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Power, Resistance, and Change in the Fiction of Roy
and al- Shaykh

By

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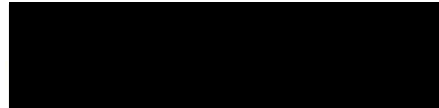
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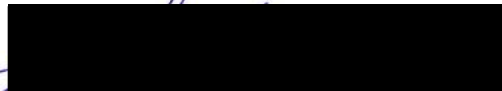
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Dedication

To the two dearest people in my life:

To my husband and my best friend, Dr. Abdelkarim Akhras: Thank you for always being there, motivating me to begin, to continue, and to complete this work. I owe it all to you.

To the pride and joy of my life, to my son, Dr. Ali Akhras: Thank you for your unconditional love and emotional support.

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Power, Resistance, and Change in the Fiction of Roy and al-Shaykh

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to study the interplay of power relations, subjectivity, and resistance in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy (1997) and in two Lebanese novels, *The Story of Zahra* (1980) and *The Locust and the Bird* (2005), by Hanan al-Shaykh. Rather than employing a unifying theoretical framework, I will link the three novels thematically, utilizing critical and cultural studies theory, employing Foucault's method of analysis and close reading of texts as well as Non-western feminists' approaches to power and resistance in order to analyze the covertways in which power creates obedience, discipline, systematic knowledge, but above all resistance. The work will attempt to evaluate the efficiency of this resistance which is produced spontaneously by mere interaction. Will such resistance ultimately reduce oppression of women and other marginalized groups, especially in non-western countries, or has such resistance become futile because it remains in the realm of reaction rather than action directed at the root or the causes of oppression and marginalization?

The study also hopes to reveal that tensions and alliances between non-western feminists' approaches to power and resistance and Foucault's notions on power enhance both approaches. First, tensions dismantle, disrupt, and question approaches, stimulating criticism and revision of each approach. Non-western Feminists realize that gender difference alone is not the sole reason for women's oppression and this realization has motivated them to utilize other available

approaches, especially Foucault's notions on power and knowledge to launch their resistance against oppression.

Women's resistance does not only constitute reactionary responses to the oppressive forces of power. In other words, this resistance is not limited to suicide, passivity, silence, or self-mutilation. This thesis aspires to show that in the novels under discussion, women's resistance, especially resistance at the micro level of society, is also very active, diverse, and complex.

Keywords: Power, Knowledge, Subjectivity, Resistance, Non-Western Feminists, Gender Differences, Foucault,

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Introduction

Power, Resistance, and Change in the Fiction of Roy and al-Shaykh

Contrary to the liberal and Marxist understanding of the top-down enforcement of power, the three novels under discussion: *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, and Hanan al-Shaykh's *The Story of Zahra*, and *The Locust and the Bird* reveal that patriarchal power has no locus or as Foucault maintains, "power exists everywhere and comes from everywhere" (1977: 93). This thesis proposes to study the mechanisms of power in the above three novels by women, not as stable structures, but as mobile and constantly shifting relations that emerge from every social interaction and thus pervade the social body. The aim is to investigate the practice of power "where it installs itself and produces real effects" (Foucault, 1980: 97).

I intend to examine the effects of the interplay of power relations on the lives of both men and women, demonstrating that there are no pure binaries; all are subjects and subjected, all are powerful and powerless. Power relations always accompany and even generate resistance because individuals are always in a position to act. The individual is an open and dynamic structure shaped by social historical and discursive conditions. However, even from the position of the so-called subjected that appears completely powerless, resistance can still take numerous forms: spontaneous, violent, passive, and even sacrificial; nonetheless, it exists and has the capacity to form subjects who are able to deviate from the designated path. However,

the nature of this resistance seems to be problematic because it is limited to mere reaction to a situation rather than independent action and this is perhaps why such resistance is unable to offer women and other marginalized groups more effective results.

Another aim of this thesis is to suggest that Foucault's notions on power offer those interested in alleviating oppression, especially non-western feminists, a theoretical tool with which to analyze the complexity of oppressive relations of power that may take on diverse forms, necessitating that analyses of gendered oppression, as well as resistances formulated against this oppression, also be multifaceted. Foucault's approach may prove useful for deconstructing and dismantling existing modes of oppression. Non-western feminists have benefitted from such studies to launch strategies of active resistance. By studying how patriarchal power exerts itself into people's lives and actions, feminists reveal that some common practices are socially-constructed to serve the interests of patriarchy. In these literary works, the predefined identity of non-western women and Untouchables enables patriarchy to preserve a privileged position in power relations.

Privileging one site of domination or one site of resistance may be misleading because oppression, as shown in this thesis, is never a result of gender oppression alone or caste discrimination alone. Women and men cannot be molded to fit the category of one identifiable subject. People possess multiple identities and especially non-western women. Feminist, Audre Lorde, in *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* stresses that she possesses multiple identities by publicly identifying herself as a "Black Lesbian feminist". She maintains that "those who share goals of liberation cannot afford the luxury of fighting one form of oppression" (157). Ammu, an Indian woman and a divorced mother of twins, in the novel *The God of Small Things*, at one

instance privileges her Indian identity over her gender identity. When Kocha Maria, an Indian female servant kisses Sophie Mol, Ammu's niece, by sniffing her hands, Margaret, Chacko's English wife, is surprised and asks, "Do the men and women do it to each other too?" (179). Ammu is infuriated and retorts "Oh, all the time! That's how we make babies" (179). In this instant Ammu's solidarity is with her fellow Indians regardless of their class or gender. Ammu's identity as an Indian is threatened by Margaret's comment concerning the manner Indians reveal their sentiments. Ammu reacts strongly because she is made to feel as the inferior other, regardless of Margaret's intentions. Ammu, like Lorde, cannot afford the luxury of fighting one form of oppression. It is a battle of self-assertion and self-preservation that forces Ammu to fight on more than one front.

Content wise, the first chapter of this thesis highlights some modern concepts of power, revealing how power, even in definition is often understood differently not only among different disciplines, but also within the same theory of the same discipline. The second and third part briefly outline some of the convergences and tensions between Foucault and non-western feminists, demonstrating that differences create further avenues for power analyses and provoke self-reflection, producing the first step of resistance by interrogating taken-for-granted notions and theories.

The second chapter investigates power relations in Roy's novel, *The God of Small Things*, beginning with a brief synopsis of the novel in the first part, followed by the second part, which studies the multi-faceted forms of oppression. Velutha, one of the main characters in the novel, is socially marginalized not only by those of higher classes or castes, but by his own father who is a docile subject blinded by his subjection to dominant practices and knowledge. Velutha's father is ready to kill his "deviant" son because he is totally convinced that it is his social, religious, and moral

duty to accept injustices imposed on him as a member of the lowest class. Velutha's father fears that if he and his family do not abide by the rules that dictate the life a Touchable ought to lead, they will suffer a worse fate in another life. Part three focuses on the eminent resistance to power. Most of the characters in the novel, *The God of Small Things*, resist or are pushed into resistance by the pressure of oppression. Ammu and Velutha challenge their family, class and society when they decide to have a forbidden sexual relationship. Estha, Ammu's son, resists by becoming mute and by refusing to adhere to the socially-constructed persona of the Indian male. He challenges his culture by performing domestic work such as cooking, washing and cleaning. The fourth and final part investigates the changes achieved via power relations, revealing that resistance to power may be limited to reactions or defense mechanisms employed for survival, but perhaps this is because sometimes it is the only option available for the marginalized during their interaction with power in such complex societies, suffering from diverse forms of oppression.

The third chapter introduces the novel, *The Story of Zahra*, which is primarily concerned with the patriarchal oppression of the protagonist Zahra who suffers gender discrimination in a male-dominated society. Zahra's subordination is certainly the result of the patriarchal system and her terror of that system and its reaction if she dares to speak. Part one provides a synopsis of the novel. Part two endeavors to understand the underlying fear that dominates Zahra, the reasons behind "the father- god image" that Zahra detests, and the role of the mother as an agent of patriarchy. In part three, Zahra's identity as a revolutionary subject, is illuminated through analyses of different instances of resistance. Zahra, who is often perceived as a docile subject and a victim by some critics, especially within discourses that insist on seeing Arab women as passive creatures, reveals that she is not only capable of

resistance, but she is also ready to use whatever spaces or means possible to liberate herself. Sex is her weapon and war is her strategic battle-ground as she struggles to defy patriarchal control. The last part outlines the changes that accompany this resistance. Zahra's resistance does not offer her much comfort. At the end of the novel; she is killed by her lover, the sniper. However, this resistance does provide her with a voice because at the end, she does speak and denounce her oppressor: "He killed me" (215). Zahra's ability to name the perpetrator is itself an act of resistance. She no longer accepts her status as the silent victim.

The fourth and final chapter delves into the memoir of the life story of Hanan al-Shaykh's mother, *The Locust and the Bird*. The first part is a brief summary of the novel. The second part attempts to reveal the interplay among the multiple forces of oppression that unsystematically interweave, creating a web of power networks that entrap all. In the third part, Kamila defies this web with every means possible, regardless of the price this defiance may incur. Unlike Ammu, she refuses to allow anyone to be a "milestone" around her neck: she abandons her daughters, her family, and her reputation as a "respectable" woman and pursues her life as she desires. The last part of this chapter investigates the effects of Kamila's resistance and attempts to identify her as a feminist. Kamila does get a divorce from Abu- Hussein and she does marry her lover, Mohammed. Regardless of all the patriarchal prohibitions in her life, Kamila is able to reject the life imposed upon her as a married woman and refuses to accept her status as a passive victim of patriarchy.

In this thesis, my methodology is derived from the theories of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Audre Lorde, or as she defines herself, "Black feminist theorist, poet, essayist, and gay lesbian activist" and non-western feminist Uma Narayan. I make use of Foucault's notions in *Power/Knowledge*, where he suggests using theory

as a “tool kit” in the sense of “instrument” rather than as a total “system” (145). Throughout this thesis, I will utilize Foucault’s notions on power as well as non-western feminists’ theories and approaches to power and resistance as tool kits to enhance my analyses of the three primary novels in this study.

Using Foucault’s grid, I try to discover how power operates by identifying and analyzing the network of relations. This is sometimes a difficult task since often power relations do not have a necessary particular form, reminding us that subordination of women and marginalized groups cannot always be analyzed by pointing the finger in one direction. I attempt to identify the mechanisms by means of which authority is expressed and obedience achieved. I question the control exercised, the methods of surveillance, and the laws or rules to which individuals must adhere. I analyze the expected activities prescribed as “proper” social conduct expressed in manners, movements, tasks, and gestures. I analyze the means by which individuals resist the power mechanism, and finally I try to locate some of the changes that result from this interplay.

The choice of the novels selected for this study may be justified by the fact that regardless of gender, cultures, and other geo-political terrains, these novels portray the lives of ordinary people who are caught up in the network of power relations. The novels reveal, to use Foucault’s words in *Power/Knowledge* that “power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives” (276). According to Foucault, power creates subjects by disciplining their bodies and actions. Individuals internalize the knowledge and practices dictated by power. However, the novels also reveal that, regardless of the effects of power, some characters like Ammu, Velutha, Zahra and Kamila, reject the dictates of

power and knowledge imposed on their minds and bodies by deviating from the rules imposed on them. Roy's novel is concerned with the caste system in India and the power mechanisms in Indian society. *The God of Small Things* reveals how social constructions like gender and class interact and intersect on multiple and often simultaneous levels, contributing to social injustices and inequalities imposed not only upon women, but also on men of low castes.

Hanan al-Shaykh's *The Story of Zahra* and *The Locust and the Bird* depict the Lebanese society and some of the obstacles both men and women are forced to encounter as a result of a patriarchal system. Yet, all three novels leave the reader with hope that change is possible because resistance exists wherever and whenever power is exercised.

The conclusion to be made from this thesis is first, that owing to the diversity of power relations, it is almost impossible to isolate and identify forms of power or even to locate power, and even if the task were possible, it does not seem so important because power can only be active if it is exercised. In other words, perhaps it would be more beneficial to focus on how power exerts itself into people's lives rather than where it is located. Second, if power has no center and no identified agent, as Foucault maintains, this means that all individuals can exercise power because no one is outside power or above it. However, what seems problematic is that Foucault presumes that all individuals are outside power relations prior to the exercise of power, but in reality some individuals already occupy privileged positions in power relations prior to the exercise of power and this positioning naturally gives them the upper hand during interaction. Ammu, Zahra, and Kamila resist, but this resistance is often hindered by their subordinate position as women. Similarly, Velutha's socially-constructed identity as an Untouchable hinders his role

in power relations. However, regardless of this unprivileged positioning in power relations, characters exercise resistance and alter the status of both power and powerlessness.

Chapter Two

Conceptions of power: Foucault and Third-World

Feminism

Since the following thesis is primarily concerned with the exercise of power, it is relevant to briefly summarize power as a concept and how it has been perceived and contested by different disciplines and theories.

2.1 Definitions of Power

Though power is theoretically and philosophically undefinable in this literary thesis, power refers to an inherited patriarchal construction of gender roles and expectations. However, this power is unable to dictate the lives of individuals or exercise complete control over their lives. Characters defy this power and struggle to define themselves and change their lives. Other notions and manifestations of power mechanisms discussed in this thesis concern the Untouchability feature in the caste system. For the Untouchables in India, power inserts itself not only in social and cultural practices and religious beliefs of the Indian society, but it is enmeshed in the lives and beings of the Untouchables themselves. The concept of Samsara, (Sanskrit: “the running around” or “wandering-on”) in Indian philosophy is the central conception of metempsychosis whereby the soul, finding itself awash in the “sea of samsara,” strives to find release (moksha) from the bonds of its own past deeds (karma). Because the rank of one’s birth in the hierarchy of life depends on the

quality of the previous life, Untouchables abide by religious and moral instructions and believe that it is justified that they are badly treated and avoided by the community and hence bear their intolerable situation. In other words, upward mobility is very rare in the caste system and Untouchables are doomed to remain untouched and sub-human to pay off all their debts. Untouchables are born to submit to the power of others, and cannot be given any power by human authority. However, despite the tremendous cost of resistance to this power, some characters refuse to accept their placement in the hierarchy of the Indian caste system.

Power is understood as an exercise rather than a possession or a resource, but this exercise of power is governed by inherited bigoted values coming from religion, dominant practices, norms and customary praxis. Therefore, prior and during this exercise of power some characters, especially non-western women and other marginalized groups are in a less-privileged position to exercise power.

In the three novels under study power is an open arena to all characters, but because of the norms and cultural epithets that govern and legitimize the exercise of power, some characters, especially women and Untouchables, are forced to struggle against their socially-constructed identities that restrict their roles in power relations. Characters like Ammu, Zahra, Kamila, and Estha struggle for self-definition and reveal that power is fragile and can be penetrated.

