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# Finding Fulfillment in All the Wrong Places: Female Actualization in Three Contemporary Novels

by

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To my parents,

I dedicate this work to you because you never stopped supporting me and praying for me. Thank you very much,

To Dr. Seigneurie,

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#### Abstract

This study deals with Nadine Gordimer's 2001 The Pickup, Laura Esquivel's 1989 Like Water for Chocolate and Hanan al-Shaykh 1980 Hikayat Zahra. All three works are fundamentally different in terms of language, culture and plot. However, they share the representation of a female character who finds some kind of fulfillment by actualizing an inhospitable space. The novels recount stories of cultural conflicts and female resourcefulness in achieving fulfillment. These women find happiness in the places where, according to the feminist paradigm, they shouldn't. In *The Pickup*, the female protagonist Julie leaves a country that promotes a certain level of freedom and moves to an Arab country where she constantly contends with cultural constraints placed on women. In the unnamed Arab country, the constraints she faces allow her to discover aspects of herself that she was unaware of in her middle-class South African environment. In Like Water for Chocolate, Tita experiences fulfillment in spaces that are even less propitious: the kitchen of her house and the house of a white American male doctor. In these spaces, she finds the means to free herself from her struggles and explore her feelings. In Hikayat Zahra, Zahra tries to find a secure place and finds it paradoxically in war-torn Lebanon during the Civil War. This thesis examines how the representation of spaces and spatial relations in those novels contribute in the construction of character identities. The purpose of this thesis is to understand how the representation of space in each novel conveys a range of possible models of female liberation. Thus, this thesis situates itself as a contribution to an ongoing revision of feminist studies.

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#### Women on the Move: Space and Gender in Three Contemporary Novels

Although feminism can relate to many areas and aspects, its common base is the thesis that "the relationship between the sexes is one of inequality or oppression" (Macey 122). Many have tried to explain this inequality, bringing out the question of women's social, political and economic rights. Since the 1850s till the 1990s, historians spoke of three different waves of feminism with different demands ranging from social, economic, educational, and political to the sexual. First- wave feminism originated in the changes that transformed the western society in the early 1900s. To begin with, one might speak of the "industrialization which undermined house-hold production and established a hierarchy between the male-dominated public sphere and the female-dominated private." Women's rights movement called for single sexual standard, dress reform, higher education and an improvement in the wages of working-class women (Code 208). Second-wave feminism was also characterized by different goals and demands: greater sexual freedom for women, liberalized divorce laws and equal pay for equal work. Second-wave feminists sought recognition for the work that is traditionally done by women (209). In the 1990s, third-wave feminism becomes a standpoint feminism in general, inspired by strands of existing feminism and concerned with personal, social and academic changes. These changes pushed women to challenge their confinement to the private space and their exclusion from the public one.

This private/public duality creates gendered social space for men and women (412).

There is an important link between the concepts of space/place and the concept of gender. In fact, Doreen Massey explores in her book *Space*, *Place and Gender* the different levels that relate gender to space and place such as the construction and understanding of gender within space. Massey sees space not as some absolute independent dimension, but as constructed out of

social relations (2). She also focuses on the symbolic meaning of space and place and the clearly gendered message they transmit. Both space and gender have an effect on identity; for instance the limitation on women's mobility in terms of space and identity is considered subordination. To confine women to the private space is also to restrict their identity (179). Therefore, women must expand their spatial limitations in order to achieve freedom and fulfillment; they must expand their limitations beyond the confinement of the private spaces into the public ones.

This thesis will examine how the representation of spaces and spatial relations in those novels contribute to the construction of character identities. In my analysis, I rely on selected contemporary theories of narratology that deal with space. Self-evident yet vague, the concept of space is an important element of narrative (Bal 132). Bal differentiates between spaces and places. She writes, "places can be mapped out, in the same way that the topological position of a city or a river can be indicated on a map." Places are related to the mathematically measurable shape of spatial dimensions. More importantly, these places do not exist in fiction, as they do in reality. She defines spaces however as places seen from a certain point of perception (133). As these women move from one space to the other, the connection of space and place with gender and gender relations emerges. Relying on Doreen Massey's study of the social nature of space and place and their relation to gender studies, this thesis will examine how gender relations vary as these women move from public spaces to ostensibly unfavorable private spaces. It will focus on the aspects that make these spaces empowering for these women, and on the features that render the construction of an independent female identity possible despite the difficult circumstances present in these spaces.

