elaine’s girl friends has made her feel: both are outsiders to an unyielding and hostile culture. Unbeknownst to all of us, and as Kristeva argues, the

foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself. A symptom that precisely turns “we” into a problem, perhaps makes it impossible. The foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he

disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities (Kristeva, *Strangers*, 1).

Thus, the stranger is part of our selves and part of how we construct our identity. We need to acknowledge the 'other,' not to abject and degrade it. Margaret Atwood claims "that "all Canadians are immigrants" – a gesture that effectively denies the existence of difference and regulates its role in the nation-state" (Budde, 286). The novel *Cat's Eye* may be asking the following questions: Is the stranger the one who comes from far away lands and tries wholeheartedly to adapt to new Canadian customs like the Indian Mr Banerji? Or is the real stranger the one who makes people feel they are strangers in their own lands because they don't fit the British and strict standards like Miss Lumley has done with Elaine? The clothes of Mr Banerji's wife may be the best example of the possibility for cultures to be unified rather than hierarchized into inferior and superior ones since: "Her red sari shows beneath her brown Canadian winter coat" (Atwood, 272).

Miss Stuart is the third 'magi' I discuss. She is the abject 'other' because she is Scottish. She is the teacher of Elaine and Carol who are in grade five now. She takes pride in her background since she has the national symbol of Scotland, dried "heather stuck on a jelly jar on her desk, and a miniature of Bonnie Prince Charlie, who was ruined by the English and whose last name is the same as her own" (Atwood, 172). Bonnie Prince Charlie is the claimant to the English, Scottish and Irish throne. He has initiated the failing Jacobite uprising of 1745. Unlike the pretentious Miss Lumley, "everyone loves Miss Stuart" and even when she hits the boys with the blackboard brushes they "don't seem to resent this habit of hers; they take it as a mark of distinction to get hit" (Atwood, 172). Miss Lumley considers England as the imperial center of the whole world. But Miss Stuart thinks that other countries that exist on the peripheries of

England are as important as England. She has her students “draw pictures about foreign countries: Mexico with cactuses and men in enormous hats, China with cones on the heads and seeing-eye boats, India with what we intend to be graceful, silk-draped women balancing copper urns, and jewels on their foreheads” (Atwood, 180). Not believing in binaries of correct and false like Miss Lumley does, Miss Stuart also “doesn’t say [Elaine has] drawn the wrong thing” when she asks her students to paint what they do after school, and Elaine’s picture turns out to be all black to denote the horrible time she spends with her girl friends terrorizing her after school (Atwood, 181). Can it be that Miss Stuart is so compassionate with these colonized countries because Scotland has been itself colonized? While Miss Lumley thinks colonized people are “crafty, given to the eating of outlandish or disgusting foods and to acts of treachery against the British,” Miss Stuart loves these people because “the sun above their heads is a cheerful yellow, the palm trees a clear green, the clothing they wear is floral, their folksongs gay” (Atwood, 180).

The second type of colonialist reality that the phrase ‘double colonization’ refers to is the patriarchal reality. Kristen Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford argue that “colonialism celebrates male achievement in a series of male-oriented myths such as ‘mateship, the mounties, explorers, freedom fighters, bushrangers, missionaries (McLeod, 201). Patriarchal representations of women also value male achievement and marginalize women politically, morally and socially. What is intriguing in Atwood’s novel *Cat’s Eye* is the fact that patriarchy indoctrinates women so well that it is two women rather than two men who control Elaine: Miss Lumley, as previously explained, and Cordelia, as I will show now. They dominate Elaine by fear. Elaine’s situation is more tragic than that

of Zahra's and Rashud's wife since Elaine fights a fierce war against her own sex, whereas Zahra and Rashud's wife fight men. Gina Wisker argues that *Cat's Eye* is a novel whose "cautionary tale is 'women beware women'" (Wisker, 99). It is shocking to see that hierarchy exists at the heart of women's world also, not only between men and women. Elaine's three girl friends are Cordelia, Grace and Carol. They are Canadians who follow the First World and the British mode of conduct. This is why they consider Elaine, who is also Canadian, inferior just because she has lived all her life in the wilderness and is not 'civilized.' This is in complete contradiction with the idea that women may be able to form a sisterhood that is capable of fighting patriarchy with solidarity among women who are not biologically related but who share similar preoccupations. Elaine wants to break away from this kind of bonding. Her incident at the ravine where she was about to die out of hypothermia has taught her "never to want to be part of a coven of girls again" (Wisker, 102). Later on and as an adult, she thinks to herself: "I am not Woman, and I'm damned if I'll be shoved into it" (Atwood, 376). In fact, "Atwood's resistance to generalisations about 'Woman' is a crucial feature in her feminist understanding of the importance of history and culture in shaping women's lives" (Howells, 18). In addition, Atwood portrays some men in the novel as kinder and less prejudiced than women. Elaine talks fondly about Mr Smeath, the father of one of Elaine's friends. She also says that she has to side with him when he has an argument with his wife about pronouncing the word toot in front of the kids because he is "a man. He does not judge [her]" (Atwood, 138).

Women in the 1940's period also have been the abject 'other' to themselves due to the domestic specific gender roles society has confined them in. Elaine thinks her:

“teachers are mostly women over a certain age, women who aren’t married. Married women don’t have jobs; we know this from our own mothers” (Atwood, 84). De Beauvoir believes that because of marriage “maternity became [such] a sacred function” that women do exclusively and without dividing their attention to other tasks (de Beauvoir, 98). Thinking about those days, Elaine who has become in the 1980’s an accomplished painter draws a series of paintings she calls *Pressure Cooker*. People who have seen the set of drawings “thought it was about female slavery, others that it was a stereotyping of women in negative and trivial domestic roles” (Atwood, 167). Even when dancing, an activity where the body moves freely and rhythmically to music, Grace “dances with perfect decorum” and decency (Atwood, 67). Elaine thinks at times that “even to myself I am mute,” and images of headless women permeate the novel to mean that what matters in a woman is her sexual body to the exclusion of her mind (Atwood, 128). If it weren’t for women taking giant steps to free themselves from these roles, they may have stayed trapped by them until now.