Historically, power has always been seen as either a resource that can be possessed by one group or as an exercise or activity through which participants attain their ends. Niccolò Machiavelli (*The Prince* early 16th century) and Thomas Hobbes (*Leviathan* mid-17th century) represent the two mainstreams along which power has continued to be perceived in modern times. In his book, *The Prince*, Machiavelli, perceives power as a resource that would provide the prince with strategic

advantages in his dealings with others. Max Weber (Weber, 1978:55), Robert Dahl (Dahl, 1957:202-03), and Lukes (Lukes, 1974: 40) perceive power as an exercise or an interaction among people.

The above concepts and definitions of power continue to be perceived along the same line, that is, power is either a possession or an exercise in which A is in a position that can force B to do something or to perform a certain act against his wishes. However, since this thesis is a study of power in the novels as it is understood by both feminists and Foucault, it is necessary to delve into the definition of power and how it is perceived by both.

Early feminists like Simone de Beauvoir perceive power as domination. In her text, "Introduction to the *Second Sex*, Beauvoir maintains that women are "defined and differentiated with reference to man and not with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute — she is the Other" (xxii). This definition of women may be absolutely true, but it has continued to take for granted that in power relations one party is always more privileged than the other and perhaps resistance is futile.

Other feminists like Suzan Moller Okin criticize the concept of power as a resource that should be distributed among women and men. In *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, Okin claims "When we look seriously at the distribution between husbands and wives of such critical social goods as work (paid and unpaid), power, prestige, self-esteem, opportunities for self-development, and both physical and economic security, we find socially constructed inequalities between them, right down the list" (136). Okin opposes this understanding of power as a possession to be distributed by some unknown agent which leaves little hope for change. Here, Power is still perceived as the property of a group (men) rather than an open arena where all

actors may exercise power during interaction. Okin maintains that the perception of power influenced the outcome of power relations. Marginalized groups, including women, foresaw the futility of resistance and surrendered to their fate.

Non-western feminists seem to be more concerned with how power oppresses woman and other marginalized groups. Chandra Talpade Mohanty in *Feminism without Borders Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, maintains that in the non-western analyses of women's lives should be "careful, politically focused, local" and should illustrate "how the category of women is constructed in a variety of political contexts that often exist simultaneously and overlaid on top of one another". Mohanty rejects gender-based analyses that not only obscures the individual experience of women, and also insists on perceiving women as more than just mere victims of their patriarchal societies. Mohanty rejects the stereotyping of women, especially non-western women as "a homogeneous powerless group often located as implicit victims of particular socioeconomic systems (23).

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault, on the other hand, perceives power not as something possessed or exercised by one group, but as an interaction. "By power... I do not understand a general system of domination exercised by one element or one group over another, whose effects... traverse the entire body social..." (1972:121). With Foucault, power is no longer a possession by a group that represents dominating institutions of power; it is a relationship that depends on the action of all those involved in the interplay. Power becomes an exercise in which all individuals can participate. Foucault's Power is a process of ceaseless struggle and confrontations which transforms, strengthens, weakens or even reverses the existing situation.

2.2 Feminism and Foucault: Tensions and Alliances

Since, as previously mentioned, this thesis aims at utilizing both Foucault's ideas on power and non-western feminists' approaches to power and resistance; it is useful to explore some of the tensions as well as the common points of convergence between the two approaches to cultural analyses. Using the work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Uma Narayan, and Audre Lorde, I attempt to discover the commonalities and the differences that might enrich the study of power and resistance in the novels discussed in this thesis.

The first striking difference between both approaches is that Foucault's analyses expose the effects of disciplinary power in the production of the human subjects, but neglect to mention that women's bodies are considered as the locus of patriarchal power. However, this criticism does not take into consideration that Foucault's notions on power focus on how power exerts itself in the lives of human beings in general. In *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault maintains that it is his "hypothesis that the individual is not a pre-given entity which is seized on by the exercise of power." In other words, no one is granted the privileged position prior to the exercise of power. No one is identified prior to the interaction in power relation.

Another difference between approaches to power and resistance between the two is that Foucault seems to focus his analyses more on how modern disciplinary mechanisms of power create individuals and docile subjects by disciplining, monitoring and regulating their behavior through state apparatuses rather than through social interaction. In *The History of Sexuality*, he describes power as a force that "passes through" institutions, practices and people (94-7).

Foucault's analyses of power and knowledge have been indispensable to non-western feminists. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault maintains that there is no "power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations." Foucault stresses the relationship between knowledge and power. The knowledge that Foucault describes is the knowledge that relates to human nature and behavior, which is measured against a norm. Foucault's point is that one cannot exist without the other. Power depends on knowledge that creates and classifies individuals, and that knowledge derives its authority and legitimacy from certain relationships of power and domination. As Foucault maintains in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*: "There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations". Non-western feminists have used this analysis to question the truth and validity of knowledge which is often used in correlation with power to oppress women and other marginalized groups. This idea will be utilized later in my analysis to show how power and knowledge rely on one another to create discipline and obedience in the three novels under discussion.

Regardless of differences, Foucault and non-western feminists share many commonalities. Foucault claims that totalizing theories can become enmeshed in power and restrict ways of analyzing power and methods of resistance. He fears that theories may become part of the dominant discourses and end up joining forces with the power they originally criticized. It seems Foucault's fears are justified because this is one of the tensions between some non-western feminists and Western Feminists today. Chandra Talpade Mohanty in *Feminism without Borders*

Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity, maintains that “feminist scholarly practices (reading, writing, critiquing, etc.) are inscribed in relations of power — relations that they counter, resist, or even perhaps implicitly support. There can, of course, be no apolitical scholarship” (22). Mohanty is critical of the production of the non-western woman as a singular, monolithic subject in some Western feminist texts.

Mohanty also insists that Western feminist scholarship be “examined precisely in terms of its inscription in these particular relations to power and struggle” (20). In other words, totalizing theories may become implicated in the oppressive forces they originally oppose. The discourse employed to represent non-western women as victims, oppressed, uneducated, and traditional creates the image of the other (the western woman) as superior. Foucault’s analysis of power relations converges with this project of understanding the nature and causes of women’s subordination. Non-western feminists believe that although some women are oppressed by patriarchal social structures, the oppression of these women cannot be solely explained by patriarchal social structures which secure the power of men over women. They regard such analyses as an oversimplified conception of power relations. Furthermore, they reject the implication that women are simply the passive, powerless victims of male power. In this context, Foucault’s work on power has benefitted some feminists to develop a more complex analysis of the relations between gender and power.

In *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism*, non-western feminist, Uma Narayan, is critical of calls to transcend borders. She maintains that this crossing can easily lead scholars and activists alike to render invisible the complex differences that differentially shape women’s experiences in different parts of the world. Narayan believes that cultural explanations are often

distorted when they cross national borders (111). Like Mohanty, she believes that non-western women and their cultural experiences are often misrepresented in the dominant discourses.

Foucault is often blamed for not formulating a clear comprehensive theory that illuminates methods of resistance. This may be true, but Foucault perceives resistance as an integral part of power relations. To Foucault, resistance takes place the moment power is exercised and not prior to the exercise. The experience and the context dictate the form of resistance. In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Foucault maintains that resistance cannot be dictated beforehand since it is an integral part of power. It is only eminent in the sphere where power is exercised. In fact, Foucault's concept of power seems to be focused on Genealogy-A concept that Foucault originally borrowed from Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals. A genealogy is an attempt to consider the origins of systems of knowledge and to analyze discourses. Foucault seems to be more interested in dismantling power rather than in launching resistance.

Nevertheless, Foucault, on many occasions, urges intellectuals and political activists to launch resistance by questioning the neutrality of institutions and by revealing their insidious political activity, which legitimizes both knowledge and power. In *The Chomsky-Foucault debate: On Human Nature*, Foucault maintains that the "real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions that appear to be both neutral and independent, to criticize and attack them in such a manner that the political violence that has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them. Foucault believes that resistance exists in the analyses of power relations. By re-examining evidence and assumptions and by shaking up habitual ways of working

and thinking, one dissipates conventional methods of thinking. So basically, by re-evaluating rules and institutions, one is participating in resistance.

According to Foucault, knowledge plays a dual role in power relations because “discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart” (1998: 100-1). Knowledge legitimizes certain discourses that become an instrument and effect of power, but these discourses can also hinder the effects of power because the mere presence of such dominant discourses suggests or creates alternative discourses that can become strategies of resistance to power. Non-western feminists have benefitted from this analysis. By dismantling existing past and present discourses, some women have been able to redefine themselves. In *Under Western Eyes” Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anti-capitalist Struggle*, Mohanty challenges dominant discourses that perpetuate the oppression of non-western women by defining her as a passive victim of her society: “female subordination and power is automatically defined in binary terms: people who have it (read: men) and people who do not (read: women). Men exploit, women are exploited. Such simplistic formulations are historically reductive; they are also ineffectual in designing strategies to combat oppressions” (31). She refuses the definition of the inferior “Other”. This challenge to dominant discourses opens up space for alternative discourses that allow non-western women to identify themselves.

To conclude, it is significant to understand how power, resistance and change are understood in this thesis. This work adopts Foucault’s notions on power; power is perceived as an exercise and not as a possession; power has no locus and it can be exercised by all individuals during interaction in power relations. However, this thesis considers that prior and during the interplay, some individuals are already

situated in more privileged positions than others, and this positioning can affect the outcome of the interplay. Dominant practices and established truths play a dual role in the interplay. They support some and hinder others because they legitimize certain acts and prohibit others.

Resistance, in this thesis, is seen as any act or struggle for definition or self-assertion. This resistance is part of the parcel of power relations. It is eminent wherever and wherever power is exercised. Resistance may be induced, subconsciously by power during the interplay as in the case of Ammu as will be seen in the coming chapter. Resistance is not limited to standardized forms or norms. It may be a reaction to an oppressive reality as in the case of Estha's muteness, or a subconscious battle for self-definition and control as with Zahra's facial mutilations as will be shown in chapter four.

Change in this thesis is the result of the power interplay in the novels. It is the outcome of the interaction of actors during the process. Characters in these novels continuously struggle to alter their lives and define themselves. This rejection alters their lives and the lives of those around them, causing change to an already existing situation. This change does not always provide oppressed characters with the desired outcome, but at least it gives hope that change is possible and forces of power are fragile. These three novels, though works of fiction, cause change to the world because they provide a space for some women and marginalized groups to speak for themselves and define themselves outside the dominant discourses of their society, revealing that substitute discourses in some societies are perhaps best expressed through fiction because of the political cultural, and social restriction that impede freedom of expression in a real extra-textual world.

This thesis analyzes the themes of power, resistance, and change on the lives of characters in the three novels under study. The work uses literature and fiction as the base for its analyses and does not allege that this research is a study of the mentioned themes on the lives of all people in either India or Lebanon. True, the findings are a result of the study of events and characters in novels, but it is also true that characters like Ammu, Velutha, Zahra, and Kamila, whether fictional or not, exist in our societies. Novels provide us with discourse which enables us to read the problems of the world and treat them in the medium of literature as if it were a real extra-textual world because the text carries exemplaries and reflections which are helpful to the world.

Chapter Three

The God of Small Things

3.1 Summary of *The God of Small Things*

Published in 1997, *The God of small Things*, deals with a variety of overlapping themes, including acculturation, colonization, marital discord, caste discrimination, gender differences, and power relations. *The God of Small Things*, the first novel of the Indian writer and political activist, Arundhati Roy, is written in English. It is the story of a twin, Estha and his sister, Rahel, and their divorced mother, Ammu, who live in Ayemenem, Kerala. Ammu is forced to return to her parental home, following her divorce from a Hindu she had married against her parents' wishes. The story centers on events surrounding the visit and the death of Sophie Mol, the twins' half-English cousin. Sophie Mol's visit overlaps with a love affair between Ammu and Velutha, a member of the Untouchables, the lowest class in India. The consequences of these intertwined events are catastrophic. Estha becomes mute, Ammu is banished from her parental home, dying alone at the age of 31; Rahel drifts from one school to another, marries, divorces, and finally ends up having an incestuous relationship with Estha, her twin brother; Velutha is beaten to death by the Kerala police after having been abandoned by all.

3.2 Power Relation in *The God of Small Things*

In *The God of Small Things*, Velutha is punished from birth because he is an untouchable or a member of a lower caste. He is described as being “abandoned by God and History, by Marx, by Man, by Women and (in the hours to come) by

children” (310). Branded from birth, Velutha is oppressed by a variety of power interactions that mingle and interweave unsystematically. There is no conspiracy or prior plan to punish Velutha, but during the exercise of power, religion, society, family, and politics bring about his oppression because each structure interacts according to the dominant practices or established knowledge of the Indian caste system and thus solidifies its existence within relations of power.

In order to understand how Velutha is oppressed by religion, it is important to understand the caste system in India, which is believed to have been introduced by priests to preserve their position of power. In India there are four basic classes:

Brahmins--priests

Kshatriyas--warriors

Vaishyas--traders

Shudras--laborer

Velutha was a Paravan, the lowest class of the Untouchables, “an Untouchable whose grandfather had converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church to escape the scourge of Untouchability” (74). However, this act of conversion did not help him because converted Touchables “were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests” (74). Velutha finds no alley in religion when he confronts oppression. Being a Christian, does not release him from his confinement as an Untouchable. Vijapur, an Indian critic, asserts in "Towards Equality: Promoting Human Rights of the Untouchables in India." *Essays on International Human Rights*:

In no part of the world has so much injustice and systematic discrimination been done to a particular group of people for thousands of years as that in India with regard to the ex-Un-

touchables/Dalits. Curiously, the bases of this discrimination were not religion, language, sex or color, which normally constitute the common grounds for discriminatory treatment in most parts of the world. Rather it was “caste” or “birth”, which is unique. (117-144)

Caste dictates one's occupation, dietary habits, and interaction with members of other castes. Members of a high caste enjoy more wealth and opportunities while members of a low caste perform menial jobs. Outside of the caste system are the Untouchables. Untouchable jobs, such as toilet cleaning and garbage disposal, require them to be in contact with bodily fluids or excrements. They are therefore considered polluted and not to be touched. Untouchables have separate entrances to homes and are obliged to drink from separate wells. They are considered to be in a permanent state of impurity.