In this study I have chosen three works that deconstruct this now dominant notion of female emancipation which has it that freedom for women developed with their movement from

private spaces to public ones: Nadine Gordimer's 2001 South African novel, The Pickup, Laura Esquivel's 1989 Mexican novel, Como Agua Para Chocolate (Like Water for Chocolate) and Hanan al-Shaykh's 1980 Arabic novel, Hikavat Zahra (The Story of Zahra). All three works are fundamentally different in terms of language, culture and plot. However, all depict a female character who finds some kind of fulfillment by actualizing an inhospitable space that she is either removed to (in Like Water for Chocolate) or voluntarily goes to (in The Pickup, and in Hikayat Zahra). The novels recount stories of cultural conflicts and female resourcefulness in achieving fulfillment. These women find happiness in the places where, according to the feminist paradigm, they shouldn't. Each novel features a number of spaces that contribute to the fulfillment of the characters. The purpose of this thesis is to understand how the representation of space in each novel conveys a range of possible models of female liberation. Although feminism is an immense field and can relate to many aspects, this thesis focuses on public and private spaces and the role they play in women's liberation. This thesis will examine, through close attention to the spaces they inhabit, how female characters in these three contemporary novels reexplore their identity in unpropitious spaces. It will also argue that these novels present alternatives to the classic narrative of female empowerment. This project is divided into three chapters, each one dealing comprehensively with one of the novels. My choice of these texts of different languages gives this study an intercultural aspect. An examination of the spaces, practices, and social and cultural codes in these three novels of different cultures expands the western frame of female liberation to include liberation within other cultures.

The first chapter of this thesis deals with Nadine Gordimer's 2001 novel *The Pickup*. Published in 2001, the novel brought the first South African Nobel Prize winner more international attention as she won the 2002 Commonwealth Writers' Prize for the Best Book

from Africa. Deeply involved in the anti-apartheid struggle, Gordimer writes novels that reflect the social background she comes from and provide an insight into the struggle of belonging and existing in a post-apartheid Africa. In fact, the novel partly takes place in the author's homeland, post-apartheid South Africa, with the question of identity as one of its central themes. *The Pickup* tells the story of Julie, a young white South African woman. She distances herself from her rich father and picks up the dark-skinned, illegal immigrant, Muslim car repairman Abdu. They gradually get to know each other. Their story becomes a story of intercultural encounter and search for identity as Abdu tries to find a country that would accept him, and Julie tries to find a place where she would fit in. Gordimer is able to represent the racial and cultural opposition in two different backgrounds as Julie and Abdu move to his unnamed Arab country where Julie manages to re-explore her identity in both places and unexpectedly finds fulfillment in the Arab country.

With its publication in 2001, *The Pickup* earned a lot of attention from critics and reviewers. Even though there are no full-length studies of this novel, several articles offer different interpretations of the work. With a plot that revolves around a rich woman falling in love with a poor black Muslim man in post-colonial and post-apartheid Africa, *The Pickup* is often interpreted as reflective of the East and West opposition. The aspect of the cultural other is discussed in a paper published in 2003 and titled "Picking up the Other: Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*" in which Franz Meier considers Gordimer's novel to clearly build on the opposition of Occident and Orient but in an ironic way. He attributes this structural irony to the fact that the East, traditionally depicted as inferior, feminine and black, is represented by a man. In contrast, the West, traditionally dominant, masculine and white, is represented by a "white woman from South Africa, a country belonging to a continent which traditionally has been more closely allied

with images of the Orient than of the West." Moreover, Gordimer depicts a "New South Africa," one with Western features that Abdu terms as European, and a stereotypical Arab country as its cultural other. Meier emphasizes the notion of how each character views this cultural other: while Abdu rejects it, "Julie increasingly finds in it what she obviously had been missing in the 'New South Africa': values such as commitment, solidarity, family spirituality." What is interesting about Meier's reading of the novel is the link he makes between the cultural other and identity. Both protagonists want to escape from their culture. Julie defines herself in contrast to her South African culture, and Abdu also rejects the culture of his past and seeks to identify himself with a Western culture that would accept him.

Furthermore, identity in post-apartheid African literature is also at the center of a study by M.J. Cloete revolving around Gordimer's *The Pickup*. Cloete adds an interesting insight to the question of identity. The article examines the theme of identity against two different backgrounds. Defining identity as the qualities, beliefs and ideas that make a person, Cloete bases this study on the assumption that "identity is unstable" (2005). She examines the question of identity and otherness by examining the paradoxical nature of the novel. This is expressed in Julie's and Abdu's cultural identities both in South Africa and in the desert country, in their beliefs, aspirations and desires. The difference between their cultural identities is also clearly evident as Julie distances herself from her middle-class South African parents and as Abdu further identifies with the very aspects she rejects. Furthermore, Cloete's reading of *The Pickup* focuses on the shifting of identities as the couple moves to another country and as both protagonists find the sense of identity that they are seeking.