In this novel, women are also treated as the abject ‘other’ to their bodies because they are unable to control these bodies. Cordelia instructs her girl friends that “men have carrots, between their legs. [...] Seeds come out the end and get into women’s stomachs and grow into babies, whether [women] want it or not” (Atwood, 100). What Cordelia says foreshadows Suzie’s accidental pregnancy by her and Elaine’s art teacher Joseph, to whom Suzie is only a girlfriend. It also foreshadows Suzie’s need to dispose of this pregnancy by herself because abortion back then was illegal, with all the dangerous effects that such a technique engenders on the female body. Cordelia also explicates to the girls all about female sexuality, mainly that women’s bodies bleed uncontrollably:

the curse is when blood comes between your legs. We don't believe her. She produces evidence: a sanitary pad, filched from Perdie's wastebasket. On it is a brown crust, like dried gravy. "That's not blood," Grace says with disgust, and she's right, it's nothing like when you cut your finger. Cordelia is indignant. (Atwood, 99).

Cordelia is furious when her misogynistic representation of the female body is met with disbelief by her fellow girl friends because, like patriarchy, she thinks the monolithic truth she conveys is so stable that nothing can shake it. She describes menstruation blood as the curse. De Beauvoir relates that "at the beginning of the century a rule forbade women having 'the curse' to enter refineries in northern France, for that would cause the sugar to blacken" (de Beauvoir, 181). Cordelia also shows to the girls a pad that has brown blood not red blood, which means that the blood on the pad has been exposed to oxidation. This is why Perdie and Mirrie's "wastebaskets smell of decaying flowers" (Atwood, 99). Thus, the female body is represented as decaying, as suffering putrefaction and as inspiring in the woman "the same disgust at this flat stagnant odour emanating from her- an odour of the swamp, of wilted violets- disgust at this blood, less red, more dubious, than that which flowed from her childish abrasions" (de Beauvoir, 338). Cordelia also steals the sanitary pads from her sisters' wastebasket, meaning that they want to hide these pads because they are ashamed by the blood their bodies produce. According to de Beauvoir "the single fact of [a girl] having to hide her menstrual pads and conceal her condition has already accustomed her to prevarication" (de Beauvoir, 380). In addition, the "brown crust, like dried gravy" that Cordelia finds on Perdie and Mirrie's hidden sanitary pads is the abject blood of menstruation that questions the power of social bonds and that society needs to keep out in order to define itself as a clean society (Atwood, 99). For Kristeva "the intolerable, or abject, body leaks wastes and

fluids, in violation of the desire and hope for the “clean and proper” body, thus making the boundaries and limitations of our selfhood ambiguous” (Covino, 17). The sight of the unusual and repelling color of menstrual blood causes the girls to confirm that it looks more like the sauce of cooked meat, that this cannot be blood going out of a human body, because if they do believe Cordelia they would be valuing her demonstration and devaluing the female physiological processes.

Before elaborating more on female bodies, I would like to briefly compare between the way culture represents them and the way it represents male bodies. De Beauvoir contends that

there is an absolute type, the masculine. Woman has ovaries, a uterus: these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature. It is often said that she thinks with her glands. Man superbly ignores the fact that his anatomy also includes glands, such as testicles, and that they secrete hormones. He thinks of his body as a direct connection with the world, which he believes he apprehends objectively, whereas he regards the body of woman as a hindrance, a prison, weighed down by everything peculiar to it (de Beauvoir, 3).

In *Cat's Eye*, male bodies are only alluded to, without being directly mentioned, when Carol talks to her friends about the wet spot on her parents' bed. Men situate themselves as neutral knowers who remain physically “enigmatic,” live “secret lives,” are “rarely seen,” are “invisible,” and “come out at night” with a “real, unspeakable power” (Atwood, 183). In this way, men leave their corporeality behind in order to become disembodied powerful social agents, an opportunity that society denies women. Surely, women themselves can become agents, but they have to work hard for it. Society doesn't grant them this position as a *fait accompli* as it does men. In addition, the bed of Carol's parents is made in the morning with the intention of carefully covering the wet spot, and although the girls want to inspect it, they do not have the courage to disturb the bed and

look at the sign of the male body: “We are afraid to turn down the covers to look” (Atwood, 183). The wet spot, which is the result of men’s bodily pleasure, exposes the masculine body as corporeal and leaking as much as women’s. De Beauvoir argues that “man is, like woman, a flesh, thus a passivity, the plaything of his hormones and the species, uneasy prey to his desire” (de Beauvoir, 763).

On the other hand, culture represents girls as slaves to their bodies. Girls are treated as the abject ‘other’ and as enslaved to their bodies because they are unable to control these bodies and their burgeoning breasts. Carol “is only ten and three quarters but she’s growing breasts” while Cordelia “is older, but she doesn’t have any yet” (Atwood, 182). The mere fact that Carol takes pride in her breasts and brags about buying bras is a sign of her body’s colonization by patriarchal presumptions because it means that she sees herself as a sexualized being only. In addition, the mere fact that Cordelia tells Carol: “Oh shut up about your stupid tits” is proof that Cordelia herself is colonized by patriarchal descriptions of the female body that she lacks, which makes her feel jealous and inferior to Carol. This is why “breasts fascinate Cordelia and fill her with scorn” (Atwood, 99). They fascinate her because they are the signifiers of femininity; Cordelia thinks that women use pumps “for pumping your titties bigger, like a bicycle pump,” which means the bigger breasts are the sexier (Atwood, 100). Also, Cordelia knows that when she will grow breasts, she will be bidding her childish body and her parents’ repression farewell. Her breasts mean that she is growing up and she is about to experience a long awaited freedom that her sisters Perdie and Mirrie already enjoy. Growing breasts also decolonizes Cordelia because through them she feels that her feminine sexual identity is secure and stable, that she is a girl similar to her other girl

friends, which is better than being an indeterminate body. In addition, breasts mesmerize Cordelia because she links them with the tender and nurturing nature of the female body, and to the task of breastfeeding she may perform later on in her life as a mother. Kristeva contends that breasts encapsulate the maternal body and the milk of Virgin Mary, “a sacré nourishing mother” whose milk has given Saint Bernard of Clairvaux wisdom, making Virgin Mary his mother and the mother of all humanity as well (Kristeva, 33). Kristeva also debates that breasts signify “nothing other [...] than ‘patience’ and ‘clemency,’ ” two qualities that define motherhood (Kristeva, 63).