History and politics do not support Velutha. As a result of dissatisfaction with the whole social system, communism, as a reformist movement, is perceived by some Indians, especially those of lower castes and Untouchables as a savior from inequality and oppression: “Marxism was a simple substitute for Christianity. Replace God with Marx, Satan with the bourgeoisie, Heaven with a classless society and the Church with the Party” (66). Velutha tries to escape from his class oppression by becoming a member of the communist party in Kerala that had promised salvation for individuals of lower classes advocating equality for all. The communist party of Kerala “never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden, extremely traditional community. The Marxists worked from within the communal divides, never challenging them, never appearing not to. They offered a cocktail revolution” (66). In other words, the movement soon becomes a part of the system it initially tries to eradicate. It becomes caught up in power relations and instead of becoming a

savior for the oppressed, it ends up as another form of oppression. It does not help Velutha as a member of the party because by supporting Velutha, the party would lose the support of the police authorities in Kerala. It collaborates with the existing authorities in order to secure its own interests and maintain its position. This is perhaps what Foucault warns of in *Power/Knowledge*. He maintains that “if counter power moves within the horizon of power it fights, and then as soon as it is victorious it is transformed into a power complex that provokes a new counter power” (1977: 137). Regardless of the promises, when Velutha seeks the help of the party, he finds himself abandoned and rejected particularly because he is an Untouchable.

Marx or communism, represented by the power hungry Pillai, the representative of the communist party in Kerala, not only abandons Velutha but also participates in his oppression. Velutha is a member of the communist movement at Kerala, and as member he is supposed to be protected by the revolution, but when Velutha seeks Pillai’s help, Pillai answers “But comrade, you should know that the party was not constituted to support workers’ indiscipline in their private life” (287). Ironically, Pillai, as representative of the oppressed, puts his hands in the hands of the same power he is supposed to be fighting when he finds it suits his interests. When Velutha visits him for advice, after he had been mistreated, he tells him that it is not in the interest of the party to interfere with private life issues, even though he knows that what Velutha is suffering from is no private issue, but social oppression, which the party adopts as part of its motto in its fight for equality. Pillai also uses his position and power to illicit contracts from Chacko, Ammu’s rich aristocratic brother, in order to increase his profits. Perhaps, Pillai’s power is the most harmful to marginalized groups or to “small things” as they are described in the novel.

Pillai advocates himself as one of the “small things”, as a representative who works and fights on their behalf. He speaks and acts in their name and pretends to be their godfather and mentor, but in reality he is a hypocrite who exploits them in order to achieve his own personal aims. Pillai masquerades as the savior of the oppressed. He wants to educate them and raise their awareness so that they would be able to confront the power that oppresses them. Ironically, he ends up augmenting their oppression. Power sometimes exercised by political parties is often gift wrapped and offered as a savior for the repressed. In a conversation between Foucault and Deleuze, the latter claims that “The notion of reform is so stupid and hypocritical, reforms are designed by people who claim to be representative, who make a profession of speaking for others, and they lead to a division of power, to a distribution of this new power, which is consequently increased by a double repression” (1986). In other words, Pillai’s power adds oppression to the already existing power that is oppressing “small things” or marginalized groups. The Party originated as a reverse discourse, but it has become enmeshed in power and has been legitimized, becoming part of the mechanism capable of perhaps more oppression than the previous power it was fighting. Pillai admits that class discrimination in Kerala is a big problem: “It is a conditioning they (the Untouchables) have from birth. This I, myself, have told them is wrong. But Frankly Speaking, Comrade, change is one thing: acceptance is another” (281). Ironically, Pillai realizes that laws alone do not cause change on the ground because power does not come from the top. Accepting this change is what really matters, and that is why change must take place on the local every day level where power is exercised by being part and parcel of power relations.

But, above all, Velutha is oppressed by his own family – by his own father, who having learned of Velutha’s love affair with Ammu, directly seeks Mammachi, Ammu’s aristocratic mother, to ask for forgiveness, announcing his intention to kill Velutha with his own hands “to tear him limb from limb” (256). But, why would a father offer to kill his own son? In this instant, Velutha’s father is acting not as a free subject, but as an individual fully subjected to power. This reminds us of Foucault’s analysis of the Panopticon, Jeremy Bentham’s design for the ideal prison, a building whose spatial arrangement was designed to compel the inmate to surveil himself, thus becoming, as Foucault famously put it, “the principle of his own subjection” According to Foucault, an individual who is exposed to disciplinary mechanisms ultimately becomes subjected to the dominant discourses that there is no need for outside monitoring. He begins to discipline himself (1977:203). Vellya Paapen, Velutha’s father, does not need anyone to discipline him. He has internalized the power mechanism. Vellya Paapen seems to be Foucault’s perfect docile subject.

Hindus believe that if one lives a moral or religious life and does not commit crimes and injustices one will be reborn in a superior caste. (O’Flaherty 1991). In other words, one will be reborn in a lower caste if one does not abide by religious and moral instructions. Thus, the Untouchables believe that it is justified that they are badly treated and avoided by the community and hence bear their unbearable life. Power and knowledge are working hand in hand. It is this knowledge, false or true, that gives power its strength and legitimacy to subject Vellya Paapen and render him docile. Vellya Paapen monitors himself, disciplines himself, examines himself using the internalized knowledge, judges his normality, and finds that Velutha has deviated from the norms and thus decides to punish him. Vellya Paapen feels that it is not right for his son to work in the pickle factory, for this is no position that an

Untouchable may hold. So, when Vellya Paapen finds out about his son's relationship with Ammu, a woman above him in the caste system, he is so ashamed that he offers to kill Velutha with his own hands.

Even before the love affair between Velutha and Ammu, Vellya Paapen, Velutha's father, had remonstrated Velutha not for anything he had done, but for his gestures and movements, which he believes are not those suitable for an untouchable. Vellya Paapen couldn't say what it was that frightened him about his son. It is not anything that Velutha had said or done. "It was not what he said, but the way he said it. Not what he did, but the way he did it" (76). Vellya Paapen believes Velutha is too self-confident for an Untouchable. He walks with his head raised instead of slouching humbly as an Untouchable should. According to Vellya Paapen, an Untouchable should know his place in society, and his movements and poise should reveal his low status. Deviating from the norms of his class could have dangerous consequences. This reminds us of the disciplinary power exercised on the body of females, the socially-constructed ideals of femininity and even their invisibility. The ideal woman should move "femininely", taking as little space as possible. Velutha is described as "leaving no footprints, no ripples in water and no images in mirrors" (216). As an Untouchable, he must take as little space in the world as possible. He is a shadow or a ghost who passes through life unnoticed leaving no prints or images. He, too, as an Untouchable is socially-constructed to fit the persona of his class. According to Sandra Bartky, practices that contribute to the construction of femininity include, a range of "gestures, postures and movements" that "produce a body which in gesture and appearance is recognizably feminine" (Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, 1988: 63). The commonalities in the socially-constructed identity of

women and Untouchables seem to be numerous. It seems women suffer for being “women” and “Untouchables” at the same time.

Socially constructed knowledge becomes a form of power that controls and disciplines. Not only does Vellya Paapen internalize the knowledge of his own casteless class, the lowest class outside the caste system, but he is also aware of this knowledge and acts with accordance to its laws in his dealings with higher classes. After Vellya Paapen informs Mammachi of the love affair between Velutha and Emma, Mammachi pushes him down the stairs. Vellya Paapen “was taken completely by surprise” (256). Vellya Paapen is shocked not because of the fall, but because he does not expect to be touched by Mammachi, a woman of higher class. After all, he is an Untouchable and not fit to be touched by a woman of higher class. To Vellya Paapen, “part of the taboo of being an Untouchable was expecting not to be touched” (256). Vellya Paapen seems to be not only Foucault’s perfect docile subject, but he is perhaps the worst nightmare for non-western feminists who fear that docility is the barrier that might prevent change in the life of women who suffer most from disciplinary practices upon their bodies and minds. Technologies of the self are practiced under the authority of some system of “truth” such as the internalized knowledge of class and gender distinction.

Velutha is oppressed by women too. Perhaps this would be interesting, especially to feminists who tend to understand power in terms of dyadic relations of dominance/subordination. This is certainly not the case for Untouchables like Velutha. His relationship with Ammu is shunned by both men and women, and especially by women. In fact, it is Ammu’s mother who becomes totally insane when she hears of the relationship between her daughter and Velutha, a man not fit to be touched let alone loved by a member of her family. She just couldn’t imagine her

daughter making love, not to Velutha as a man, but to an Untouchable. Mammachi thinks of her daughter “naked, coupling in the mud with a man who was nothing but a filthy coolie” (257). It is Mammachi, too, who pushes Vellya Paapen down the steps. Vellya Paapen is physically apprehended by a woman, not any woman, but one of a higher class and this is tolerated. It is also Mammachi who bestows advantages upon a man when she sends Velutha to school to be taught carpentry. It is also Mammachi who employs Velutha in the pickle factory against the wishes of her own family and his. Here, it seems that the caste system questions notions about power within gender relations. Is it now a female/male- a master/slave dichotomy or is Mammachi, too, another docile subject who like Velutha’s father, is merely acting in accordance with her internalized knowledge of class distinction? Both Mammachi and Vellya Paapen need no external monitoring. They have internalized their roles and are ready to observe their own actions.

Mammachi seems to identify more with her class than she does with her gender. Mammachi pays women from lower castes or Untouchables to encourage them to have sexual affairs with Chacko, her son. She sees no harm in exploiting other women to fulfill the needs of men from her class. “She secretly slipped them (low class women) money to keep them happy” (169). Is Mammachi acting as a subject or as a docile object who has internalized the dominant practices and knowledge of both her gender and class? Mammachi has not only internalized the knowledge of the Indian caste system, but she seems to have internalized the oppressive tactics of her class. She uses her class privileges to oppress women and men of lower classes. Perhaps as Audre Lorde maintains in *Sister Outsider* “Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” “We have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression” (114). Lorde

believes that women often become accomplices in oppression because they, too, have internalized dominant or established knowledge of their society.

Trying to isolate forms of power that have brought about the dire consequences of oppression against Velutha seems to be an impossible task. Foucault claims that research on power can only be perceived when power is exercised. To really detect power, it is necessary to analyze it in interaction. After the violent death of Sophie Mol, and the scandal of the love affair between Velutha and Ammu, Baby Kochamma goes to the police and accuses Velutha of raping her niece and of killing Sophie Mol. The police, in the name of the law, seek Velutha out and in the name of justice arrest him. There is nothing strange about the incident. After all, it is the duty of the police to bring criminals to justice. However, what is strange is the manner used by the police to execute their mission:

They were opening a bottle or shutting a tap cracking an egg to make an omelette, sent to collect the dues from those who broke its laws. Impelled by feelings that were primal yet paradoxically wholly impersonal. Feelings of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear... power's fear of powerlessness. Man's subliminal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify. Structure order complete monopoly. It was human history masquerading as God's purpose. They were not arresting a man; they were exorcizing fear Touchable policemen acted with economy not frenzy, efficiency not anarchy, responsibility, not hysteria. (308-309)

The application of the law in itself is normal, but the manner of this application is puzzling. Roy calls it "a clinical demonstration in controlled

conditions” (308). It is as if a disease or an epidemic had been diagnosed and it is their duty, as protectors of society, to eradicate it. They perform their job efficiently and with “economy “as if they had been trained for it. It is not a mission to bring a criminal to justice, but revenge against those who defy power or deviate from the norms. They beat Velutha almost to death and even though he no longer poses a threat, they handcuff him. The police are portrayed not as humans, but as mechanical apparatuses whose job is to fix and protect the machine. Anger and frenzy would have made the mission less brutal because such feelings would humanize the police. One wonders if this power is the result of their official duty, or if it is something much deeper than that. So, this power seems to be “rooted deep in the social nexus” as Foucault describes it in *Power/Knowledge*. In other words, this power is not so much official duty, but power enmeshed in their personality, as a result of cultural beliefs and social values to which they have been subjected. It is power endowed to them by history and even by religion. By restricting the rights of Untouchables, religion empowers the police. In the same conversation between Foucault and Deleuze mentioned previously, Foucault describes power exercised as punishment:

Power is manifested in its naked state, in its most excessive form, and where it is justified as a moral force. Power doesn't hide or mask itself. It reveals itself as tyranny pursued in the tiniest details; it is cynical and at the same time pure and entirely justified because its practice can be entirely formulated within the framework of morality. Its brutal tyranny consequently appears as the serene domination of good over Evil of Order over Disorder. (Deleuze, 1986)

The above definition of power reminds us of the exercise of power in the previous passage. The power of the police is completely justified and ethical because

they are defending society against those who break the norms and cause chaos. They are applying the law, but the manner of application clearly reveals that their power is formed at the local everyday level of interaction. Like Vellya Paapen and Mammachi, the police seem to be acting out of their subjection to knowledge. The disciplinary power mechanisms have transformed them into docile subjects ready to execute their mission. This reminds us of the significance of the power/ knowledge nexus. The police have internalized the norms of society and the knowledge that it is their duty to punish those who deviate from the norms of society.

The power of the police is not the power of law alone. It is rather the interplay of power relations. Velutha allows the kids to paint his nails as part of a game. After Velutha is beaten almost to death, “they (the police) noticed his painted nails. One of them held them up and waved the fingers coquettishly at the others. They laughed” (311). The paint or nail polish on the nails of a man has its own special punishment too. One policeman “lifted his boots and brought it down with a soft thud (311), crushing Velutha’s male organ. Velutha is now being punished for deviancy from the norms –for both class deviancy and for gender deviancy. He is punished for the polished nails because according to the dominant knowledge they had interpolated, nail polish is a feminine construct. His male body is being subjected to the disciplinary power of cultural and social knowledge. Had Velutha been a woman, he would have been saved from the pain of the last thud at least.

Caste in India is gender blind as revealed in the novel and in the codes of conduct that govern marital and sexual relations. “A Dalit male who had had sexual relations with a Brahmin woman would be punished by “having his penis severed and his wealth confiscated, and if the woman has a husband or patron of some kind, these above two punishments will be followed by death” (Yamazaki,1997:

6).Analyses of the lisesituations of characters in this novel reveal that social constructions like gender and class interact and intersect on multiple and often simultaneous levels, thereby contributing to social injustices and inequalities imposed upon Indian women and marginalized groups such as Untouchables.

In *The God of Small Things*, Ammu is forced to suffer multiple forms of oppression too. She does not receive college education: “Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl” (38). Ammu breaks the taboo once when she marries a Hindu, twice when she divorces him, and thrice when she has an affair with the Untouchable, Velutha. As a result, she has to be punished by all. Ammu is locked up, separated from her children and left to die at the age of 31. After death, she is punished by being deprived of a proper funeral: “The church refuses to bury Ammu (162). We are not told exactly why she is refused a proper burial. Regardless of her class, Ammu is beaten by her father and abused both mentally and physically. Pappachi, her father, “flogged her with his ivory-handled riding crop. Ammu didn’t cry. When he finished beating her, he made her bring him Mammachi’s pinking shears from her sewing cupboard” (181), and while Ammu watches, her father “shreds her new gumboots with her mother’s pinking shears” (181).