I find Cloete's interpretation of the shifting of identities in *The Pickup* persuasive, for she defines identity as a shifting process that is influenced by the individual's experiences. I depart

from her analysis with my focus on the elements of space and their role in the exploration of an identity. More specifically, I focus on Julie's movement from private to public spaces and how that movement reverses the traditional tale of female liberation. I focus also on the novel's shuffling of social and cultural codes which expands the western frame of female liberation to include self-realization in a country where traditionally it cannot be achieved, in a traditional Arab country. My objective in chapter I is to add to the work previously done by other critics in order to show that a study of place and space can offer a new perspective on the issue of identity.

Chapter II deals with Laura Esquivel's Mexican novel Como Agua Para Chocolate (Like Water for Chocolate). The novel was published in 1989, and in 1990, it became Mexico's number one best-seller. It was translated to English in 1992, and in 1994, it won the prestigious ABBY award. Esquivel often explores the relationship between men and women in Mexico in her novels. The novel takes place in the early 1900, around the time of the Mexican Revolution. Like Water for Chocolate tells the story of Tita, the youngest daughter of a very strict mother who runs a ranch in Mexico. Tita is condemned to spend her life in the kitchen, unmarried in order to take care of her mother as the very old tradition dictates. Tita becomes the cook, caretaker and healer of the family after her sister's marriage to Pedro, the man Tita loves. Consequently, the space of the kitchen becomes an important space for Tita in order to find fulfillment. Tita's story in the kitchen among the recipes and the practice of cooking offers a perspective on the relationship between women themselves and between men and women as Tita, just like Julie in The Pickup, sets out on a journey to find fulfillment in the one place where she traditionally wouldn't.

Written by a Latin-American author in 1989, Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* belongs to post-boom literature of the 1980s. One of the characteristics post-boom literature

inherited from the period of the Latin-American boom is magical realism, and Esquivel's novel was interpreted for its use of magical realism. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris briefly discuss Like Water for Chocolate in their book Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community where Faris explains in her article "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction" the characteristics of magical realist fiction as they are found in Like Water for Chocolate and other postmodern texts. Faris explores the "irreducible element" of magic which means "the disruption of the ordinary logic of cause and effect." This disruption allows for the real to seem amazing or maybe ridiculous (168). This element is prominent in the novel. Tita's tears have magically infused the cake, but the tears that the guests experience are real. Another element is the descriptive detail which represents the realism in magical realism. "Realistic descriptions create a fictional world that resembles the one we live in, in many ways by extensive use of detail" (169). The real recipes in the novel are magical and impart wisdom at the same time. Another important element which sets Tita's story in motion is the underlying of an ancient system of beliefs in magical realist narrative, mostly those set in rural areas (182). In Tita's case, it is the old tradition dictating that the youngest daughter is to remain unmarried in order to take care of the mother for the rest of her life. According to Faris, the ending of the novel combines the magical and the real, for it ends not with Tita's and Pedro's passionate fire which is the culmination of their love and all the magical moments but with the passing on of Tita's recipes (185).

More recently, in an article entitled "Post-Boom Magical Realism" Molly Monet-Viera adds an interesting insight to the magical realism reading of *Like Water for Chocolate*. Just like Zamora and Faris, Monet-Viera finds that the novel uses many of the typical elements of magical realism such as the presence of spirits (Nacha and Mama Elena), hyperbole, and the coexistence

of the natural and supernatural realms. Similarly, she finds that "marvelous events are depicted without any surprise... Events transgress the laws of nature, but they are never questioned by the narrator or the characters" (102). However, Monet-Viera adds a feminist reading to the aspect of magical realism. Even though Tita's magic is empowering in certain situations, for example when she sabotages her sister's wedding, "she never transcends the limitations imposed upon her by Mexico's patriarchal society" (103). What I find most interesting about this feminist reading is that it considers Tita's aspiration to the traditional roles of wife, mother and cook meaningless since it takes place outside the public sphere where meaningful decisions are made, "thereby simply rearticulating women's oppression" (103). She also considers Tita as passive in the face of all her struggles, and that all her desires are realized with magic. Perhaps what I find most challenging for my thesis is her claim that Tita's passivity contributes to the women's marginalization and that women can rise above oppression without action or struggle. However, after her mother condemns her to the kitchen, Tita uses that space as a personal one in order to establish an identity (Johnson 31). She does not give in to her imposed fate. I believe she finds the resources to fight it and achieve what she desires. Susan Lucas Bobrian writes in her article on Like Water for Chocolate that rather than reducing cooking to an innate knowledge, the kitchen becomes a space of creative and magical events. Esquivel has redefined Tita's cooking skills and the female domain of the kitchen (60). In this chapter I argue that by narrating Tita's story in the kitchen, the novel offers an alternative to the traditional female notion of selfrealization. This novel expands the frame of female liberation to include one of the most unpropitious private spaces, the kitchen.

The third chapter deals with Hanan al-Shaykh's 1980 *Hikayat Zahra* (The Story of Zahra). Due to its portrayal of sexuality, *The Story of Zahra* was banned in seven Arab countries.