Simultaneously, breasts fill Cordelia with scorn. De Beauvoir argues that breasts are the “seat of one knows not what dull disaffection” (de Beauvoir, 332). She also argues that a girl “views with anguish the enlargement of this firm and slightly painful core, appearing under each nipple, hitherto as inoffensive as the navel” (de Beauvoir, 332). Cordelia rejects breasts so much that: “She reads out the descriptions [of bras,] snorting with stifled laughter: “Delightfully trimmed in dainty lace, with extra support for the mature figure.” That means big bazooms. Look at this-*cup* sizes! Like teacups!” ” (Atwood, 99). Cordelia’s cynicism at the sight of bras signifies that she undermines the excessive attention that patriarchal society gives to women’s breasts. She may think that ornamented bras attract men to the carnality of women’s bodies to the detriment of women’s souls, which objectifies women. She feels angry towards herself because she has not grown them yet, which makes the morphology of her own body abnormal, decelerating this way her freedom and heightening her chances at remaining a child in her parents’ eyes. She fears that if she does not abject the idea of having breasts and excludes it from her ‘self,’ she might become ‘other’ to herself. This disappointment at her own

body not developing like all other girls' bodies may be the reason why she picks on Elaine's unusual demeanor. She has seen herself in Elaine. Breasts also fill Cordelia with scorn because when they show, she will have to leave behind her patriarchal ways that empower her so much in order to become a powerless female.

In addition, Cordelia represents the 1940's patriarchy that has regulated women and the way they behave "as if there's some invisible leash around their necks, holding them in check" (Atwood, 100). Cordelia colonizes Elaine's 'self' and makes her "other" to herself, causing Elaine to "burst inward" (Atwood, 157). Cordelia and her girl friends colonize Elaine's body also with the patriarchal presumptions of the 1940's, which Elaine compares to "deep-sea diving [where] the invisible pressure of the heavy undersea water will crush you like mud in a fist, until you implode" and destroy yourself (Atwood, 157). It is important to remember and remark that even though Elaine and Zahra come from two different geographical regions that are miles apart, and even though the term 'postcolonial women' may be too homogenizing for both women's experiences, some common points can be detected between Elaine and Zahra. Just like Zahra in *The Story of Zahra* destroys her face to evade patriarchal pressure on her body by picking her acne until blood comes out, Elaine faints like a hysteric, peels "the skin off her feet [and] would go down as far as the blood" (Atwood, 124). In order to explicate Elaine's action, I need to elaborate on Deborah Caslav Covino's use of Kristeva's theory of abjection (Atwood, 124). Covino argues that

the skin of milk, for instance, puts one in mind of the thin skin membrane that defines the borders and limits of the physical body; because human skin provides only a relatively flimsy and easily assaulted partition between the body's inside and the world outside, this milky reminder disturbs our distinctions between outside and inside, I and other, moving us to retch, and want to vomit in an acute attempt to expel the scum of our being (Covino, 17).

At this sad stage of her life, Elaine acts like someone who experiences “abjection [which] is a sickness at one’s own body, at the body beyond that ‘clean and proper’ thing,” as Elizabeth Grosz puts it (Covino, 17). Elaine’s own body causes her to feel revulsion and disgust not only at its difference from the three girls’ bodies that conform to society’s rules so well, but also at her own sense of ‘self’ that is unable to quickly learn social propriety and to perfectly perform it as they do. This is why Elaine starts to mutilate her body “where the pain gave [her] something definite to think about, something immediate. It was something to hold on to” in the face of the three girls invasive and threatening methods (Atwood, 124). Peeling the skin off her feet means that Elaine is removing her last line of defense so that her death comes faster and easier to relieve her from her torture.

Elaine’s friends are girls who are indoctrinated by patriarchal power so well that they use the knowledge they have about this system to forcefully discipline Elaine into behaving the way they behave. They painstakingly teach her how to walk, talk and think like them, in a feminine way, which makes Elaine see a former picture of her that is taken in the wilderness as a “shrunk, ignorant version of herself” (Atwood, 61). But isn’t Cordelia’s behavior living proof that even though she may be rightly seen as colonizing Elaine’s body, Cordelia is herself colonized by patriarchy? Cordelia uses the exact same sentence to order Elaine to “wipe that smirk off [her] face” because Cordelia’s father has already used it with her (Atwood, 213). He is especially disappointed with Cordelia because of her inability to conform to the feminine rules of the era, while her two older sisters do with flying colors. Repeating what has been done to her and to her girl friends by their fathers, Cordelia and her girl friends are “determined to ‘improve’ Elaine; that is,

they attempt to coerce her to be a proper little girl and to mimic culturally prescribed feminine behavior” (Bouson, 164). McLeod argues that “Western women’s relationship with the dual workings of colonialism and patriarchy is often particularly complicated as members of the ‘civilised’ colonizing nation, yet disempowered under a Western patriarchal rubric” (McLeod, 202). Compared to Elaine who comes from the wilderness, Cordelia considers herself powerful because she is a member of the civilized Canadian nation who has always lived in the city. Still, she is herself weakened by the patriarchal force of her father: “Nothing she can do or say will ever be enough because she is somehow the wrong person,” which makes her “so abject” (Atwood, 274).

But what does it take for one to “become a woman?” (de Beauvoir, 296) In order for Elaine to become a woman, she needs to exactly reproduce what her girl friends do because she and her girl friends have the same biological sex. Elaine thinks that iterating what they do causes her to feel “as if [she is] doing an imitation of a girl,” which means that we learn gender by behaving the way others who have the same biological body as ours behave (Atwood, 57). Cordelia may be jealous of Elaine for not worrying about conforming to the gender roles of the era like she does. And what happens to women’s bodies on their way to becoming women? Atwood opens up the novel on Elaine, a fifty-year-old woman who reflects on her life in the 1940’s Toronto. She imagines herself coming into Cordelia’s hospital room, her childhood girl friend and tormentor, to see Cordelia in an iron lung “fully conscious, but unable to move or speak” (Atwood, 8). This machine that is fitted all over the polio victims’ body and that helps them to breathe, symbolizes for Elaine all the restrictions that Cordelia has put on Elaine’s body when both of them were children, in order for the latter to become a woman. Opposite to

Cordelia, Elaine imagines herself coming into the hospital room to visit Cordelia “moving and speaking,” which means that she is now a woman free from patriarchal restrictions (Atwood, 8).