After marriage, her husband beats her and tries to prostitute her to his boss in order to maintain his job. Her brother Chacko, the learned “Oxford Man” refuses to give her a share of the inheritance: “What is yours is mine, and what’s mine is mine” (57). Even the law represented by inspector Thomas, at the police headquarters, deprives her of her right as witness. When she discovers that Baby, her aunt, had given the police a false account implicating Velutha as a rapist and a murderer, she goes to the police to set things right. However, she is shunned and humiliated by

inspector Thomas who “Stared at Ammu’s breasts as she spoke: He said that the police knew all they needed to know and that the Kottayan police didn’t take statements from Veshyas (prostitutes) or their illegitimate children” (8). Perhaps, here the inspector is punishing Ammu not for being a woman, but for abandoning the norms of her class and taking sides with an Untouchable. Ironically, even Ammu’s high class does not save her from oppression. On the contrary, had she been an Untouchable, she could have married and loved Velutha. In fact, her high class status oppresses her as a woman. She is trapped by the very power that would have made Velutha acceptable. Had she been a man, she would have been able to love an Untouchable woman. The Manusmriti text, one of the sacred texts of Hinduism, formally written down perhaps 2000 years ago, distinguishes between such classes:

A ‘Twice-Born’ man was permitted to marry a Sudra woman to procreate children, *if he found no woman of his own caste*. However, if a ‘Twice-Born’ woman married a Sudra, her children would be untouchables and outcastes, and further the higher the rank of the woman, the lower the rank of her untouchable children. If a Brahmin woman married a Sudra, her children would be Chandalas, the lowest of the untouchables, fit only to be scavengers, and skin dead animals” (O’Flaherty 1991).

In other words, had Ammu been a male, it would have been acceptable to have a sexual relationship with an Untouchable woman, just as her own brother, Chacko, was permitted to have relationships with women of lower castes. Mammachi, her mother, might even facilitate the circumstances of the affair as she does with Chacko, providing the means and the place for the relationship as mentioned earlier. It seems that women are potential victims of oppression no matter

which form this oppression takes. Audre Lorde, in one of her speeches claims that “black females are assailed on all sides, on so many fronts that words like double or triple jeopardy are simply inadequate descriptions” (61). True, Lorde, in her speech, is referring to Black women of low class, but this description also applies to Indian and non-western women who are forced to suffer both gender and class oppression regardless of their privileged class. Ammu does more work in the pickle factory they own than Chacko, her brother, yet she is not only deprived of her share of the inheritance, but she is also deprived of any wages due her as an employee. The women of lower classes who work in the factory are paid for their work, but Ammu is not. In other words, Ammu is oppressed because of her high class.

It is true that Mammachi through her docility, participates in the oppression of both Velutha and her own daughter, Ammu, but she, too, is a victim of both class and gender oppression. Mammachi, who is seventeen years younger than her husband, is beaten daily with a brass vase (47). When the violin teacher mentions Mammachi’s skills on the instrument, Pappachi, Mammachi’s husband, forbids her from taking any more lessons: “The lessons were abruptly discontinued when Mammachi’s teacher, LaunskyTieffenthal, made the mistake of telling Pappachi that his wife was exceptionally talented and in his opinion, potentially concert class” (47). True, Pappachi prevents his wife from taking violin lessons, but he is not able to extinguish her passion for the instrument. Even after Pappachi breaks the bow of Mammachi’s violin and throws it into the river, she does not surrender. In fact, following this episode, Mammachi continues to play the violin at home and especially in front of special visitors. When her granddaughter, Sophie Mol, and her daughter-in-law, Margaret arrive in India, Mammachi “played a Welcome Home,

Our Sophie Mol melody on her violin” (47). The violin continues to be Mammachi’s pride and joy regardless of Pappachi’s attempts to stifle her talents.

Mammachi is forced to abandon the violin lessons, but she does not surrender. The Kottayam Bible Society has a fair and Mammachi is asked to make some jam and pickles. The products sell quickly, and Mammachi discovers that she has more orders than she is able to cope with. Thrilled with her success, she decides to pursue the idea, and soon starts her own factory, producing home-made pickles and jam in her own kitchen. The factory soon becomes a profitable enterprise.

Though profitable and productive on the local, regional, and national level, Mammachi’s work is not taken seriously or regarded professionally by the patriarchal society because it is seen not as work, but as the product of a mere housewife. Mammachi’s situation reminds us of Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s article: *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* in which Mohanty praises the analyses of the Indian writer Mies and her (1982) study of the lace-makers of Narsapur, India. Mies’ study analyzes the household industry in which “housewives” produce lace doilies for international consumption, and concludes that the lace producers are defined as “nonworking housewives” and their work as “leisure time activity,” revealing that the “ideology of the housewife,” is “the effect of a certain historically and culturally specific mode of patriarchal organization, an organization constructed on the basis of the definition of the lace-makers as nonworking housewives at familial, local, regional, statewide, and international levels”(31). Both Mammachi and the lace makers perceive themselves and are perceived by society as petty commodity producers rather than as workers. Mammachi sees herself as a housewife and her work as the production of her kitchen. Again, it seems that women’s salvation depends on questioning and

redefining the taken for granted “truths” and knowledge upon which women and their production are identified.

Mammachi’s skills as an entrepreneur are again halted by her gender and class. Her husband does not encourage the idea because “he did not consider pickle-making a suitable job for a high-ranking ex-government official” (48). She is a respectable high class housewife and has no need or right to work. Had she been a member of a lower class, work would have been desirable if not necessary. She herself employs women of low class to help her run the factory. According to Mies’ study of Narsapur women, most of the Kapu women uphold patriarchal norms and look down with disgust upon women who are permitted to work outside the house like “women of other lower castes; however, these respectable house wives cannot ignore the fact that these women are earning more money precisely because they are not respectable housewives but workers” (33). In India, women’s housework is rendered invisible in a patriarchal society. Mammachi, too, is oppressed because she is a working woman from a high class.

When Chacko, Mammachi’s son, returns to Ayemenem, he takes over the factory, registering it as a partnership and informing Mammachi that she is the “sleeping partner” (57) which means that legally she owns nothing. He invests in equipment and expands the labor force, naming the factory *Paradise Pickles & Preserves*. Interestingly, as soon as Chacko takes over the management, the factory, which had been up to that time, a small but profitable enterprise run by Mammachi, as a large kitchen, begins its financial slide. And what is more interesting is that “whenever anything serious happened in the factory, it was always to Mammachi and not Chacko that the news was brought” (122). The mother remains the actual manager of the factory, but legally and officially, the factory belongs to Chacko. His

gender renders him the sole rightful owner of the enterprise, regardless of his qualifications and his work. Being a man means that the factory is his right by law and by tradition. Even though Mammachi, the owner of the factory, and Ammu, the daughter, do more work in the factory than Chacko, “whenever he was dealing with food inspectors or sanitary engineers, he always referred to it as my factory, my pineapples, my pickles”(57). Legally this is the case, because Ammu, as a daughter, has no claim to the property and Mammachi, the rightful owner is no more than a sleeping partner.

Pappachi, the husband, who resents the attention his wife is suddenly getting, tries to arouse public opinion against Mammachi. “In the evenings, when he(Pappachi) knew visitors were expected, he would sit on the verandah and sew buttons that weren’t missing onto his shirts, to create the impression that Mammachi neglected him”(48). Pappachi’s attempt to expose Mammachi’s negligence as a wife reveals how dominant practices empower patriarchy with tactics to strengthen power. Pappachi knows that society would sympathize with him as a neglected husband and would indict Mammachi because, as a wife, she has duties towards her husband. Actually, Pappachi is not only indicting Mammachi as a woman, but by revealing her violation of his supposed rights as a husband, he is sending the message that working housewives neglect their family duties. In fact, Pappachi is producing a corpus of knowledge that supports power. In the novel, we are told that Pappachi “to some small degree he did succeed in further corroding Ayemenem’s view of working wives” (48). By insinuating that his wife is neglecting her duties as a housewife, Pappachi is sending a social message that housewives neglect their duties as wives when they perform any other work.

3.3 Resistance in *The God of Small Things*

Before we can describe women and marginalized groups as either docile or resistant, perhaps we ought to try to define our understanding of the term resistance. What does it mean to resist? The malleability of the term itself seems to be problematic. I mean can the silence of the oppressed or the spontaneous rejection of the acceptance of oppression be called resistance? Can learning to live with power according to one's own terms be called resistance? Is the ability to define oneself a form of resistance? Perhaps, again, before we answer these questions, it is first necessary to examine not only the private experiences of these people in their local context, but also to analyze the intricacies and the effects of power networks on this particular group of people who confront multiple forms of oppression.

The novel, *The God of Small Things*, reveals that resistance springs up whenever and wherever power is exercised. In *The God of Small Things*, resistance to power is sometimes voiceless. Estha, Ammu's son, combats the oppression of power or at least adjusts to it with silence. Estha, as a young boy, is sexually abused by the "Orange Lemon Drink Man" (115) at the theater. Estha is sent to a juice shop because he cannot keep quiet during the show. The shopkeeper takes advantage of the young boy and forces him to perform sexual favors. Estha is humiliated and devastated by the act. After the death of his half-English cousin, Sophie Mol, and the scandal of his mother's love affair with Velutha, Estha, still a youth, is chosen by Baby, his mother's aunt, to go into Velutha's cell and falsely condemn him as his abductor and murderer of his cousin, Sophie Mol. Baby, the aunt, manipulates Estha by convincing him that if he does not testify against Velutha, his whole family would be jailed. In addition to such traumas, Estha is forced to be separated from his twin sister, Rahel, and from his mother, Ammu. He is "re-returned" to Calcutta to live

with his own father and step-mother. In Calcutta, Estha becomes mute and withdraws from the world as if he has given up on speech. His silence is resembled to the “psychological equivalent of what lung fish do to get themselves through the dry season. However, unlike lungfish, Estha’s dry season looked as though it would last forever” (318). It is as if Estha’s silence is his protective shield or at least his way of adapting in order to survive.

Perhaps, Estha feels that his muteness is more effective than his voice. We must remember that his voice or his speech is used against him when he is forced to lie to protect himself and his family. Estha is abandoned by his own family when he is sent away. After the death of his cousin, Sophie Mol, Estha is exploited by his mother’s aunt when he is forced to protect the family name following the scandal of the love affair of his mother. So by becoming mute, he is at least, in control of his own body. His ability to control his own voice makes him stronger. Had Estha not talked, he would not have been able to condemn Velutha and live forever regretting his act. It is as if Estha is depriving power of the weapon that had been used to oppress him, namely his words. Silence serves him better than speech. Estha merely blocks himself from the world. His silence is his escape from oppression. His resistance may seem ineffectual on both the personal and the collective level, but considering the previously mentioned multiple forces of oppression Estha confronted, perhaps silence or muteness is the only choice available to him.

Does Ammu resist patriarchal oppression or is she merely pushed to the periphery by all the injustice she is forced to confront? In other words, perhaps Ammu’s resistance is subconsciously induced by power. Ammu is persecuted most of her life. As a child, she is bullied by her father who beats her and humiliates her for no reason. As a woman, she is abused by her husband who asks her to sleep with his boss so he could maintain his job.

As a divorcee, she is oppressed by society: men think they have a right to sexual favors from her and women pity her because she lacks the protection and security of a husband. She is bullied by her family who regard her as a parasite, living in their house and eating their food. All this pushes her to the periphery and causes her to rebel against this oppression. She learns to live with this power, somewhat on her own terms. It gives her the strength to adapt to her conditions. She breaks the taboo and loves the Untouchable Velutha. It is as if she is pushed to the limits, and it is this pushing which endows her with strength to adapt and survive. She develops her own self-defense mechanism, a natural defense system against oppression of power.

As she grew older, Ammu learned to live with this cold, calculating cruelty. She developed a lofty sense of injustice and the mulish, reckless streak that develops in Someone Small who has been bullied all their lives by Someone Big. She did exactly nothing to avoid quarrels and confrontations. In fact, it could be argued that she sought them out, perhaps even enjoyed them. (181-182)

In order to understand Ammu's action, again it seems that we must analyze her experience in its local and historical context.

3.4. Changes Achieved Via Power Relations

A closer look at Ammu's life reveals that her resistance to power does little to minimize or alleviate her oppression, but it certainly changes her life and the lives of those around her. In fact, it could be said that this resistance is itself the result of power relations. Ammu is initially driven into marriage because she sees marriage as an escape from her parental home. She chooses her husband because he is the last resort to her escape: "All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the

clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother” (44). In other words, her marriage is not an independent choice, but an act provoked by patriarchy: Ammu is pushed into the marriage in the hope that she would escape from her own family. When her husband proposes to her five days after they first meet, Ammu does not pretend to be in love with him. “She just weighed the odds and accepted: She thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem” (44). Ammu is under no illusion that she is marrying because to her it seems that this marriage is the only available option for escape.

Later, when Ammu can no longer stand life with her Hindu husband, a drunkard who beats and abuses her, she decides to divorce him and return, unwelcomed, to her parents in Ayemenem. The act is again not so much a choice of will, but another available option that she knows would offer her little consolation. Ammu returns to everything that she has fled from. Again, Ammu is aware that she is worse off than before since she is forced to suffer the fate of a “divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage as well as a mother of twins” (44) who has no position in her parental home or anywhere in her community. Regardless of the source of this resistance or its result, Ammu does reject her situation, and though this rejection does not offer her much salvation from oppression, it does give her a voice. Ammu knows that marrying a Hindu can only bring wrath upon her from both her family and society. She also knows that a divorce is not acceptable in her society, but she refuses to live with a husband who abuses her both mentally and physically. Ammu also knows that her love affair with the Untouchable Velutha, who is shunned by society, provokes her family and her society, but she chooses to love him anyway. When she discovers that Velutha is wrongly accused of raping her and abducting her children and her niece, she refuses to be silenced by the police and by

her family even when she knows that her confession would not save him and would only reveal her as a disrespected woman.

Moreover, Ammu is aware of her oppressive situation. On more than one occasion she voices her opinion of the patriarchal system. When Chacko, her brother, informs Estha and Rahel that Ammu cannot have her family inheritance, Ammu retorts "Thanks to our wonderful male chauvinist society" (57). Ammu does not only try to change her life by her continuous struggle with power forces, but she herself is changed during the process. A few years after her divorce, when Ammu looks at herself in her wedding photographs, Ammu feels "the woman that looked back at her was someone else." She sees herself as a "foolish jeweled bride" with her "silk sunset-colored sari shot with gold" and "rings on every finger", while white dots of sandalwood decorate her arched eyebrows. When Ammu sees herself like this, she feels bitter because "she had permitted herself to be so painstakingly decorated before being led to the gallows" (44). Ammu, at this instant, does not only reject the image of the traditional Indian bride, but she also refuses to allow her body to be a site for decoration or permit it to be subjected to dominant social and cultural practices. Analyzed and seen in this local context, Ammu's actions and reactions in power relations can only be described as forms of resistance.