In fact, al-Shaykh could not find a publishing house that would accept to publish the novel, so she published it at her own expense. Hanan al-Shaykh writes about women who play an important role in her work. In fact, *The Story of Zahra* revolves around its eponymous hero who narrates her story as she goes through experiences that leave a great mark on her. As a young girl, she gets involved in an affair with a married man, but she is not satisfied and does not feel a part of it. She tries to escape to her uncle in Africa, thinking that she might be safe there. However, he makes inappropriate advances towards her, and that pushes her to marry his friend who condemns her for not being a virgin. Following her divorce from her husband, she decides to come back to Lebanon in the middle of the civil war where she gets involved with the neighborhood sniper. Of all the spaces she occupies, Zahra finds a kind of fulfillment in the last one, one of the most unfavorable spaces, the space of the home in war-torn Lebanon. By bringing Zahra back home in war time, the novel reveals the space of the home as an unlikely space of fulfillment.

The Story of Zahra is the author's first novel to be translated into English. After its publication, the novel received a lot of attention due to its intricate plot, complex female character and multiple narrators. It also sparked an interest with its detailed portrayal of human relationships and the Lebanese civil war. There are some interesting readings among the studies done on this novel. In 2001, Ann Marie Adams explains in her article "Writing Self, Writing Nation: Imagined Geographies in the Fiction of Hanan al-Shaykh" how "the main character herself is clearly represented as a symbol of the embattled nation." Zahra is identified with Lebanon; her exiled uncle sees her as a citizen of his beloved country, and her husband Majed sees her as a symbol of the respectable country he never had access to previously. Consequently, neither man is able to understand or help Zahra, for they both want something different from her

(203). Adams presents an interesting reading on the relationship between men and women, feminism and nationalism. According to her, Zahra is a "troubled young woman whom various men attempt to constrain and understand within the dogma of their own nationalist politics" (204). Adams acknowledges the role of the men in Zahra's life represented by their narratives in the novel. In fact, al-Shaykh herself says in an interview that women are victims of society more than victims of men because the men are also sometimes victims of their society since they have to obey it (Sunderman 1992).

The element of the home is another important aspect since the novel begins and ends in the same place and space: the home in Lebanon. This aspect was also discussed in several articles. In an article on the representation of interior spaces in Lebanese war fiction, Samira Aghacy analyses the space of "the home and its gendered associations" (89). Aghacy argues that the space of the home is a space of violence and that Zahra feels imprisoned within this confining site of exploitation and sexual abuse, where the male figures in her life "are intent on harassing and restricting her" (93-94). Most importantly, I find most persuasive her argument that the space of the home is transformed into a space of self-realization. Moreover, Aghacy argues that by venturing into the masculine space, Zahra challenges the male order and pushes against the boundaries set by men in order to "transcend the role gender has imposed on her" (95).

In the third chapter, I argue that *The Story of Zahra* shows how the space of the home, which is a private space from which women try to free themselves, is a space of fulfillment. Zahra's return to the home is not a simple return to the previous conditions that reigned over her life; it is an opportunity for her to reconfigure that space. Again, by examining the different

spaces in the novel, this chapter will show how *The Story of Zahra* reveals an unusual space in the tale of female fulfillment.

The Pickup, Like Water for Chocolate, and The Story of Zahra differ in many aspects, but they all share one similarity: a female protagonist who manages to find fulfillment in an unexpected, unfavorable space. These novels present alternatives to the traditional Western frame of female liberation.

But they want to decide for themselves. They don't want anyone to tell them to wear the chador... They want to study or work anywhere they decide outside the kitchen, the modern world where men still think we're the only ones to have a place.

Nadine Gordimer

These words uttered by an Arab male in Nadine Gordimer's 2001 novel *The Pickup* evoke a now classic – and somewhat Eurocentric – split between private "women's" space and the public spaces of male prerogative. The novel, however, sets up this polarity only to undermine it. This chapter will argue that Gordimer's novel traces a wholly unexpected movement on the part of the white female South African protagonist living in an unnamed Arab country. In depicting the character's movement from public to private spaces, the novel reverses the traditional notion of female emancipation and therefore broadens the horizons of female self-actualization. This chapter's examination of spaces will show how *The Pickup*'s shuffling of social and cultural codes expands beyond a western frame to include liberation within a traditional Arab country.