Before reaching this stage, Elaine has been the abject ‘other’ because she is exotic in her girl friend’s eyes. To elaborate on the idea of the West considering the colonized ‘other’ as peculiar, McLeod, following Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*, proposes that the colonizer “makes assumptions about people [and deems them] passive, submissive, exotic ” and unfamiliar (McLeod, 53). Likewise, Carol compares and contrasts between her house and Elaine’s house in order for her to define herself in familiar terms and Elaine as an alien: “This is where you *sleep*?” she says. “This is where you *eat*? These are your *clothes*?” (Atwood, 54). The orientalist and colonialist also want to be acknowledged as a force to be reckoned with since they have the power to go to foreign lands and civilize their natives. In the same way, Carol “wants [Elaine] to be marveled at. More accurate: she wants herself to be marveled at, for revealing such wonders” (Atwood, 54). Elaine feels that “it is as if [Carol] is reporting on the antics of some primitive tribe: true, but incredible” (Atwood, 54). Carol can report to her other girl friends how Elaine lives because she is a superior western urban girl recording how an inferior primitive rural girl lives. The more Elaine is puzzled, the more Carol feels she is in control. This is why Carol wants to “explain things to [Elaine,] name them, display them. She shows [Elaine] around her house as if it’s a museum, as if she personally has collected everything in it” (Atwood, 57). Said writes: “ The Orient became something suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in the anthropological, biological, linguistic,

racial and historical theses” (Said, *Orientalism*, 7). The orientalist and patriarchy have conducted themselves in this manner because they benefit from controlling the Orient and women. But the orientalist may be seen as worse than Carol: while Carol explains her own western culture to the outsider Elaine, the orientalist defines the oriental foreign culture to western people, and he defines it the way he wants, not the way this culture really is. This conjures up Said’s argument that he describes as the “exteriority of representation” (Said, *Orientalism*, 22).

Elaine is also the abject ‘other’ that Cordelia, Grace and Carol distance themselves from and criticize so that they can define themselves as worthy and noble. This is the way Elaine’s three girl friends have authority over her. Her body does not fit under neither the category of girl nor under that of boy, and this why it needs to hide. Kristeva asserts that “the sacred [...] is always a purification” (Kristeva, 91). For that purpose, Cordelia digs a hole and she, along with Grace and Carol

pick [Elaine] up by the underarms and the feet and lower [her] into the hole. Then they arrange the boards over the top. The daylight air disappears, and there’s the sound of dirt hitting the boards, shovelful after shovelful. Inside the hole it’s dim and cold and damp and smells like toad burrows. [...] When [she] was put into the hole [she] knew it was a game; now [she knows] it is not. [She feels] sadness, a sense of betrayal. Then [she feels] the darkness pressing down on [her]; then terror (Atwood, 115-116).

In fact, what they bury with Elaine’s body is her otherness. Elaine comes from the wilderness, where the aboriginals have lived for ages on the outskirts of civilization and development. To the three girl friends, she represents the complete opposite of what modern Canada stands for, namely urban development and strict social conformity.

Elaine has an identity that defies cultural standards. She wears her brother’s “gray slacks and dark-blue plaid shirt,” does not know what a pageboy or a cold wave haircut is,

thinks that twin sets have to do with twins, is not yet afraid of heights like most girls should be and, most importantly, she is not a devout Christian as her girl friends are (Atwood, 33). The abject and scary darkness of the hole Elaine is put in is a far cry from the semiotic and comforting dimness of the mother's womb after which Elaine expects a blissful birth. I can detect traces of the semiotic in Elaine's description of the hole. Like a baby who is about to be born, Elaine can't remember if she has been "crying when they took [her] out of the hole just like a baby has no memory of what has happened the moment of her birth (Atwood, 116). Like a baby who is about to be born, she also "can't remember what has happened to [her] while [she] was in [the hole]. [She] can't remember what [she] really felt [and she] has no image of herself in the hole" (Atwood, 116). Elaine, after this incident, is in fact reborn, but as a slave who obeys all of Cordelia's whims, hence as a slave to patriarchy. She remembers all her other birthdays, but the one following this event leaves her with a "vague horror of birthday parties" because it reminds her of the psychological trauma she has undergone in order for her to be coerced into acting as a woman (Atwood, 116). Her girl friends bury her alive for three reasons. The first reason is to implicitly tell her that if she does not adapt to their norms, she will metaphorically die: she will lose their friendship that she cherishes so much because through them she learns about a whole new feminine world that has been previously unknown to her. She negatively describes going up north where her father can conduct his scientific research and says: "I am being wrenched away from my new life, the life of girls" (Atwood, 70). Said argues that "the scientist, the scholar, the trader, the soldier was in the Orient because he could be there, with very little resistance on the Orient's part" (Said, 7). Supposedly, it is the normal course of history for the West to

invade the East and for the East not to resist. In the same way, Elaine has not fought back the ill treatment of her girl friends because she thinks what happens is normal, because she wants to affiliate herself with the powerful, and because all she wants, like many women in a patriarchal society, is “to please” (Atwood, 132). The second reason they bury her alive is to defend their feminine values that Elaine challenges. Laura Moss argues that “garrison mentality,” as Margaret Atwood points out, “[relates to] articulating the British soldiers’ fear of isolation and being surrounded, and emphasizing the tenuous communication and transportation links connecting the British forts to the outside world” (Moss, 167). The British soldiers fear that the enemy entraps them. Like these soldiers, the three girls fear that Elaine might entrap their patriarchal ways by starting an irreversible chain of events that will cause them and their patriarchal culture to change. This is why they besiege her with “garrison mentality”: they entrench her and cut her from the outside world instead of her becoming a role model for the liberation of women from the oppressive gender roles of the 1950’s.

The third reason Elaine’s girl friends bury her alive is because they want to exclude and separate her paganism from their Protestant Christianity. Elaine’s parents are atheists and her father, who is an entomologist, believes that religion brainwashes people. He tells her: “When you’re grown up, then you can make up your own mind about religion, which has been responsible for a lot of wars and massacres [...] as well as bigotry and intolerance” (Atwood, 104). When Elaine comes back from Sunday school, her father asks her: “Did you learn anything?” meaning that, to him, religion doesn’t teach worthy and scientific verifiable truths (Atwood, 109). At the behest of Mrs Smeath, Grace’s mother, Grace invites Elaine to visit the Smeath’s church because Elaine’s

parents don't go to church. Mrs Smeath tells Elaine "we don't go to our church with our heads uncovered," [and] she "emphasizes *our*, as if there are other, inferior, bareheaded churches" (Atwood, 105). This is how Elaine discovers that even in religion there are hierarchies between 'our' churches and 'their' churches.