Power not only produces new forms of knowledge, but it also creates subjects and identities. When Velutha refuses to accept the restrictions imposed on him by his class, Velutha challenges the taken-for-granted perceptions of knowledge about Untouchables and the socially-constructed identity of an Untouchable. His rejection of this identity as an Untouchable (He performs other than menial jobs; he continues his studies; he loves women of high classes; he becomes an active member in political parties) opens up possibilities that question the internalized knowledge that

permits power to exercise oppression through the caste system in India and creates new identities and subjects who refuse to accept the limitations dictated on their characters by culture and society. Challenge to such knowledge opens up possibilities for new forms of resistance. This challenge questions the existing knowledge concerning Untouchables and provokes reevaluation of this knowledge, and perhaps even shakes the supposed identity of Untouchables.

Dalits or Untouchables in India are excluded from engaging themselves in reading and learning professions and participating in religious customs and ceremonies. Velutha questions this system when he breaks its rules. Velutha goes to school and learns carpentry. Velutha fixes everything around the Ayemenem house, from the factory's canning machine to the cherub fountain in Baby Kochamma's garden. As a member of the communist party, he becomes active politically refusing to be excluded from social and political life. Velutha also dares not only to touch, but to love Ammu, the Syrian Christian. Velutha dies or is beaten to death as a result of this resistance to power, but he "leaves a hole in history" (307), a hole that would perhaps be widened by future generations who follow his example by resisting and not necessarily in the same manner nor with the same results, thus creating oppositional practices that oppose power. Velutha, like Ammu, tries to alter his conditions. He could have lived his life as his brother, Kattapan, who is described as a "good safe, Paravan" (207). Kattapan could neither read nor write and that is important because, as long as Untouchables remain simple and naïve, they are acceptable in their communities. The moment they become questioning and assertive and aware of their rights they become dangerous. The knowledge /power base of the hegemonic systems are again evoked here. Velutha's refuses to remain a safe Paravan.

Today, discrimination on the basis of caste is illegal under the law; however, in India such discrimination still continues to be a social evil experienced every day in several forms. It is true that laws and acts imposed against discrimination of any kind may reduce injustice and domination, but what is also true is that discrimination cannot be confronted by laws and acts alone because acts and laws are likely to be implemented in their letter not in their spirit. This is perhaps why non-western feminists maintain that women's lives should be analyzed and their resistance be studied at the local, everyday level where power is most exercised and resistance is most perceived. In other words, resistance must be multi-faceted if oppression is to be reduced.

Resistance solely on the macro-level may not be sufficient in alleviating oppression because no one is above the power matrix and this means that discrimination could be practiced by the police and the jurisdiction system. In "Towards Equality: Promoting Human Rights of the Untouchables in India." *Essays on International Human Rights*. (1991): 117-144, the Indian critic, Vijapur, claims that:

the perpetrators of atrocities against Dalits and offences of Untouchability are rarely punished" because "there is a big gap in the registration of cases of crimes against Dalits in police stations and the rate of acquittals by the judiciary..... in 1999-2000 and 2000-2001, as much as eighty-nine percent of cases resulted in acquittals. (177-144)

In other words, the law alone cannot serve the marginalized simply because those who apply the law, just like the police in the novel, *The God of Small Things*, are not outside power relations. The application of the law is going to be affected by power relations and the dominant practices that prevail in that particular community.

Chapter Four

The Story of Zahra

4.1 Summary of *The Story of Zahra*

Originally written in Arabic, *The Story of Zahra* (1986) by Hanan al-Shaykh has been translated into 21 languages and is still the object of academic study. Set in Lebanon, during the Civil War (1975), the novel deals with taboo subjects such as sexuality, domestic violence, and politics. The story of Zahra is divided in two sections: the first entitled “*The Scars of Peace*” consists of the voices of Zahra, her uncle Hashem, and her husband Majed, whom Zahra marries for a short period before she returns to Lebanon where the Civil War has erupted. The title of the section “*Scars of Peace*” reveals the scars imprinted on the body and psyche of Zahra and the other characters in the novel, scars that have mutilated not only women, but also male characters in the novel.

The second section of the novel is narrated solely by Zahra. It presents details of Zahra’s life during the civil war, focusing primarily on Zahra’s sexual relationship with a sniper. Zahra is repelled by the war and by the sectarian killings, and especially by the changes that had affected people, particularly her brother who had joined a militia and had become a fighter, a drug addict, a looter and a murderer. Despite her fear of the war, or perhaps as a result of this fear, Zahra becomes implicated in the war and decides to fight using the only weapons she believes available for her as a woman, her sexuality and her body. She convinces herself that her relationship with the sniper would perhaps save a few people, at least during her

sexual intercourse with the sniper. Zahra becomes pregnant, and when she informs the sniper of her situation, he murders her.

As in the novel, *The God of Small Things*, this study will analyze the power relations at work within the story. The main concern will be the resistance of characters to cultural, social, and patriarchal power through the interplay of power relations, demonstrating that power only exists in action and can have no sole monopoly in power relations. It is an open arena for struggle. However, as in *The God of Small Things*, this exercise of power, though available to all, does not offer equal positions prior and during interaction because of already privileged positions, and this gives some characters, especially men, the upper-hand and limits the actions of others, especially women. Nevertheless, even when characters seem fatally passive and submissive to power, there is always an act of resistance, a defiance that alters all actors and renders them powerful and powerless at the same time. The Lebanese society doesn't suffer from caste discrimination, as in India, but the patriarchal system is perhaps just as severe, especially when working in correlation with gender inequality and oppressive social and cultural norms.

4.2 Power relations in *The Story of Zahra*

Although, *The Story of Zahra*, has been widely studied by feminists and other critics alike as a work which mainly deals with the oppression of Zahra in a male-dominated society, Hanan al -Shaykh, herself, rejects the idea that Zahra is merely a victim of a patriarchal system and that Zahra is the only victim or even a victim in the novel. In an interview with Paula Sunderman, in the *Michigan Quarterly Review*, al-Shaykh claims, "I feel that [women] are victims of society more than victims of men because men are sometimes victims of society as well. They have to obey it, but

a vicious cycle ensues because men are behind the wheels of social change” (629). Hanan’s al-Shaykh’s opinion of Zahra’s situation seems to echo that of non-western feminists: women’s oppression is the result of gender inequality, but this inequality exists alongside other forces and is the product and the effect of oppressive forces of power structure embedded in religion, law, class, society and culture. In *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, Chandra Talpade Mohanty maintains that to understand this oppression, women’s experiences must be analyzed within concrete historical, political, and local settings. To merely presume that men exploit and women are exploited, reinforces binary divisions between men and women and overlooks other differences, masking the many multiple forms of discrimination against women, and thus perpetuating their oppression. Analysis of women’s lives requires that non-western women be seen as whole people in their actual complexities — as individuals, as women, as Lebanese, as Indian— rather than as merely passive victims of male-dominated societies. (Mohanty 19-42)

Zahra is a victim of her own family. She is oppressed by her own father, who consciously or unconsciously implants fear into her life, the fear that is mainly responsible for Zahra’s schizoid self. Zahra’s father is a tyrannical patriarchal figure par excellence, represented by Zahra as a Hitler figure. He is “The lord of the tram-car” (14) who sees “life in terms of black and white” (24). He beats Zahra and her mother in order to force them into confession about the truth of the mother’s affair. However, it is not primarily this physical battering which causes Zahra’s mental instability; her father also verbally abuses her every time he sees her fingering her pimples: “He would scold me severely whenever he caught me playing with my pimples. My father would go raving mad every time he noticed my face and its problems. He would say sarcastically that will be the day when Zahra married. What

a day of joy for her pock-marked face” (24-25). Zahra recalls how in Beirut she would seek refuge in the bathroom to escape her father’s scrutinizing look: “Each morning, I merely locked the bathroom door and stayed a prisoner, as I used to seek refuge in the bathroom back home in Beirut when I was afraid of my father’s penetrating eyes, afraid he would discover what I had grown into, afraid he would kill me” (24). So, it is not just the physical violence that she fears, but the all-encompassing god-like figure of a father who is forever watching her, monitoring her movements, and even her thoughts, trying to make sure that Zahra is the chaste young girl she should be. Zahra monitors herself. This again reminds us of Foucault’s panopticon which disciplines subjects to practice surveillance over themselves and their actions.

To fully understand Zahra’s fear of the father, it is important to understand the role the father figure plays in upholding the family honor in Zahra’s Lebanese society. Zahra’s father would, as Zahra avows on several occasions, kill her if she ever came to swerve from the strict moral code of a Muslim girl. Understood in this context, Zahra’s fear is justified, especially if we consider official reports on honor crimes in some regions in Lebanon where honor killings still prevail and often, the male relative confesses to his crime because he believes he is not only erasing the shame brought to the name of the family, but, because the punishment for such crimes is usually very light. The article titled: *Lebanese Man Impregnates His Sister, Kills Her in 'Honor Crime*, in the Naharnet, reveals that Zahra’s fear of the father figure springs from the reality of her experience as a Lebanese woman living in a particular society, and should be viewed within this context. The article maintains that:

There are no exact official numbers about honor killings of women in Lebanon; many honor killings are arranged to look like accidents, but the figure is believed to be 40 to 50 per year.

(Lebanese Man Impregnates His Sister, Kills Her in 'Honor Crime)

Perceived in this context, Zahra's fear is very real. Zahra is not confronting a tyrannical father, an individual, but she is up against a whole system of power relations ready to condemn her if she deviates from the norms upheld by her society, and that is why Zahra's fear of losing her reputation as a virtuous woman is so overwhelming to her. Zahra wants to preserve the image of "the mature girl who says little, Zahra the princess, as my grandfather dubbed me. Zahra the stay – at – home, who blushes for any or for no reason, Zahra the hardworking student... Zahra, in whose mouth butter would not melt, who has never smiled at any man, not even at her brothers friends" (40).

However, it is not enough to conclude that the father is merely practicing violence on Zahra and her mother. In fact, it would be too simplistic to attribute this oppression to a dualistic or binary struggle of male/female dichotomy. Zahra's father is a traditional figure who believes that it is his religious duty as a Muslim to protect his daughter and wife. Like Velutha's father, Vellya Paapen, Zahra's father believes he is fulfilling his duty as the head of the family. When he beats Zahra and her mother, he is not only punishing the mother's possible transgression of the marriage covenant, but also her possible transgression of socially enforced codes of conduct. The father has internalized his role according to the dominant or established knowledge prevailing in his society: the belief that it is a father's duty to punish his family, and particularly the women in his family when they deviate from the social, religious, and even traditional norms of society. The father does not question,

reexamine, or criticize these practices because to him, they are unquestionable truths. These dominant practices play multiple roles in power relations; they legitimize the father's actions, allowing him to exercise power over his family, as this knowledge and these practices have established themselves as truths. Zahra's father internalizes this knowledge and becomes subjected to it. Basically, he loses his individuality and becomes a tool within power relations. In the mind of the father, Zahra and her mother are already constituted as subjects on the basis of his sociological notion of women. So, prior their entries into the arena of social relations, women like Zahra, are forced to confront their already socially-constituted identities as women.

Interestingly, Zahra's father seems to reinforce the culturally constructed notions of beauty and femininity. A woman must have a pimple-free complexion. He realizes that a woman, who does not fit the standards of beauty, might become a spinster with no marriage prospects. To him, Zahra and women in general should have one aim in life: they must ensure that their looks are in line with the norms of society in order to find a husband. Not once does the father encourage Zahra to pursue her education even though she is studious in school. On the other hand, Ahmad, Zahra's brother, though lazy, is encouraged to pursue his higher education in America. The father has internalized a role, like Velutha's father, he has become "the principle of his own subjection" (Foucault 203), fulfilling a role endowed to him by a set of cultural, religious, and patriarchal forces. Ironically, both Velutha's father and Zahra's father believe that they are acting as the protectors and saviors of their family, whereas in reality they are protecting the power mechanism they have internalized.

Zahra is shown to suffer multiple forms of oppression and exploitation, primarily at the hands of men, but also, significantly, Zahra is oppressed by her

mother, too. The novel begins with Zahra's first memory of her mother's infidelity. The mother tells both Zahra and the husband that she is taking Zahra to the doctor to give her calcium injections. When Zahra innocently questions her mother about the need for such injections, the mother responds: "Isn't it enough that I have sold my gold bracelets to buy you your calcium injections? Don't you see how bow-legged you are?" (4). Zahra is used by her own mother: the mother needs Zahra as an excuse to meet her lover and to protect her from suspicion. Zahra remembers with resentment: "She actually needed my protection .She wanted me to shield her" (13). So, Zahra is made self-conscious of her physical shortcomings and at the same time she is made to feel guilty for being the reason for her mother's sacrifice and the selling of her gold bracelets to pay for Zahra's injections. Moreover, Zahra is forced to lie to her father and to bear his battering and rage when he suspects that he has been duped and his honor threatened by his wife in collaboration with Zahra.

Zahra is also silenced by her mother. In another scene of the novel, Zahra and her mother, after visiting the mother's lover, hide in a dark room in their home in order to escape detection by the father who has somehow been informed of the mother's affair. The mother presses her hand on her daughter's mouth to prevent her from revealing their hiding place. She actually impedes her vocality and silences her.

The mother also contributes to a large extent to gender inequalities that oppress Zahra and impede her autonomy. This is manifested in the distribution of food as Zahra explains: "Every evening it was the same. My mother would never give me a single morsel of meat. This she always reserved for Ahmad, sometimes for my father" (11). This favoring molds Zahra's sense of gender inequality and negative self-image. Zahra is made to feel as the inferior "other" (Beauvoir xxii). The mother transmits the idea that women, as a category, are subordinated as men's "other". Even

in the distribution of food, men are favored and privileged. This idea is later implanted in the mind and psyche of Zahra when the mother lies to protect Ahmad from his father's rage as a result of his dubious absences from home.