The plot of *The Pickup* recounts the story of a young South African publicist named Julie Summers. Julie is the daughter of a rich white middle-class man; however, she has distanced herself from her father's bourgeois lifestyle and moved out of his house in the suburbs into a cottage. In the beginning of the novel, Julie's car breaks down, and this event sets the story in motion, for she picks up and falls in love with the mechanic who repairs her car. Abdu is an illegal immigrant from an unnamed Arab country who works as a mechanic because it is the only way to remain undetected. Abdu's and Julie's relationship develops as they spend more time together in her cottage and with her mixed circle of friends who meet around the Table in the

El-Ay Café. Soon afterwards, Julie's blissful situation changes as Abdu is faced with deportation from South Africa. Refusing to ask her father for his help, Julie tries her best with her connections to help Abdu remain in the country. But Julie's efforts are not enough, and Abdu has to leave. Spontaneously, Julie decides to accompany him, so they get married because Abdu cannot present her to his family as a girlfriend. The second part of the novel takes place in the unnamed Arab country. Ibrahim (as Julie learns later is Abdu's real name) and Julie settle in the lean-to room in his parents' house. Ibrahim immediately starts reapplying for immigration to any western country that will take him while Julie, much to Ibrahim's surprise, finds her place in her new environment. She connects with his family, especially his sister, and finds inner peace in the desert that begins at the end of the street. At the end of the novel, when Ibrahim is finally granted a visa to America, Julie refuses to go with him and chooses to stay in his country with his family, giving the novel a final ironic twist.

Nadine Gordimer does not divide the novel into chapters or parts, but since the story takes place in two different settings and countries, the novel is divided into two almost symmetrical parts. The first part takes place in South Africa, more specifically and as we find out towards the end of the novel, in upper-middle-class Johannesburg where the female protagonist, Julie, enjoys all the freedoms she is entitled to. As she moves with Ibrahim to his unnamed Arab country, the second part of the novel begins in a totally different setting where Julie apparently enjoys less freedom.

Through Julie's experiences, the novel re-inscribes the traditional notion of female liberation which has it that women's liberation follows a spatial path from private to public spaces. The public/private dualism existed long before "first-wave" feminism came to contest it in the early twentieth century. Women in the west were socially defined as naturally suited for

private spaces, the home, the kitchen (Code 412). "First-wave" and "second-wave" feminism brought many changes to the situation of women in the western world. Among these changes was the breakdown of the public/private dichotomy. Social reform movements "propelled a wide spectrum of women to challenge their exclusion from the public realm" (Code 208). In her book Space, Place and Gender, Doreen Massey links the issue of women's mobility in space to identity. She says, "One of the most evident aspects of [the] joint control of spatiality and identity has been in the west related to the culturally specific distinction between public and private. The attempt to confine women to the domestic sphere was both a specifically spatial control and, through that, a social control on identity" (179). Therefore, confining women to private spaces controlled their identity by preventing a minimal level of mobility in order for women to be "free." By effecting these changes and moving out of the private to the public sphere, women were seeking equality, freedom and a sense of fulfillment that they could not achieve in the private sphere alone. Today, many Western women have achieved a level of freedom that allows them to co-exist with men in the public sphere. However, the matter differs in the Arab countries where women still face some constraints that restrict their freedom and confine them to the domestic space.

Mieke Bal defines place as locations "related to the physical, mathematically measurable shape of spatial dimensions" (133). Places become spaces when they are "linked to a certain point of perception...That point of perception may be a character, which is situated in a space, observes it and reacts to it" (133). In other words, the events that unfold in the setting and the characters' actions and reaction there transform places into spaces. Even the physical features of those spaces have an importance. "Objects have spatial status. They determine the spatial effect of the room by their shape, measurements, and colors" (135). Therefore, the spaces in any novel

and in *The Pickup* in particular acquire functions and meaning different from those of geographical places.

The Pickup presents an alternative to the classical narrative of female liberation and fulfillment by having Julie leave the Johannesburg spaces she knows to go live with Abdu in his family home near the desert in a country which unexpectedly offers her the fulfillment that she constantly aspires to but never achieves in her own country. She finds fulfillment in the private spaces of that desert country more easily than she ever did in the public spaces of her country. In her contact with the cultural other, she manages to explore aspects of herself that she was unaware of. In her husband's country, she explores social norms and practices that were "strangely new to herself" (Gordimer 117).

The Johannesburg and Arab spaces are so different they can be described as functionally opposite. Bal says, "strategically, the movement of characters can constitute a transition from one space to another. Often one space will be the other's opposite" (137). In Johannesburg, we are introduced to three main places/spaces: the Table at the El-Ay Café, the cottage and the father's house in the suburbs. In the second part of the novel, and in what could be considered the opposite of Johannesburg, the unnamed Arab country, we are introduced to two main places/spaces: Abdu's house, more particularly the lean-to room, and the desert. Again, as a result of the dialectical relation between these spaces, Julie manages to re-explore her identity and find fulfillment.