Elaine also suffers from the patriarchal God that the Protestants believe in and that devalue Virgin Mary because she is a woman. Hierarchies of gender are obvious inside the church the Smeaths go to. Their church endorses the trinity of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The patriarchal triad of girl friends that ousts Elaine, a female, from all meaningful activity may be compared to this patriarchal trinity that has disregarded Virgin Mary, a female as well, for ages from all representation. In fact, on the three stained-glass windows of the church, Elaine notices that "both of the Jesuses have halos [while] on the other side is a woman in blue, with no halo" (Atwood, 106). This woman is Virgin Mary. In the Sunday school Elaine used to attend with her girl friends, "Virgin Mary is never with a crown, never with a pincushion heart, never all by herself. She is always more or less in the background. Not much fuss is made over her except at Christmas, and even then Baby Jesus is a lot more important" (Atwood, 202). Mrs Smeath, who believes herself to be "the stronghold of righteousness," criticizes Catholics for worshipping Virgin Mary (Atwood, 139). Elaine says that

When Mrs Smeath and Aunt Mildred speak of Catholics, as they have been known to do at the Sunday dinner table, it's always with contempt. Catholics pray to statues and drink real wine at Communion, instead of grape juice. "They worship the Pope," is what the Smeaths say; or else, "They worship the Virgin Mary," as if this is a scandalous thing to do (Atwood, 202).

What is preposterous is that both women utter these hateful remarks at the Sunday dinner table, right after coming back from church, a space where they falsely show how pious,

charitable and clement they are. With this frame of mind, Elaine even doubts that “the kingdom of God is within you” and to her “all this seems less and less possible ” because all she sees are people who worship a God of a certain sect and who consider other sects as inferior (Atwood, 137). She thinks to herself that God is not The Father at all because he takes precedence over Virgin Mary and he does not treat all humans equally; this patriarchal God is negatively described as “something huge, hard, inexorable, faceless” (Atwood, 200).

Aunt Mildred, Mrs Smeath’s relative, is a missionary in China, which makes her an authority figure. She dissuades Mrs Smeath from trying to teach Elaine the Bible because Elaine “is a heathen” (Atwood, 198). Aunt Mildred believes there is no point in trying to instruct Elaine religiously because she tells Mrs Smeath that children like Elaine learn about Christianity “but it’s all rote learning, it doesn’t sink in,” which makes her going to China to convert inhabitants there to Christianity questionable (Atwood, 199). Her travels to this far away land may only be considered a western ethnocentric show of power towards what she considers inferior far eastern people. Talking about how beautiful Mr Banerji’s dark skin color is, Elaine remembers that “there’s a child these colors in the ring of children on the front of the Sunday school missionary paper, yellow children, brown children, all in different costumes, dancing around Jesus” (Atwood, 143). This means that religion is not discriminatory by definition, but false misinterpretations make it so. The patriarchal and vengeful Mrs Smeath also tells Aunt Mildred that the ill-treatment of Elaine at the hands of her girl friends is “God’s punishment” and that “it serves her right,” which means “it has been discussed, tolerated [...] known and approved” by Mrs Smeath (Atwood, 199). This discourse is reminiscent of Tertullian’s,

the Christian author from Carthage, who reminds women of the third chapter of Genesis by saying: “And do you not know that you are Eve? She still lives in this world, as God’s judgment on your sex” (Alexander, 409). Mrs Smeath’s discourse is proof of her “dark-red, black-spotted heart” a heart that is full of hatred, evil intentions and biases towards the ‘other’ (Atwood, 134). Instead of being Elaine’s saviors, Mrs Smeath and Aunt Mildred, along with Miss Lumley and Cordelia, may be seen as “an arm of the Symbolic Order,” doing by-proxy what the patriarchal men don’t do (Covino, 22). Ironically, accomplishing this task in men’s stead, these women may be seen as more misogynistic than men themselves.

At a later point in the novel, Princess Elizabeth visits Toronto. Elaine is in such a state of despair, caused on the one hand by the adult females, and on the other by the female children surrounding her, that she considers destroying her own body and throwing herself “in front on [Princess’ car,] or onto it, or into it” in order for her to enlist the help of the princess (Atwood, 178). Elaine thinks that the princess, being a First World woman, is capable of saving a Canadian girl who is doubly colonized, first by British realities and second by patriarchal ones. Elaine’s action recalls that of suffragette Emily Wilding Davidson who, on Derby Day in 1913, has thrown herself into the course of the race in order to knock over the horse of King George V for the sake of having the right to vote. It would be highly understandable to see that King George V has not helped Emily Wilding Davidson earn the right to vote because it would jeopardize his male-supremacist power among many other reasons. But for Elaine to refrain from enlisting the help of the princess who is a female like her because she doubts the princess’s will to

help, proves that western colonizing women may not be able to rescue colonized women as they always profess to do.

Contrary to colonialism, postcolonialism and feminism share the same preoccupation. They both dream of “empowering expression about lives and perspectives previously erased or marginalized. Feminist critical theory recuperated the silent work of silenced Other, [...] its basis of challenging the notion of subordinate positions and Othering being fundamentally similar to that basis within postcolonial criticism” (Wisker, *Key Concepts* 155). Elaine has been the colonized who has been afraid of getting more grades than Grace in Sunday school and who has pondered: “Is it wrong to be right? How right should I be, to be perfect? The next week I put five wrong answers, deliberately” (Atwood, 136). Still, even during her childhood, Elaine has made several trials at decolonizing herself from the symbolic order of language that constructs barriers and creates differences between her ‘otherness’ and her girl friends’ symbolic-revolved and imprisoned ‘selves.’ When her mother prepares the alphabet soup because she thinks children find it cheerful, Elaine depicts the soup as follows:

The alphabet soup has letters floating in it, white letters: capital A’s and O’s and S’s and R’s, the occasional X or Z. When I was younger I would fish the letters out and spell things with them on the edge of the plate, or eat my name, letter by letter [...] The soup is orangey-red and has a flavor, but the letters themselves taste like nothing (Atwood, 151).