Interestingly, Zahra's mother seems to have internalized the patriarchal system, but only as a transmitting agent, instilling its values and imposing its norms on Zahra, without being touched herself. She is the carrier who transmits disciplinary power: the mother, a Muslim, traditional married woman has multiple love affairs, covers her tracks to elude the watchful eyes of people in a strict conservative society. Zahra's mother uses religion to shield herself and dupe her husband: "I'd swear a thousand times. I swear by the Qur'an. I swear by the shrine of Sitt Zaynab" (15). Zahra's mother knows that to protect herself she must be ready to use whatever means possible. She even bribes her own brother, Hashem, when he discovers that she is having a love affair: "Fatima was always trying to bribe me after she knew I had found out about her love affair with a man that wasn't her husband" (69). It seems the mother is able to subvert or at least dodge the disciplinary mechanism of power. So, is the mother an active subject in the power relations, or is she just as subjected to power as her own husband? Analysis of her life situation reveals that she is a mixture of both.

Regardless of society's moral stand on the mother's conduct and the means she uses to confront power relations, Zahra's mother is not a mere victim of the patriarchal system because she resists and challenges this system by having a love affair despite all the restrictions imposed on her as a woman. However, the mother ensures the continuation of cycles of gendered oppression when she instills in her daughter the patriarchal notion of gender inequality as previously mentioned. It seems women can become the instrument of their own oppression. In a paper

delivered at the Modern Language Association convention in December 1977, *The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action*, Audre Lorde maintains that women “need to root out the pieces of the oppressor which are planted deeply within each of us”. In other words, because women are not outside power relations, they may become subjected to power and act in accordance with its dominant practices and established knowledge.

4.3 Resistance in *The Story of Zahra*

Zahra is often misunderstood by readers and critics alike because of her inability to vocalize her needs. In an interview with Mai Munasa, in Al Jadid Digital issue 50, *Hanan al-Shaykh* refers to *The Story of Zahra* in the article: *My Story is an Extended Commentary*, Mai Munasa asks the author about the reaction of a group of university students to *The Story of Zahra*, al-Shaykh responds, “They were all of one mind: how can the girl so willingly accept her status as victim? Why didn’t she object or rebel? I tried to explain to them that Zahra came from a different environment from theirs” (7). This group of English university students perceive Zahra as a passive victim: they cannot understand why she accepts her situation and are even infuriated by her morbid passivity. The students’ questions reveal that they do not see any resistance in Zahra’s actions or reactions. Because the students define Zahra in terms of their own experience alone, Zahra becomes “other,” the outsider whose experience and resistance is too “alien” to comprehend. The students expect Zahra to rebel against her oppressive situation in ways that they themselves would have done. What is problematic here is that by setting up their own experiences and methods of resistance as the implicit referents, that is, the yardstick by which to measure the resistance of others, the students fail to understand Zahra’s resistance.

In another interview with Maya Jaggi, Jaggi explains that according to al-Shaykh "there was a gap; in the West, they thought she was weak, but in the Arab world they know how difficult it is to break out of customs" (Jaggi). Perhaps this is exactly the point. Zahra is being judged outside her personal experience. She is categorized as a docile subject, unable to actively fashion her identity. We should remember that Zahra is produced and constituted as a woman through the complex interaction between culture, religion, and other ideological institutions. So in order to judge Zahra, we should situate her within her particular local Lebanese context. To be defined solely on the basis of her gender identity, completely bypassing her other social identities misinterprets her experience and her resistance.

Zahra's short tragic life and morbid death are loaded with instances of resistance. Throughout the novel, she finds ways to defy cultural norms, patriarchy and ingrained social structures by subverting the disciplinary power used to violate her body and mind into a weapon of her own. She allocates herself her own private space, even if it is only a bathroom. Zahra escapes the panoptical gaze by resorting to the bathroom. She locks herself in the bathroom in both Beirut and in Africa, demonstrating agency through utilizing already existing spaces for her own needs. In other words, Zahra reallocates the purpose of the bathroom for her own needs: this already existing space is used by Zahra as an escape route, a private space where she is temporarily free from the oppressive world around her.

Zahra utilizes her own body to lash back at the disciplinary powers that try to monitor, regulate, and discipline her. Despite her fear of her father, Zahra refuses to comply with his wishes: when her father scolds her for picking at her pimples, Zahra continues defiantly to purposely scar her face, showing his failure to exercise control over her body. Zahra remarks: "I would hurry to the mirror to inspect in the calm

light of day the ravages of the latest onslaught” (24). Why does Zahra insist on mutilating her face?

By scarring her face, Zahra conveys multiple messages; she asserts that she alone controls her body; she rejects her father’s authority; and above all she rejects the ideals of femininity imposed on her as a woman. Zahra knows that a mutilated face might diminish her chances of finding a husband. According to Bartky “Women internalize the feminine ideal so profoundly that they lack the critical distance necessary to contest it and are even fearful of the consequences of noncompliance, and ideals of femininity are so powerful that to reject their supporting practices is to reject one's own identity” (Deavoux 226). Zahra contests this feminine ideal of a beautiful complexion and is not fearful of the consequences of “noncompliance” nor is she afraid to reject the merits they would provide. Zahra reveals that women are not “robotic receptacles of culture,” (Deavoux 227) but active agents able to contest ideals of femininity, designed to control them. By shunning the ideals of femininity that would ultimately secure her marriage prospects, Zahra reveals that she is not a docile subject, and is ready to define herself outside the parameters of the norms of society.

Initially, sex, is used to demean and destroy Zahra on several occasions, especially in her relationship with Malek, whose name means possessor. Malek, a friend of Zahra’s brother, is a hypocrite who seduces Zahra and uses her as an object of sexual convenience. Zahra passively submits to his sexual demands, mesmerized as if she were fulfilling a role she was made for. Basically, she seems to be a product and an effect of power relations and her implication in the exercise of power appears to be erased. In her relationship with Malek, she just obeys regardless of how she feels about him and the whole affair. She admits that she “felt sick but followed

nevertheless” (31) and “shivered every time” (32), but Zahra has no idea why she continues coming to the garage.

However, in Africa Zahra begins to change. She refuses to be cast in roles. As soon as she sets foot in Africa, Zahra realizes that her uncle, Hashem, envisions her as a symbol of the Lebanon he left behind. So, for Hashem, Zahra becomes a representation of his lost dream land, but Zahra rejects this role. Hashem is accused of “political hooliganism” (50) by members of his own political party because of his extreme views and his belief that his own party possess the truth and therefore all other parties should be exterminated. Hashem is forced to leave the country and flee to Africa, but he holds on to his past and romanticizes it. Zahra notices “how very idealistic he was about his country” (19). Hashem’s verbal communication and physical gestures are saturated with sexual connotations. When Hashem takes Zahra to the movies, she is repulsed by his caresses. Zahra is disgusted with these sexual advances, and can only respond by stiffening her body and running to the bathroom. When Majed proposes marriage, seeing the possibility of escape, Zahra directly consents.

Majed, on the other hand, marries Zahra because she represents the Lebanese woman who will mother his children, secure him safe sex and a higher social position, without having to pay costs of traditional dowries and wedding ceremonies- she is “an already-made bride” (73). In Lebanon, Majed had tasted the bitterness not of gender distinction, but of social and class discrimination. He recalls how his father roamed the streets “carrying his anvil, hammer, and a box of nails” (74). Zahra, like Ammu in *The God of Small Things*, marries Majed not because she has any illusions that this marriage will secure her happiness and love, but because it provides her with an escape route; by marrying Majed, she would not be forced to live with her uncle,

Hashem, who sexually harasses her on several occasions. This marriage will also save her from returning to her parental home from which she had initially fled. Zahra tries to adjust to her new life, but when Majed discovers that she had lost her virginity prior to their marriage, he becomes infuriated. Zahra realizes that it is impossible to escape power, even when she attempts to comply with its demands. Zahra admits: "I have tried to make myself into what is expected" (94). Even, when Majed decides to accept Zahra's loss of virginity, Zahra rejects the commodification of her body regardless of the consequences. Majed describes her as she lies down stiffly beneath his body, "as rigid as wood" (88). Zahra is unable to become a docile subject although she tries. Following her divorce from Majed, Zahra, also like Ammu, is forced to return, unwelcome, to her parental home.

In the second part of the novel, after her return from Africa, Zahra becomes an initiator in her sexual relationship with the sniper. It is she who plans the relationship. She monitors the sniper, studies the situation, and implements a scheme to entrap the sniper into a sexual relationship, which, as she maintains, would distract him from his mission of killing innocent passers-by. Interestingly, Zahra uses dominant gender knowledge of power to determine the most suitable venue to entrap her victim, the sniper. Zahra wonders "What could possibly divert the sniper from aiming his rifle and startle him to the point where he might open his mouth instead? ...perhaps a naked woman, passing across his field of fire?" (157). Zahra decides to use her knowledge of the sniper and his patterns of thinking to entrap him and direct his actions. In this instance, Zahra uses the already existing knowledge that she has internalized to her own advantage. Her ability to manipulate this knowledge of the sniper in order to achieve her ends reveals Zahra's ability to exercise power. Power

becomes productive to Zahra because it induces creative means of resistance. Power motivates Zahra to defy her oppressive situation.

Zahra also utilizes commonly-perceived male arenas to reverse the effects of disciplinary powers directed at her. Sex and war empower Zahra in launching her resistance. Zahra realizes that men in her society perceive women as mere sexual conveniences and decides to use this knowledge to subvert power and execute her mission. In *Contemporary Lebanese Fiction: Modernization without Modernity* Aghacy maintains that “In a war setup and in the absence of her family, the protagonist Zahra transgresses all spatial boundaries and traditional structures to empower and free herself from familial authority and other social and religious restrictions. By having sex with the sniper on the outer stairs, Zahra unleashes what is considered a menacing female sexuality that challenges and interrogates the norms of society, in a chaotic and anarchic present” (567). It is she who seeks him out, half-naked, with the goal of initiating a sexual relationship in his own controlled space, a building. Zahra empowers herself by utilizing the same disciplinary mechanism that had previously been directed to control her. Perhaps power here is productive, as Foucault maintains, in the sense that it empowers Zahra by providing her with the means to overcome her passivity. Zahra seems to have internalized the principle of the Panoptican (to monitor, study, judge, examine) only to arm herself and reverse its effects. She gathers information about the sniper and uses this information to execute her plan to entrap the sniper. She is able to move from the category of victim to the category of active subject. Zahra interrogates traditionally assigned gender roles when she wields sex as a weapon that can be initiated by women, revealing that power does not have a center nor can it be possessed; it is the interplay that counts.

War, too, “the quintessential terrain of men”(54), as Aghacy maintains in her book *Masculine Identity in the Fiction of the Arab East since 1967*, offers Zahra freedom and liberation. In the early days of the war, Zahra and her family flee to their village in the South, leaving Ahmad in Beirut. Zahra, distressed at having left her brother alone and unable to bear village life returns to Beirut to the family’s apartment on her own. Without familial control and with limited social control, Zahra undergoes major changes. She claims: “It begins to occur to me that the war, with its miseries and destructiveness, has been necessary for me to start to return to being normal and human” (161). It is in this context that Zahra becomes active. For the first time in her life, she chooses her own sexual partner. Critical of her past experiences, she becomes assertive: “It was always my fear of people which put me in a pathetic state, but that fear had evaporated with the war to a point where I was able to look the pharmacist in the face and ask for ten packs of contraceptive tablets” (185). Zahra wonders what “had made him into a sniper? Who had given him orders to kill anonymous passers-by?” (154) and wonders “Is it necessary for him to kill? Is he insane?”(174). Zahra is also critical of her brother Ahmad and of what he has become. During a conversation with her brother about the political situation in Lebanon, Zahra is critical of her brother’s views and voices her own political opinion; “You ought to read the other papers to get a balanced view” (166). She refuses his one-sided opinion of the war situation. She even knows where she stands on issues of war: “All sides burn and plunder whatever they can lay their hands on, and you are like the rest of them” (166). At this instance, Zahra criticizes all those engaging in the civil war.

The war also changes Zahra’s relationship with her parents, especially with her father. She realizes that she fears neither his gaze nor his belt: “neither do I still

fear ...his piercing eyes, which now seem covered by moist veils that shift with the constant shaking of his head” (173). Zahra’s greatest fear is that her father would discover that she is not the obedient girl he believed her to be. She admits: “I never asked myself whether my fear of my father was on a mental or a physical level” (40), and analyzes that fear as “part of a conglomeration of fear (40). She realizes that her fear of her father is too complicated to understand. Overcoming her fear of the father is an accomplishment not to be taken lightly because this fear had always been a stumbling block, a hindrance to Zahra’s resistance. Even in Africa, after Majed finds out that she had lost her virginity, Zahra begs Majed: “Kill me. Do anything you wish, but I beg you not to tell Hashem or my family” (87). In fact, it is this fear that initially kept her docile, obedient, incapacitated, and led her to accept many facets of her oppression.

Ironically, the setting of the savage Civil War serves Zahra well because it grants her the freedom to maneuver with more autonomy. Anne Marie Adams claims that “Zahra is not an autonomous character” (201). True, Zahra is not an autonomous character, but who is? With these power relations, can there ever be full autonomy? If there were, then there would be no power relations. According to Foucault, a power-free society is an abstraction. Having situated herself in a context sanctioned by patriarchal, social, and cultural norms as monolithically male/active-female/passive, Zahra decides to resist these power relations and disrupt and challenge the stereotype of a mere female victim in a male-dominated society. Zahra becomes implicated in the production of power relations.

4.4 Change Achieved via Power Relations

What has Zahra's resistance achieved? On the personal level, Zahra's resistance brings about her death, but it also gives her a voice that persists even after her death. It is she who narrates her own death "he's killed me" (215). Zahra is finally able to point the finger and accuse the perpetrator (He), without shame, guilt or fear. By voicing her accusation and naming her perpetrator, she asserts her right to live, and above all she reveals the self-respect and the self-love she has acquired during her struggle in power relations. This resistance also brings about self-awareness and situation-awareness: even after death she is able to comment on her experience, "I close my eyes that perhaps were never truly opened" (215). Zahra realizes that she has changed and this change has given her a voice of her own. Zahra is now able to see her own shortcomings, and this self-evaluation and self-criticism could be the most essential part of her resistance.

The story of Zahra was published by the author herself, as previously mentioned, because Arab publishers found it too shocking for their audience. In an interview with Maya Jaggi in *The Guardian*, Jaggi explains that in al Shaykh's view "There are many Zahras in the Arab world", and she has received "so many letters from women saying I'd told their story". As a novel, Zahra's story has made other women realize that they are not alone in their experiences. In 2014, we cannot deny that there are still many Zahras in the Arab world, but partly because of *The Story of Zahra* and other novels dealing with taboo subjects, more people have become aware of the existence of Zahras in the Arab world. If as Cooke argues, "The artist's role was to guide the way to social reconstruction at the individual level" (14), then, *The Story of Zahra*, has achieved this purpose, at least, at the personal subjective level.