Julie's sense of identity and fulfillment is put to the test in her country and more precisely in the three spaces mentioned above. To begin with, Julie is a single woman, living in Johannesburg. She is the daughter of a rich white man who lives in a big fancy house in the "Suburbs". Capitalized throughout the novel, the Suburbs area, and more particularly the

father's house, is the meeting place of the older generation, of her father and his similarly rich guests. The scene of the Sunday lunch at the father's house is essential in setting the standard of what Julie is not and what she does not wish to be: the daughter of a bourgeois man who controls a big part of stocks, base metals and chemicals. Along with Abdu, the reader is introduced to the world of economy and capitalism. The father and "the principal guests he was cultivating" talked about buying and selling with little concern to "robbing the poor of their jobs [and] killing the industry" (43). In Marx's terms, the father and his guests would form the capitalist class who possesses the means of production and consumption (Bottomore 54). Her father's house in the suburbs is not the first space that we see Julie in, but it is an important one to understand Julie's alienation. Her father's house is described as very luxurious, with very luxury-craving people as guests, and a sophisticated and worldly stepmother – Danielle. The choice of adjectives used to describe the house suggests a degree of opulence, "the cushioned chaises longues and flower arrangements are an extension rather than a break from the formal comforts, mirrored bouquets and paintings in the room" (Gordimer 40). Even the food is presented in an exquisite manner, "the food, already set out by the time the daughter of the house arrives, is the cold Norwegian salmon with sauces and kaleidoscope-bright salads" (40). These objects, the chaises longues, the flowers, the food, take on more meaning than just objects. They acquire in Bal's terms "spatial status" (135), and, hence, reflect the father's lifestyle.

The passage describing the father's house begins with a statement that uses the pronoun you and a command and therefore can only be said by Julie to Abdu as she takes him to her father's house for the Sunday lunch, "Don't be too sure you know what's to come, that set struck and rebuilt for the same scene every Sunday all over The Suburbs" (40). In this case, we have

two different levels of narration. *The Pickup* is told by an omniscient narrator who chronicles the story and has complete access to the events, characters and dialogues. Throughout, the story is narrated objectively in third-person singular:

The signals of the personal language situation refer to the language situation of the narrator, we are dealing with a perceptible narrator. When the signals refer to the language situation of the actors, and a clear change of level has been indicated by means of a declarative verb, a colon, quotation marks, etc., we speak of a personal language situation at the second level (Bal 48).

However, when Julie speaks these words, "Don't be too sure you know what's to come" (Gordimer 40), the change of level was not indicated clearly by either a colon or quotation marks. In this case, "We have text interference... The words of the actors are represented at the first level (that of the narrator), so that the narrator adopts the actor's discourse" (Bal 48). Julie defies the "narrative convention" by saying these words to Abdu, showing that there is no one fixed identity for her yet just as there are no clear narrative changes. When Julie finishes her words, an unexpected shift in perspective back to the narrator occurs as s/he describes the father's house, "these guests are not exposed, in every sense, half-clad to the sun and plastic chairs round a swimming pool her father is not bending a belly over grilling meat" (40). This unannounced shift in perspective leads the reader to believe that Julie is the one to say these words. It also lets the reader in on Julie's thoughts. Interestingly, the use of the negation "not exposed" and "not bending a belly over grilling meat" expresses a certain implied comparison; in other words, the description of her father and his guests implies that Julie's standards would be the opposite of her father's social gatherings. Hers would be a social gathering where guests would enjoy the sun on plastic chairs around the pool and the host would grill the meat himself.

In addition to that, at the end of that same paragraph, we learn through the narrator Julie's feelings towards that situation and her discomfort, "Julie comes upon it as always: sinking into a familiar dismay" (40). Even her stepmother knows that Julie prefers to distance herself from that lifestyle. Referring to Danielle's reaction to Julie and Abdu, the narrator declares, "Either no reaction other than hostessly; or more likely one of no surprise that the girl would turn up with what was no doubt the latest wearying ploy to distance herself from her father" (41). She distances herself from that lifestyle to the point that "she is overcome by embarrassment" and afraid of what "those people" might say in front of Abdu (45). "Julie is so sickened by the pretence of her father's house that she escapes the company by fleeing into the house. The description [of the interior of the house] captures the essence of her loneliness and spiritual neglect among the pomp and splendor of her so-called home" (Cloete 2005). The narrator says, "but it is another house she's running away to hide in; she has never lived in this one. This is not the upstairs retreat of the house where she was a child...Rejection implies hidden – her rejection hid this origin of hers now expansively revealed before him" (Gordimer 45). Julie related the sense of comfort that one would get when at home to memory. She remembered what "her" house used to be like, her bedroom with adolescent posters of film stars on the walls and the worn panda from her father. However, "each room she looks into up there – no one of them is the room that was hers" (45), and that image simply doesn't meet with what she remembered. Hence, this is not where she belongs. Her father's house becomes the symbol of the affluence she refuses, just like the car she borrows from her father in the beginning. That car is also described as a "car from the Suburbs" (8). Julie worries a lot about being seen in that car to the point that she once denies her connection to it, "it is not mine! She claimed her identity: I'd like to have my own old one back!" (9). She hates that car and the attention it attracts from Abdu. She hurries to