Elaine throws up the letter soup when her girl friends come to pick her up from her house, “with here and there a ruined letter” (Atwood, 152). To elaborate on this idea, I use Kristeva who reasons that I may give birth to my ‘self’ when: “I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which “I” claim to establish myself. [...] During that course in which “I” become, I give birth to myself amid the

violence of sobs, of vomit (Kristeva, *Power*, 3). Vomit itself is semiotic because it tests the notion of self and other on which our subjectivity depends, and because it makes the boundaries of our selfhood blurry. Elaine vomits the ‘self’ that the patriarchal order has constructed for her, a ‘self’ where her own name and identity become tasteless when she eats them. They become synonymous to the “nothingness [that washes over her] like a sluggish wave” (Atwood, 155). Hers is a ‘self’ that patriarchal culture has ‘ruined’ in the same manner that the British colonization of Scotland has ‘ruined’ Bonnie Prince Charlie’s claim to the English, Scottish and Irish throne I have previously discussed. At the same time, throwing up the letters is a sign of Elaine abjecting her old ‘self’ and establishing an identity of her own, one that refuses the three girls colonizing power. In her adulthood and in order to relieve herself from these painful memories, Elaine leaves Toronto and goes back to nature and the wilderness. She compares this step to going back to the semiotic that most people abject, because it is in the outback that she “can be free of words, [she] can lapse back into *wordlessness*, [she] can sink back into the *rhythms* of transience as if into bed” (Atwood, 158).

As a teenager, Elaine has a leading role at school, has a mean mouth, and reverses hers and Cordelia’s roles by telling Cordelia horror stories in order to terrorize her. As an adult, the first ‘decolonizing’ act Elaine does is choosing to become a painter, which is a predominantly male domain. Gone are the days when she has to imitate her girl friends who say in self-derogation the following: “Oh, [your scrapbook] is so good. Mine’s not so good. Mine’s *awful*. They say this every time we play the scrapbook game. Their voices are wheedling and false; I can tell they don’t mean it, each one thinks her own lady on her own page is good. But it’s the thing you have to say, so I begin to say it too”

(Atwood, 59). De Beauvoir contends that “the woman who is ‘truly feminine’ [in patriarchy’s eyes is the one who] is frivolous, infantile, irresponsible (de Beauvoir, 24). In the same way, Ashcroft believes that “the colonial subject is a ‘child’ of empire” (Ashcroft, *Postcolonial*, 171). Contrary to them, Elaine challenges men in their own arena because “great art transcends gender” (Atwood, 378). She prefers painting to biology and sciences, themselves male fields in the eyes of society and culture back then. Even in the eighties of the last century, Elaine admits that it has been hard for her to find a gallery where she can do her retrospective because she is a female and galleries’ “bias is toward dead, foreign men,” since men are better painters than women (Atwood, 16). When she notices that someone has drawn a moustache on the poster that features her face and that advertises for her retrospective, she thinks to herself: “Is it just doodling, or is it a political commentary, an act of aggression?” (Atwood, 20). If it is a political commentary, then it may be warning her that she is treading on male art territory and that she had better settle with the “other choice [that] would have been *housewife*” (Atwood, 15). Choosing to paint, she would also be the active gazer at female bodies rather than the passive female body of a model that the painters gaze at. She also becomes a painter in order for her to express her dismay at what society does to the female body without using language, which is another way of discarding the symbolic from her life.

But Elaine’s major ‘decolonizing’ event may have happened at the climax of the narrative with the help of the apparition that she takes for the Virgin Mary. After the ravine incident where she is about to freeze to death, Elaine sees what she thinks is the holy saint and describes the situation as follows: “I hear someone talking to me. It’s like a voice calling, only vey soft, as if muffled. I’m not sure I’ve heard it at all. The person

[...] is a woman. [...] She holds out her arms to me and I feel a surge of happiness. Then I can't see her any more. But I feel her around me, not like arms but like a small wind of warmer air" (Atwood, 209). It is the semiotic nonverbal communication between Elaine and the saint that gives her the power to remove herself from the ravine. I can compare the soft voice, the apparition being a woman, the close proximity between Elaine's body and the saint's body, the warm embrace, and the joy that surrounds Elaine at the onset of this experience to the feeling a child has in the arms of her mother. In fact, it is Elaine's thirst for a similar experience with her own mother that makes such an encounter between Elaine and the saint so important. Elaine's mother has done two major mistakes raising her daughter. The first mistake is that she has not prepared her to the gendered complexity of the urban girls' world, herself being oblivious of all that relates to the strict binary divisions of masculine and feminine behavior. The second mistake Elaine's mother has done is to remain indifferent to the three girls bullying of her daughter, even though she has been conscious of it, because she is also oblivious of the fact that motherhood is an institution that has strict rules of conduct that the mother should abide by. This attitude makes her "a nonmother" in Elaine's eyes (Atwood, 236). It is only when she realizes that the night has fallen and that her daughter is missing that Elaine's mother goes out looking for her. All this pushes Elaine to equate between Virgin Mary's apparition and the maternal that she never had with her own mother. In "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini," Kristeva indicates that patriarchy represses the mother's power by abjecting her: "paternity [is] necessary in order to relieve the archaic impact of the maternal body on man" (Kristeva, *Desire*, 263). Virgin Mary's maternal body is a

body that patriarchal culture wants to depict as having only “ear, milk, and tears”

(Kristeva, *Stabat*, 248). Kelly Oliver reasons that

The power of the mother in a matrilinear society, the power of the child’s primary relationship/identification with the mother, and the power of the mother as the authority over the child’s body are all condensed into the symbol of the Virgin mother. The mother’s power is brought under paternal control. It is domesticated (Oliver, 51).