Chapter Five

The Locust and the Bird

5.1 Summary of *The Locust and The Bird*

The Locust and the Bird is the story of Hanan's al-Shaykh's illiterate mother. Kamila, the mother, orally narrates her story to her daughter who writes it in the first person's point of view. The author begins the story with her own prologue and ends it with two chapters and an epilogue, in which she explains how writing the story has changed the mother-daughter relationship, bringing them closer together.

The *Locust and the Bird*, is a memoir of the life span of Hanan al-Shaykh's mother, Kamila, and her family who are forced to contend with poverty. Abandoned by the father, society, and religious representatives, their mother moves them to Beirut to live with their older siblings from her first marriage. The move proves pivotal in Kamila's life. After the death of her sister, Kamila is forced into marriage to her own brother in law, a religious man twice her age. Kamila rejects this marriage not only because she detests and fears her brother in law, but also because she is attracted to Muhammad, a young man she meets at the Seamstress' house. Kamila protests, but is unable to alter her family's decision. At thirteen she marries Abu-Hussein, and at fourteen she becomes a mother. Kamila refuses to accept her role as either wife or mother. She improvises methods of resistance and creates spaces to elude power and subvert its effects. She has a love relationship with Muhammad, and manages to finally secure a divorce, marry her beloved, and have five children. At 37, Kamila becomes a widow and again finds herself caught in the networks of power that interlink and

collaborate to oppress widows and single mothers through patriarchal, social, and religious practices. Kamila manages to survive, and the memoir ends with the death of Kamila, surrounded by family, relatives, and friends.

5.2 Power Relations in *The Locust and the Bird*

Kamila, like Zahra and Ammu, suffers oppression at the hands of her own mother. It is the mother who takes Kamila to live at the mercy of a “gloomy brother” and her brother-in-law. The mother stands aside and does nothing when Kamila is forced to become a vendor instead of being allowed to attend school. The mother becomes an accomplice in Kamila’s forced marriage. It is she, with the help of Khadija, her daughter-in-law, who tricks Kamila into the marriage. Kamila unknowingly consents to the marriage, and when, a few years later, Kamila discovers that she has been duped into marriage, it is her mother who intentionally lies to her, explaining that the engagement is “nothing more than a mock marriage for religious purposes” (70). The mother explains that the marriage is a religious ritual that would allow Kamila to live under the same roof as Abu-Hussein. Again, in order to understand the mother’s actions, we must analyze them within their context.

Kamila’s mother is forced to seek refuge because she is unable support herself and her family after the father abandons them. In other words, the move is not a choice, but a necessity imposed upon the mother because she does not have the financial means to live independently. The mother is not only illiterate, but she lacks the skills or training that might secure her employment of any sort. Collecting herbs and wheat left behind by harvesters, the mother tries to make ends meet, but she simply cannot support herself and her two kids on these seasonal leftovers. The

mother ultimately attempts to force her husband to pay child support as both religion and civil law dictate, but she fails.

The patriarchal power of religion, law, and society join forces to limit the mother's choices and dictate her actions: Kamila's family is a Muslim Shiite. In an article in *The Daily Star*, Beckie Strum maintains that "Family law in Lebanon falls exclusively under the jurisdiction of religious courts, meaning each sect dictates rules regarding marriage, divorce, inheritance and custody. For Shiites, fathers automatically gain full custody of boys aged 2 years old. Mothers can keep their daughters until they reach 7 years old" (Strum 2013). The mother tries to force the father to provide child support, but in vain. The sheik responsible for upholding the religious law explains that "the payment due to you will be sitting right there, in the middle of your home" (23). However, the payment never arrives and instead the father tricks the children and takes them to his house to live with their stepmother. By doing this, the father is able to evade payment for child support and at the same time he silences the mother if she wishes to have the children back. Interestingly, even when the law seems to be on the mother's side, her rights remain violated. These laws cannot help the mother because they are initially written by patriarchy and are implemented in the name of the patriarchal system. So, they become legitimate instruments of control over women. Such laws actually perpetuate women's oppression because they are used as truths that legitimize the exercise of power, and at the same time such laws are established and reinforced by power because they are the base upon which power launches its exercise. This is why non-western feminists' insistence on re-examining and re-evaluating existing laws is justified because if the law itself is oriented for the sake of one side, then previously existing laws should be re-examined.

Thus, abandoned by both religion and law, the mother endeavors to gain the support of society. On several occasions, the mother, accompanied by her two children, pursues the father in Nabatieh square, but she is unable to force him to abide by the law. He dupes the children and disappears. She asks relatives and acquaintances to persuade him to pay, but again he weasels out of his obligations, claiming that he cannot pay because he has no money. Finally, complaining to a “loving neighbor” (23) about her situation, the mother is advised: “Let him have the children. Stop torturing yourself” (23). The mother is definitely a victim of power relations, but she is not a passive subject; she tries, within the limits of her power, to find ways to support herself and her family. The mother is confronting not her husband as an individual, but the multiple forces of patriarchal power that support the husband, as a male within the Lebanese society.

In order to analyze the mother’s resistance and her role in power relations, it is necessary to understand that the mother is herself a product and an effect of the power relations in this Lebanese society, and it would be naive to situate her outside this particular society and expect her to act with autonomy. Before marrying Kamila’s father, the mother had been previously married to another man who had been murdered on a remote road by a gang of thieves. Kamila’s mother had witnessed the robbery, but when asked by the authorities to point the culprits out, she is unable to do so because she is too bashful “to look at the men the authorities paraded before them” (36). In her society, a “respectable” woman is supposed to be gazed at by men, and does not, herself, gaze at men. The mother’s “bashfulness” and timidity hinder her exercise in power relations. She exercises surveillance over and against herself because she has been subjected to act according to the dominant power practices of her society or basically according to established truths that

validate certain actions and prohibit others. She refuses to look at the thieves because she believes that as a woman she should not look directly at strange men. The mother refuses to deviate from the norms of her society regardless of the consequences.

The mother cannot be defined outside the complexities and intricacies of her own society. She is not a docile subject as previously shown, and yet she is not a fully autonomous agent. When her daughter Manifa dies of a rat bite, she blames herself for the death: “Mother blamed herself for my sister’s death. Coming to Beirut and staying at her house had brought bad luck” (53). Manifa, the eldest daughter and whose husband Kamila will later marry, dies of fever as a result of a rat bite. So, instead of blaming the economic situation which forces women to use wood as fuel, or the husband who does not provide modern electric appliances for his wife, the mother blames herself. Why? Perhaps, as a woman, she is fraught with guilt because she has been allowed to survive. The mother seems to have been socialized to see herself with suspicion. Perhaps, the mother has been subjected to misnaming others’ practices and seeing herself as a bad omen. The mother may merely have adopted the tactics of the patriarchal system by oppressing those who are seen as inferior or as the weakest elements in power relations.

Ibrahim, Kamila’s half-brother, or as she calls him “Mr. Gloomy” (41) is a patriarchal figure who appoints himself master over Kamila. When Kamila refuses to marry Abu Hussein, he threatens and abuses her saying that “people will be saying that cousin of the seamstress has been playing around with your mind, or has done something worse to you” (84). He tries to silence her by threatening her reputation as a woman. Interestingly, Ibrahim blames Kamila not for something she herself has done, but for what another man might have done to her. To Ibrahim, Kamila is an object rather than a subject, an object used by men, yet she is to blame. Perhaps, this

is why Kamila's mother blames herself for her daughter's death. As a woman she has been trained to think that she is to blame even when she is the victim.

On her wedding night, Ibrahim forces Kamila into Abu-Hussein's room, closing the door behind her until her husband fulfills his mission of penetrating her virginity. Even in the bathroom, Ibrahim monitors her moves, demonstrating power over her in the most private spaces. "I sang to myself as I worked, but not in the way I sang when I bathed at home. Then I had to sing quietly, so that Ibrahim or my brother-in-law would not hear me" (60). When Kamila's adultery is discovered, it is Ibrahim who curses her and beats her, not her husband: "His moustache seemed bushier, and his hand struck me again and again, like a meat tenderizer, as he shouted curses with every blow" (148). Kamila is aware that Ibrahim is a source of her suffering, but she can't understand the reasons for his hatred. Kamila is not aware that Ibrahim is merely executing his patriarchal role. Kamila is being punished not so much for being Kamila, but for being a dependent woman in a patriarchal society. Abandoned by her father and unable to financially support herself, Kamila must accept her fate. She wants to scream and ask Ibrahim: "What did I ever do to make you torture me so?" (122). Perhaps, Kamila's scream should be directed not at Ibrahim, but at the whole patriarchal system which has recruited Ibrahim and commissioned him to act under its authority. Ibrahim, the older brother, is executing his patriarchal duty as the male of the family, especially in the absence of the father. Actually, if Kamila had screamed; Ibrahim might not have been able to answer her because perhaps he himself didn't know that he was punishing her or why he was punishing her. Ibrahim is not aware that he is punishing Kamila because he simply can. He is not aware that he is an instrument of power, or that he is even oppressing Kamila. He thinks he is protecting both Kamila and the family reputation. As her

older brother, he believes it is his duty to dictate her life and punish her if she swerves off the track designated for her as a woman.

Ibrahim is a victim and an aggressor at the same time. After the death of his father, his grandparents refuse to give his mother any inheritance and even deny the existence of the "valuables" (37) that his mother had previously left with them. When the mother asks for help, she is beaten and sent away. Unable to provide for the children, the mother accepts an offer to get the children admitted to an American charitable boarding school in Sidon.

When the mother remarries, she decides to bring her children back to live with her. Kamila's father cannot support himself, let alone a family, and soon the children leave for Beirut, abandoning their education in search for jobs to support them. Let down by family and society, Ibrahim channels his anger at Kamila. By punishing Kamila, he is punishing his mother, his step-father, and the entire power network that deprives him of his family, education, and financial security. Why Kamila? He focuses all his anger upon Kamila because, as a dependent woman, she is the weakest element.

Unlike heroines in the cinema, Kamila does not live happily ever after with Muhammad. She is widowed at 37 with five children to support, confronting a patriarchal traditional society, legitimizing itself under the name of law and religion. Though financially much better off than her mother had been when she was widowed, Kamila has to struggle against the males of Muhammad's family in order to ensure financial support for herself and her family. She explains that "Muhammad's family (the men that is) sat in silence like fishermen, waiting for me to make the tiniest mistake to trap me in their nets" (218). One brother-in-law is

appointed by the family as her guardian, watching her every move and calculating her expenses.

When Kamila goes to court to get an official order to remove his guardianship and to restrain Mohammad's brother who is making amorous advances to her, she is silenced by the official, whose ears seem to be "stuffed with stones" (220). Kamila goes to Sharia court law "assuming that justice would be on my side" (220). Again her complaints come to no avail as the official would not listen to her pleas. Abandoned by family, law, religion, and society, Kamila resorts "to trickery and cunning" (220). She decides to be Abu Al-Hinn, a tiny bird that elicits sympathy from his hunters, using his fragility. Using the beauty of her sister-in-law as bait, Kamila revisits the sheik. While her sister-in-law is "batting her eyelids at him" (221), Kamila weeps and convinces him that she should be the sole guardian of her property.

Kamila claims that if she were in India, the men in Mohammad's family would have "decided to burn me alive alongside Mohammad's corpse" (219). Despite her love for Mohammad, Kamila refuses to accept the role of the martyr or to be a sacrificial token. She struggles against a patriarchal system which is especially oppressive to widows. Kamila rejects the social practices that define widows as women with no future.

5.3 Resistance in *the Locust and the Bird*

Perhaps in no other story is resistance to power forces as evident as it is in *The Locust and the Bird*. Kamila lies, steals, and deceives, uses her friends and her daughters, attempts suicide, and even attempts murder in her struggle for survival and freedom of choice. "I went to our neighbor and begged her to confront Abu-

Hussein with a false claim for a debt when he left for work the next morning” (107). Without a bit of shame, she conspires with a neighbor to rob her own husband in order to secure her needs of dresses and food she craves “I continued to steal money from Abu-Hussein whenever he left the room to do his ablutions before prayers or when he slept” (108). Kamila even robs Sitt Zeinab when she visits her shrines; she decides to keep the money which a friend had sent with her to put in the shrine. Confronted by her husband concerning her adulterous relationship with Mohammad, she screams “lies, treachery” I yelled.” Bring me the Quran so I can swear on it” (147). Nothing seems to be off limits when her survival is threatened. Kamila resists by defying all prohibitions used to control her. To survive, she is ready to break every rule imposed upon her. Kamila is simply saying I refuse to succumb to your commands.

Regardless of her love for her daughters, Kamila uses her own daughters as cover up. She takes them with her on her amorous feats to avoid social disgrace. On one occasion, she even takes her daughter into the bathroom and dictates a letter to her lover. She wonders: “Kamila, what are you doing, asking your eight-year-old daughter to write your lover a letter?” (166). Although Kamila does not seem happy with the manner she is using her daughter; she lets nothing stand in the way of her resistance and does not feel guilty for her actions.

Overcome by her powerlessness after her “adulterous” relationship is discovered, Kamila runs to the stove and soaks herself in kerosene, grabs a box of matches, and is intent on committing suicide. Her brother manages to prevent her from setting fire to herself (110). On another occasion Kamila “headed for al-Rawshe, the suicide rock for jilted lovers” (160). Interestingly, on both occasions, she is happy that she had been saved. Her attempted suicidal acts seem to be acts of

powerlessness and revenge against her family. Kamila thinks that by killing herself, she would expose her family to social disgrace and they would have to bear their guilt-ridden conscience for life. However, her own stories of the many suicidal acts of women in her neighborhood reveal that the death of a woman, especially an adulterous woman as in the case of Kamila, might not be such a big issue.

Kamila's resistance seems to know no limits. Having noticed that slugs die when they are sprinkled with salt, she tries to kill her brother, Ibrahim, and her brother-in-law by adding salt to the cod liver oil they take each day, but fortunately, Ibrahim and Abu-Hussein "did not shrivel up and bust" (83), as slugs do. Another highly controversial act of resistance is her self-inflicted abortions: "I jumped secretly from my bed to the floor until I nearly fainted, and yet still I did not stop. Then I drank some boiled parsley, all the while asking the baby inside me for forgiveness" (154). Kamila claims that she does not want any more children from Abu-Hussein, but she repeats the same act when the father is Mohammad, the long-sought lover: "I managed to miscarry twins after jumping off tables and taking lots of aspirin" (199). Why would Kamila really want to abort Mohammad's baby? Kamila, herself, perhaps answers this question when she comments on her situation after she delivers her fifth baby: "After the delivery I lay there with milk oozing from my breasts, feeling just like one of our cows back in Nabatiyeh. I leaned over her to moo and clean her up with my tongue (191). Regardless of Kamila's sense of humor in depicting her state, comparing herself to a cow reveals her anger at being constantly pregnant. By self-inflicting her own miscarriages, Kamila is rejecting her role as a machine for the production of babies.