deny its ownership and the financial/social labeling that the car imposes on her, "I don't own it, that's for sure... You should buy a new car. He was turned from her, again looking at the Rover: the evidence gathered that she could afford to. She lobbed the accusation back to him" (9). Moreover, she distances herself from her father's affluent lifestyle which is characterized by an "intimate language of money" (45), a language which Julie and her guest experience in a detailed conversation among the father and his guests. She finds herself "overcome by embarrassment" as she observes Abdu taken by their capitalist conversation. And even though she has a job in public relations, she does not identify with her father's economic and social life possibly because she does not belong in that exploitative economy that does not recognize "robbing the poor of their jobs" (43). In her father's home, where she would presumably acquire a sense of identity, Julie defines herself by what she is not, by her "difference from the bourgeois world of her parents" (Meier 2003). She rejects that space with its "social and racial isolation" (Genty 85).

Julie defines herself in contrast with her past (Meier 2003); as a result, she makes herself a home and a familiar space outside her father's house in the El-Ay Café. Located in town and away from the Suburbs, the El-Ay's urban setting appeals to Julie. The El-Ay Café is an important space for Julie, for in it she meets with her friends at the Table. The word table is almost always capitalized in the novel as if it were a proper name to draw the reader's attention to the fact that it is not just a table in a café. The friends who sit around the table are a mixed group: an old poet, a Buddhist, a journalist, white friends of the same social class as Julie and other black friends. These are her "elective siblings who have distanced themselves from the ways of the past, their families whether these are black ones still living in the old ghettos or white ones in the suburbs" (Gordimer 23). They probably distanced themselves from their families for the same reason she has; they possibly could not identify with their families' social

norms (no matter what these norms are). The Table seems to be free from the father's influence; "indeed The Table where Julie and her friends meet [is] emblematic of the social freedom and mobility of the new South Africa" (Kossew 23). Hence, it can be seen as a reflection of Julie's beliefs. Within that space, she can maintain a sense of identity that she created away from her father and which is characterized as liberal and unorthodox.

However, the Table of mixed liberal friends is not home either, and it is not where her identity is formed. Some features of this space make Julie's attempt to identify with it weak. Julie distances herself from her father's pretentious lifestyle, but the El-Ay Café doesn't provide much authenticity either. The name of the café itself is supposed to stand for Los Angeles but is written differently. It is supposed to "offer the inspiration of an imagined lifestyle to habitués" (5). It seems as if it is a place for people who, by her father's definition and his standards of living, failed in their life like her friend the unemployed journalist who house-sits for absent owners or the couple who paint banners for rallies and pop concerts. Also, when the time comes for Julie to leave her country, she marries Abdu but doesn't include her friends of the Table as she had done previously. She also notices how her chosen "grease monkey" does not really fit in with her friends and doesn't understand their reactions to the point that she finds herself apologizing for them instead of just defending them and identifying with them as she had done earlier. Finally, although Julie did not distance herself and refuse The Table as she does with her father's house, the liberal space of the Table is not the space where Julie re-explores her identity. Furthermore, when Julie faces the different conditions of life in the unnamed Arab country, she refers back to her time at the table as "playing at reality...a game, The El-Ay Café" (164).

The third important Johannesburg space that plays a role in Julie's liberation and identity re-exploration is her cottage. It is the closest space to a home she has, and the space that gets her

closer to the sense of fulfillment. Just like the table at the café, the cottage is far removed from the Suburbs, and unlike her father's house, it is a small rented place with little furniture in it. It is a very closed space that she calls her own, "her elected place, her cottage" (26). When she brings Abdu back to her cottage, it becomes "their place" (50), "their bed" (53) where she experiences the purest kind of love as if she were experiencing it for the first time. Maybe the most important aspect of the cottage to explore is that it reasserts Julie's refusal of her past and identity as the daughter of a rich white man. As I mentioned above, the cottage is quite the opposite of her father's house. Whereas her father's house contains different rooms for Danielle to decorate and organize, Julie's cottage is comprised of one room with a kitchen. Unlike the organization and defined aspects of her father's house, Julie's cottage is untidy, "to seat himself he removed the stained cup and plate and a spatter of envelops, sheets of opened letters, withered apple-peel, old Sunday paper, from a chair" (18). And, in contrast to the details used to describe the father's house, her cottage is said to be "an outhouse renovated as a cottage...its underfurnishings nevertheless giving away a certain ease inherent in, conditioned by, luxuries taken for granted as necessities: there was a bathroom that dwarfed the living-cum-bedroom by comparison, and the cramped kitchen was equipped with freezer and gadgets" (18). Another difference is the economic and social class that these two places reflect. If her father's house reflects a bourgeois, rich social status, the cottage reflects an average social status. However, this cottage is not the favorable space for Julie to re-explore her identity. Just as her father's house and the table lacked some aspects that make favorable spaces, the cottage also lacks an important element. She enjoyed the love and sex she experienced with Abdu in the cottage, but that experience didn't last because they were caught up by reality and the immigration services. She did not have to worry about the outside world when she was inside with Abdu. She creates her