Despite the veracity of this description, Elaine can “turn and walk away from” her girl friends only because Virgin Mary “is still with [her,] invisible, wrapping [her] in warmth and painlessness” (Atwood, 210-214). They follow her and she “can hear the hatred, but also the need. They need me for this, and I no longer need them” (Atwood, 214). Indeed, just like the West needs the East to buttress its own sense of superiority in colonial contexts, the three girl friends need Elaine to prove to themselves that she is inferior to them in patriarchal contexts. This incident incites her to relinquish the three girl friends’ semi-patriarchal power altogether and look for matriarchal love in the image of Virgin Mary. Kelly Oliver, following Kristeva, argues that “the Virgin’s maternity, and her relation to her child, is purely spiritual” (Oliver, 51). This spirituality (and lack of physicality) causes Elaine later on to doubt that she has ever seen Virgin Mary, but it also pushes her to think: “I am indifferent to [my girl friends]. There’s something hard in me, crystalline, a kernel of glass. I cross the street and continue along, eating my licorice” (Atwood, 214). Margaret Atwood confesses in an interview with Earl Ingersoll that: “If [she] were going to convert to any religion [she] would probably choose Catholicism because it at least has female saints and the Virgin Mary” (Ingersoll, 2006). Elaine also prefers “Catholic churches to Protestant ones” (Atwood, 217). Because of Virgin Mary’s effect on her, Elaine proudly thinks to herself: “I am free” (Atwood, 214).

On the other hand, Kristeva thinks that the Virgin Mary's immaculate conception of the Christ is a myth that women need to discard in order for them to decolonize their bodies from patriarchal assumptions. Elaine's pregnancy decolonizes and empowers her because it erases the difference between the maternal 'self' and the baby's 'otherness.' Covino, following Kristeva, explicates that the pregnant woman is "a figure of doubling of self into other, and the eventual splitting of the self into the other, a figure that bespeaks both the identification of the self with the other, and the negation of self in the other that makes the recognition of the other possible (Covino, 22). Kristeva reasons in "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini" that "within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an other" (Kristeva, *Desire*, 237). By extension, pregnancy empowers women in general and Elaine in particular by erasing the sexual difference between her feminine and purportedly inferior body that only 'receives' and her husband Jon's masculine and purportedly superior body that 'gives.' This is why women do not need to separate themselves from the 'other,' (i.e. the other sex) because motherhood has already allowed them to incorporate the 'self' and the 'other' in one and only body: the maternal body. Virgin Mary also has no *jouissance*, and her body is not a sexed body. This is why the symbolic wants all mothers to emulate her. It is the Word that has impregnated Virgin Mary, an idea that removes the threat of the primal scene. But Kelly Oliver argues that from a Kristevan perspective "the mother is a threat to the Symbolic order [because] her *jouissance* threatens to make her a subject rather than the Other against which man becomes a subject" (Oliver, 50). Elaine describes pregnancy as powerful first because it brings her closer to her body and to her husband Jon, and second

because it brings her closer to her own mother. It brings her closer to her body when she thinks:

My body was like a feather bed, warm, boneless, deeply comforting, in which I lay cocooned. It may have been the pregnancy, sponging up my adrenaline. Or it may have been relief. Jon glowed for me then like a plum in sunlight, richly colored, perfect in form. I would lie in bed beside him or sit at the kitchen table, running my eyes over him like hands. My adoration was physical, and wordless. I would think *Ah*, nothing more. Like a breath breathed out (Atwood, 371).

What is of interest in this passage is that pregnancy reconciles Elaine with her body.

Because of pregnancy, her body becomes ‘self’ to her after years of being the ‘other’ that doesn’t conform to social rules, that bleeds during menstruation, and that is grotesque with its “breasts, puffy-looking, their nipples bluish, like veins on a forehead” (Atwood, 183). Her body now is a comforting space that is as light as a plume. Because of pregnancy also, Elaine sees Jon as perfect, and is even thankful to him for impregnating her: “I don’t see Sarah as a gift I have given him, but one he has allowed me” (Atwood, 371). Finally, pregnancy empowers Elaine because a pregnant woman’s body is where the presymbolic and prerepresentational drives of the semiotic are formed. The semiotic’s threat keeps erupting in the symbolic with the emission of interjections like ‘ah’ that Elaine breathes out. Patriarchal culture causes the body of Virgin Mary to be an asexual body, and a body from which the semiotic instinctual drive has been discarded. Elaine’s body is not a fully cultured body because the exclamation (ah) denotes Elaine’s drive energies, sensuality and “outlaw *jouissance*” that escapes all patriarchal definitions of the female body (Oliver, 50). In addition, the semiotic is the expression of the maternal and pre-Oedipal relation between Elaine and her own mother. It is the “return of the repressed” mother that Elaine has had to discard- or the mother who has discarded herself

from Elaine's life as previously explained- in order for Elaine to become a functional being in the symbolic culture.

Kristeva also reasons that the traditional discourse about Virgin Mary is no longer applicable to modern motherhood. To Elaine,

If Christ is a lion, as he is in traditional iconography, why wouldn't the Virgin Mary be a lioness? Anyway it seems to me more accurate about motherhood than the old bloodless milk-and-water Virgins of art history. My Virgin Mary is fierce, alert to danger, wild. She stares levelly out at the viewer with her yellow lion's eyes. A gnawed bone lies at her feet. I paint the Virgin Mary descending to the earth, which is covered with snow and slush. She is wearing a winter coat covered over her blue robe, and has a purse slung over her shoulder. She's carrying two brown paper bags full of groceries. Several things have fallen from the bags: an egg, an onion, an apple. She looks tired. *Our Lady of Perpetual Help*, I call her (Atwood, 376).

Elaine paints the Virgin Mary as a lioness because she means to say that if her daughters are bullied at school as she has been, she will defend them and will not remain silent like her powerless mother has done before. Elaine may be implying that her mother acting like Virgin Mary and accepting in submission that her Holy Son be thrown to his fate, like Elaine has been, is not the best strategy for a mother to adopt. On the contrary, Elaine will be a powerful lioness who has the ability to act rapidly and to counter any danger her daughters might face. Virgin Mary being only the "ear of understanding" is a version of femaleness that does not appeal to Elaine (Kristeva, *Stabat*, 257). If the masculine Christ is a powerful lion, then she is also the feminine powerful lioness who can reverse the gaze of the viewer. Elaine also recognizes women's input in society and does not belittle their efforts: Virgin Mary in her paintings is the prototype of the working mother and housewife who can juggle many responsibilities at once, even if she looks tired.