By resisting, Kamila becomes an active agent in the network of power relations. Kamila uses her knowledge of Abu-Hussein's interests, habits, and pattern

of thinking to her own advantage; in Hamidiyya Market, Kamila pleads with Abu-Hussein to buy her a gold bracelet. When he refuses she asks him “instead for a golden Quran, dangling from a gold chain, thinking he might buy me something connected to religion” (92). The Quran is not her first choice, but knowing her husband’s bond to religion, she thinks the Quran would be acceptable to him. She even tries to tempt him by announcing that if he bought the Quran for her, she would “say all her obligatory prayers” (92). Living with Abu-Hussein allows Kamila to subvert power from within. Kamila monitors power, studies its weaknesses, and utilizes that knowledge as a means for her resistance. She deduces that Abu-Hussein would not refuse a religious token, and if this is all she could convince him to buy for her, then be it.

Through irony and humor, Kamila is able to subvert religious rituals. Abu-Hussein resorts to religion when he is about to make decision. In Syria, Abu-Hussein and his cousin’s husband consult the prayer beads to decide if the women should retreat to the end of the park where they will be safe from the eyes of strangers or to have them sit by their side during lunch. According to the beads, it is “God’s will” that the women should sit alone. Frustrated by the decision, Kamila decides to avenge herself and have some fun. She asks the cousin’s husband to consult the beads “for God’s will” on something she had in mind (94). When the man replies that the consultation’s result is positive, Kamila pushes the man into the stream. Reproached by her husband, she replies, “You wouldn’t want me to offend God, would you?”(94). Bead consultation is a common ritual in Islam. The act consists of reading certain Ayahs from the Quran while moving the beads between the fingers until one or two beads remain. An even number means that the decision is unwise

and the plan should be abandoned, whereas an odd number implies that the decision is wise and should be pursued.

The cinema plays a paradoxical role in the life of Kamila: it arms her with methods of resistance and substitute discourses, but at the same time it subjugates her to the substitute discourses of the cinema, limiting her choices and her agency. From the cinema, Kamila learns that not all men are the same. She claims that “after my trip to the cinema, I saw my easy going brother Hassan in a new light” (51). True, Hassan her other half-brother, is not able to help her when she is forced into marriage, but it is he who convinces his brother of her divorce from Abu-Hussein. From the cinema, she learns that men like Abdal-Wahhab “–actually spoke to a woman, sang to her, embraced her, then whistled as he hurried on his way” (50). From the cinema she deduces that not all men are Abu Hussein and “Mr. Gloomy”. Kamila transmits the message that woman’s oppression is not always the result of male /female dichotomy, but is partly the result of a system of patriarchy deeply rooted in the minds of both men and women.

The cinema molds Kamila’s emotions and reactions. When Muhammad reproaches her for not informing him of her engagement to Abu-Hussein, she envisions herself in a film, reacting as the heroine might do in such a situation: “I felt like throwing myself at his chest and weeping, “No, no, you must believe me; you have to believe me” (69).Kamila utilizes a very common cliché used in Arabic films. When Kamila loses all hope of convincing her family to give up the idea of marrying her off to Abu-Hussein. She envisions herself in a scene from a film and begins acting the role of the oppressed heroine. “I twisted and turned shouting a mix of classical Arabic and Egyptian dialect,” save me, ye people, save me!”(83). Kamila turns to the cinema for protection because in the cinema, unlike in reality, the hero

leaps in at the last moment, saving his heroine from the grasp of her “evil” family. Because reality is not as heroic as the cinema, Kamila seems to be searching for substitute knowledge that would provide her with the means to adapt to her unbearable situation. The cinema offers her the hope of a happy ending that she doesn’t find in reality.

In the end, Mohammad does not save Kamila, but it is her own resistance and struggle which allow her to define herself and survive. In fact, after her marriage to Mohammed, she wonders if she had really “exchanged one kind of fear for another that was even more complicated” (188). Mohammad expected Kamila to play a role that would suit his status: “Consider my status, Kamila. I could hear him say, “Consider my position” (189). Kamila wonders if having married Mohammad meant she had to change her personality. It seems a Lebanese woman, like Kamila, can only exist as an appendage to man. Simone de Beauvoir maintains in” *Introduction to the Second Sex* that women are “defined and differentiated with reference to man and not with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute — she is the Other” (Beauvoir xxii). Is Kamila the object that must be molded to fit the subject, Mohammad?

Perhaps the most significant role the cinema plays in Kamila’s life is in molding her perceptions of herself and her actions. In the eyes of her society, Kamila is a loose flirtatious woman who commits adultery, divorces her husband, and abandons two daughters to marry her lover. Society condemns Kamila who transcends its moral and religious codes. The cinema allows Kamila to see herself and her actions in a different light. She sees herself as the oppressed heroine who has every right to struggle against her oppressors, using whatever means necessary to overcome this oppression: “As I watched the film, I began to see that love was the

most important thing in the world- more important than even money and food” (98). She sees her actions as courageous and chivalric.

Has the cinema become another form of power used to subjugate Kamila, controlling her movements, gestures and ideals, providing her with counter knowledge that restricts her subjectivity? Kamila admits: “The cinema had become my school, teaching me about life, history and geography. I learned about a continent called Europe and saw scenes from the war. The cinema taught me how to speak and dress” (118). Cinema scenes and practices replace those of her reality; Kamila begins to speak and act as actors in the cinema.

However, Kamila also maintains that the cinema “took me inside splendid houses and hovels, and introduced me to the people who lived in them. I desperately wanted to live like some of them, but I also thanked God that my life was better than that of many others. On the screen I met people like me, others like Ibrahim, and still more like my husband” (118). Kamila defies the docile subject category because she has the critical distance that allows her to comprehend that she is not an exact copy of any of them. The cinema enables Kamila to become questioning and self-critical. She realizes that she is no saint. She is not afraid to say: “I’d even used my own two daughters” (157).

Kamila, unlike docile subjects, is aware of her oppression. “Everyone was whispering about my scandal and divorce, though no one had stopped for a second to consider the scandal of forcing a fourteen-year-old girl to marry her widowed brother-in-law” (181). She also realizes that she is not the only Kamila in her neighborhood. In fact, Kamila represents all women in her society. The only reason she is “ostracized” (182) is because her illicit love affair is not kept secret: “But across the neighborhood, they were all at it behind closed doors” (182). It seems that power

leaves Kamila and women in her society few choices. She is in no position to choose her methods of resistance according to socially acceptable forms. Within such power relations, Kamila knows that she must use all possible means in order to survive.

5.4 Change Achieved via Power Relations

Kamila is an early feminist who lives her life the way she desires, ignoring social customs and fighting for what she wants. She fights her family and the traditional patriarchal society for freedom of choice. She advises her daughter, Hanan al-Shaykh, “Don’t be harsh on the bygone past. It was sweet because I defied both the noose and shackles around my wrist. I took back my freedom” (Mai Munasa,). Kamila is a feminist because without a shred of timidity or discretion, she recounts her experience as a woman, revealing her own flaws and those of her society. Kamila is an Arab feminist who defies the feminists’ western representation of the Arab woman as a submissive victim in a male-dominated society, asserting that Feminism is not a western import to the Arab world, but is rather an indigenous movement often overlooked by western feminists. But above all, Kamila is a feminist because she refuses to die without telling the world her story. Rejecting the confinement of her illiteracy, she uses her daughter’s pen to write her own story just as she uses drawings to write letters to her lover: “With a pencil I drew a picture of two little birds perched on two flowers, inhaling the scent. I drew the leaves in heart shapes, then a sun and a moon. Next I drew a nest for the two little birds” (121). Being illiterate, Kamila cannot write love letters to Mohammad, so she responds by using drawings as a means of communication. She simply refuses to be silenced.

Kamila reveals to the world that there exists at least one Kamila in Lebanon. She empowers herself by challenging social and patriarchal forces. Through the

interplay of power relations, she is able to disrupt power and remain a somewhat active subject herself. She distorts dominant practices, revealing that power is fragile and can be penetrated. She decenters power, proving that wherever there is power there is resistance and that the revolutionary subject cannot be limited to a single individual or to a specific group. Kamila supersedes Foucault's expectations when her resistance grants her freedom of choice and space of autonomy. She dies a free woman with little regrets. By forever struggling against her oppression, Kamila reveals the power of women, especially non-western women who are forced to suffer multiple forms of oppression. Kamila blurs the lines that attempt to stereotype or define her as woman, victim, aggressor, or any other given category. She is no static subject, and that is an advantage because this lack of fixed identity permits her to become a member of all movements that cooperate to fight subordination not only of women, but also of other marginalized groups.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

To conclude, this study of the three novels under discussion tries to show that “power is everywhere” and resistance to power in the three novels takes a variety of forms. Regardless of the oppression practiced on Velutha as an Untouchable and on Ammu as a divorced Indian woman, both struggle for self-definition. Velutha resists by refusing to accept his fate as an Untouchable. As previously mentioned, he tries to define himself by rejecting the role imposed upon him by multiple forces of power. Ammu, too, breaks the barriers and defies the limits of both class and patriarchy by having a sexual relationship with Velutha. True, both die at the end, but their acts of resistance allow them to define themselves as subjects in power relations. In the Lebanese novel, *The Story of Zahra*, the protagonist, Zahra is pushed to the periphery, but finds spaces and means to resist despite her subordinate position in the power interplay. Despite this resistance, Zahra too, is murdered at the end, but resistance grants her a voice and reveals the inability of patriarchal power to define her and dictate her life. Kamila, in *The Locust and the Bird* demonstrates that women can exercise power, defy power, and affect lasting changes in their own status and the status of power relations by resisting the forces of power. Kamila does not erase patriarchy altogether, but she subverts it from within. If this is the case, then why do women and other marginalized groups still suffer both oppression and suppression?

Although power has no center or locus and can be exercised by all, as Foucault continually maintained, the exercise itself privileges one side over the other

prior and during the interaction. In other words, true, marginalized groups, such as the Untouchables in the novel *The God of Small Things* and non-western women in the three novels are able to exercise power, but because of their subordinate position in the interaction, these men and women are unable to effect much change. Ironically, at times, some women and Untouchables, especially docile subjects, are consigned in the play of power, increasing its oppression with their support.

Velutha's exercise of power is stifled because he is born in the lowest class in the Indian caste system. Velutha's political activity stumbles with his identity as an Untouchable because he is perceived as an Untouchable prior and during his interaction in power relations. Socially, regardless of his actions or qualifications, he is seen as an Untouchable who has dared to deviate from the norms of his class. Instead of being judged for his work and skills, he is seen as a traitor, even by his own father. Ammu and her mother both work in the pickle factory, but because they are perceived as women prior and during their interaction in the labor force, their labor remains unacknowledged, unappreciated and even unpaid. Zahra, in *The Story of Zahra*, and Kamila in *The Locust and the Bird* are also able to exercise both power and resistance, but again, their exercise or interaction is made difficult because they are women living under patriarchal rules. Their exercise in power relations is limited to what a woman is permitted to do and does not depend solely on the interaction or the exercise of power itself. So, before and during the exercise of power, as women, they are already marginalized and robbed of the chance of fair interaction. What does it mean to be given the chance to exercise power when, in fact, some women and Untouchables are crippled before their interaction in power relations? It is as if the subordinates are allowed to run in the race, but their knees must be broken before the race begins.

Vellya Paapen, Velutha's father, and those whom we have described as docile characters, interact in power relations according to their already sanctioned roles prior the exercise. These characters are actually hindered before their exercise of power because they have been robbed of their subjectivity before and during their interaction in power relations. Vellya Paapen hinders change because he implements and transmits the knowledge and established practices he has internalized. Although Vellya Paapen is himself a victim of cultural and social forces, he exercises power against those who resist these forces; Vellya Paapen is the first to exercise power against his own son. He is the first to notice that Velutha is acting outside the norms of his class; he is the first to charge him with deviancy and the first to announce his desire to kill him with his own hands.

So it seems that the problem lies not only in the exercise of power or in resistance, but also in the dominant practices or the established knowledge or truths that define subjects and determine roles and identities prior and during the exercise of power. Both Foucault and non-western feminists perceive the significant role knowledge plays in power relations. In *Power/Knowledge* Foucault maintains that "in any society, there are manifold relations of power, which permeate, characterize and constitute the Social body. And these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and knowledge of certain discourse" (Foucault). So, power relations depend on existing knowledge in society. If this is the case, then it would seem that change can only take place if this established social and cultural knowledge is examined and reevaluated. These established truths have multiple functions in power relations; they validate the exercise of power, legitimizing the act of power as an objective act based on truth and laws; established truths also validate themselves as

truth because they become unquestioned knowledge repeatedly used as basic truth in power relations; these practices also create docile subjects who internalize these established practices as true knowledge and act according to their norms; knowledge categorizes subjects prior and during the exercise of power, limiting the ability of the subject to interact in power relations; and finally such discourses become stumbling blocks in the face of those who resist because they define the limits that can be exceeded in power relations. Basically, these dominant discourses seem to be the crux of the problem in power relations.

The problem is not so simple, especially for non-western women and other marginalized groups who live in complex societies and who perceive such dominant truths as part of their unique culture and identity. Foucault's notions on power and resistance seem to be directed towards individuals who share the same rights in power relations and who suffer from the same oppression. Asking the illiterate Vellya Paapen to question or abandon the dictates of the Indian caste system is naive, and expecting Zahra's father to abandon the dominant practices and beliefs of his patriarchal society is too idealistic. Non-western feminists recognize that women's oppression is partly the result of dominant knowledge, but they also know that these dominant discourses cannot be easily eradicated, and must be analyzed and understood in a historical, political, and local setting. Substitute practices and substitute knowledge must take into consideration the intricacies of each society.

In most cases, resistance on the individual level takes place as soon as power is exercised, and such resistance, though often limited to reaction against oppressive situations is necessary to alleviate women's oppression and bring about change. Dominant practices and established truths need to be carefully examined and questioned. Women like Zahra, Kamila, and Ammu resist, but their resistance would

be more fruitful were it to be conjoined with the collective work of non-western feminists. These women are oppressed because they are dependent women, uneducated, unskilled, and untrained. Through historical, political analyses of women's lives and local experiences, non-western feminists like Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Uma Narayan, attempt to establish foundations for resistance by participating in the formation of laws and politics to introduce new or amended laws that would enable women to be independent. Their Research is carried out on issues of social, economic, legal, and political status of women, taking into consideration women's relationship with their environment, religion, culture, and history. The task is not simple and may never eradicate women's oppression completely, but it may alleviate inequality.

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