To conclude, I argue that forgiveness may be the key message behind Atwood's novel *Cat's Eye*. It is only when Elaine forgives the abjection her three girl friends have

subjected her to, that this female bildungsroman or “coming of age” novel ends. Atwood contends that an eye for an eye may lead to more blindness in the world, and that even justice, if induced by bloodshed, is not justice anymore but murder. When Elaine’s brother Stephen dies as a result of a terrorist attack to avenge some other death, she thinks: “He died of an eye for an eye, or someone’s idea of it. He died of too much justice” (Atwood, 424). Forgiving what Cordelia, the symbol of patriarchy, has done to her is Elaine’s way of coming to terms with the pains of the past. Elaine is now conscious of the fact that Cordelia has treated her badly because she wants to project on Elaine what patriarchy has done to her. As an adult, Elaine imagines herself seeing Cordelia at the bridge. Elaine feels the same shame, “the sick feeling in [her] body, the same knowledge of [her] own wrongness, awkwardness, weakness; the same wish to be loved; the same loneliness; the same fear. But these are not [her] own emotions any more. They are Cordelia’s; as they always were” (Atwood, 459). The last two lines of this passage form an epiphany: Elaine realizes that Cordelia herself feels abnormal, and this why she has made Elaine feel abnormal. Virgin Mary’s mercy has saved Elaine from the abject freezing ravine when she was a nine-year-old child by telling her “you can go home now” (Atwood, 209). In the same fashion, Elaine imagines herself saving Cordelia from the abject freezing weather by forgiving her and telling her almost forty years later: “you can go home now” (Atwood, 459). Elaine’s position of power does not push her to make Cordelia suffer like Elaine has suffered at the hands of Cordelia herself. This may be reason enough for western colonizing women to stop victimizing western colonized women by being more patriarchal than men themselves, since any position of power may

be reversed at any given moment: the powerful Cordelia have become not only powerless at the end of the novel, but depending on Elaine's mercy for her survival.

Conclusion

Every colonization is purportedly followed by decolonization. Patriarchal-minded men construct women as sex objects and they encroach upon them in a way which is not short of colonial. However, the three fictional women I have examined in this thesis, namely Zahra, Rashud's wife and Elaine, have managed at the end of the novels to free themselves from the yoke of slavery and oppression. George Sadaka contends that "they seem to have managed to free themselves from their gendered "self-ication" which means "making a 'self' grow according to gender registers required by ruling patriarchs who not only inherit but also propagate a definition of 'self' for both men and women" " (interview—June 6, 2015). Fictional or textual as these women are, they become the property of the world through a text (novel) that issues them as paragons to the world. These three women are components of fictional realism, but they may also be aspects of worldly truth in as much as several truths about the condition of women (in East and West) could be revealed to the world through them. Unfortunately, the colonization of women may be seen as having a greater toll on eastern women than on western women due to the former's lack of education, their financial dependence on men, and the detrimental perspective they have of their bodies and gender.

The two main theorists I have employed in this thesis are Simone de Beauvoir and Edward Said. De Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex* in 1949 which falls in the aftermath of World War II and the declaration of the United Nations Charter, with the intention of allowing women to think that not only nations but also women have the right to exist, to be sovereign over themselves, and to have freedoms of speech and choice pertaining to

free peoples and free political terrains in a free world. Edward Said published *Orientalism* in 1978, thereby launching postcolonialism as one of the disciplines of literary theory which grows in tandem with the liberal orientations of Marxist, Feminist, Post-modern, Post-structural, and Deconstructionist disciplines. In this thesis, I presented a dovetail of Feminism and Postcolonialism to demonstrate that women, much like nations, may also be decolonized from upper-handed powers that claim mastery and that curb the freedoms of identity and self-hood.

Women may be capable of decolonizing their bodies and their ‘selves’ when they discard oppressive polarities like “them” and “us.” De Beauvoir contends that femininity is a projection of what the male wants to reject from his own being. This idea causes women to feel that the female body is the prison of women and that this prison is owned by men. To leave the prison is to make the jailer lose ownership of this prison so that the liberation from external prisons may help the liberation from internal prisons as well. Women may concentrate on the notion of body-centrism, or the body as a body that is “intrinsically special” (Clark, 2008). Nancy Hirschmann in her book *Feminist interpretations of Thomas Hobbes*, argues that

Hobbes accepts both consent (the social contract) and conquest (foreign invasion or usurpation of sovereign power) as grounds for the political legitimacy of a regime. However, conquest is *not* valid if the conquered individual *or* conquered sovereign is not physically free. Conquest becomes “consent” only on the condition that the subject “hath his life and corporal Libetrie given him” (Hirschmann, 231).

Hobbes’ speculation may be used to help us understand that a woman consents first to the conquest. In order to consent, she should be physically free, capable of deciding what she wants to do with her body and how to use it. This freedom is intrinsically linked for a woman to the choice of becoming pregnant, aborting the baby, having a sexual

relationship, refraining from it, behaving according to the gender construction of her time and location or discarding them altogether and conduct herself the way she pleases. If she can do this, she may have a consciousness that is different from that of other women who blindly abide by patriarchal rules. In addition, if she can do this on her own, it is highly unlikely she will accept that men debase and colonize her body. De Beauvoir contends that while male's consciousness "asserts itself as the essential and sets up the other as inessential, as the object, [...] the other consciousness has an opposing reciprocal claim, [that of removing] the absolute meaning from the idea of the Other and bring out its relativity" (de Beauvoir, 7). In order for women to go on with the task of decolonizing their bodies as they have started doing ages ago, they may need to consider their bodies and—more importantly—the consciousness of their bodies as fundamental in their struggle to free themselves from the male oppressive occupation. Many women around the world still live in deplorable conditions. They are mentally abused into believing that their bodies should be reduced to their genitalia, hence the need for men to police their (women's) bodies. They are physically abused into accepting that their physiological specificities be under males' watchful eyes, which allows men to deny women, for example, the right of having an abortion. Worse still, even a long fight to win the right for abortion has unfortunately proven to be a double-edged sword for women. In different parts of the world, men may indulge into physical relationships with women outside of wedlock. In case they impregnate the woman, they abuse the right to abortion that women themselves have fought strenuously to implement. They may ask women to miscarry to relieve themselves from the responsibility of the baby. This incident may take place anywhere in the world in the twenty-first century, hence the persistent and still relevant

need to pursue a decolonization of the female body until women reach the happy ending of seeing their bodies and their 'selves' radically free from male domination.

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