own small world within the walls of the cottage. The cottage functions as a frame where Julie feels safe. But what happens when one element of this space is taken away? When Abdu has to leave the country, that space loses its function, so Julie leaves that space to find fulfillment in another space. Her life in the cottage was make-believe because she was playing a waiting game with Abdu, waiting for the deportation papers to come, waiting to see if she can change the outcome of the game and overturn the decision of sending Abdu away. It seems as if life and work stopped during that time. Thus, when Julie faces the different conditions of life in the unnamed Arab country, she refers back to her time in the cottage as "playing at reality...it was a doll's house, the cottage" (164). In the cottage, Julie was just playing at reality because, just like in her father's house and at The Table, she was just playing a role. In other words, she was "playing" because without genuine insertion into the economy as someone whose life depends on his/her work to earn money to live, there are no stakes for her.

In this first part of the novel, Julie lives in seemingly favorable spaces, but in the midst of the chaos, she longs for some stability, safety and fulfillment. Although she lives in post-colonial, post apartheid, Johannesburg, she still cannot find a true sense of who she is because "she has led an emotionally sterile and unproductive existence" (Kossew 22). She first leaves her father's house. Even though the house is described as pretentious and can be considered as a private space since it is a house, it is still a favorable space. It is a house with many luxuries and riches to which she can have access if she wishes to. However, it is in that same space that she asks one of the important questions that could help her determine her place in life, "where to locate the self?" (47). The fact that Julie wonders about locating the self in her father's house shows that this space is just not that favorable for her to re-explore her identity, for generally speaking a person tends to develop a sense of identity at home, and the home remains the place

to return to when faced by problems. The father's house becomes a "thematized" space (Bal 136) because while in it, Julie realizes that she has no actual place. Moreover, the Table at the El-Ay Café is also a clearly favorable space, for she determines what is said and done there. The friends at the table don't ask questions, they help when they are needed, and they are accustomed to all sorts of practices. However, it may be that same lack of codes of behavior where nobody actually cares about the other that pushes Julie to take that step towards Abdu's country. She simply does not find around the Table in the café what she is looking for outside her father's house. She left a dysfunctional family only to join another one where everyone goes by a "generic quality" and no actual name or description: the poet, the AIDS victim, Julie's pickup (Genty 86). As for the cottage, it offers her the kind of freedom that no other place in that first part can offer. Again, even if it is considered as a private space, it is not the private space that is inhibiting and oppressive like a father's house or a husband's home. It is the space where she experienced and surrendered to a great love. Nevertheless, the fact that she constantly questions the situation she is in and the fact that she does not seem able to exist in that cottage without that love and the security and closeness it provides make the cottage an inconvenient space for the construction of an identity and the quest for fulfillment. Since Julie couldn't identify herself in these favorable spaces in a country where she is not constrained in any way but where she misses a sense of belonging, she decides, in an unexpected move and against her father's and Abdu's advice, to move to a country where she will face many constraints that will limit her affective and physical freedom thus challenging the mobility of women from an interior space to an exterior space.

If Julie defines herself "in opposition to the culture of her past" (Meier 2003), then moving to a more conservative country (in this case Abdu's unnamed Arab country) could be the right decision. Ibrahim's (formerly known as Abdu in the first part of the novel where

individuals remain somewhat anonymous) country is defined as the opposite of Johannesburg. When Julie tries to imagine that country, she does so wrongly and conforming to the western essentializing view of the east, "palm trees, camels, alleys hung with carpets and brass vessels" (Gordimer 25). She has a faint idea about where she is going. When she tells Ibrahim that she wants to go with him as she shows him the two airline tickets, and knowing fully the lifestyle she leads in Johannesburg, he tells her, "you cannot live in my country, it is not for you, you can't understand what it is to live there" (95). When she tells her father about her decision, he responds with what is evident to everyone except to her: she doesn't belong in that country. His description of the country may not be as simplistic as hers; nevertheless, it is exaggerated and inaccurate, "the place is dangerous, a country of gangster political rivals, abominable lack of health standards – and as for women: you, you to whom independence, freedom mean so much, eh, there women are treated like slaves. It's the culture, religion" (98). Ibrahim and Julie's father both paint her a very negative image of that country; however, it is in that desert country and the two spaces mentioned before that Julie manages to re-explore her identity.

Johannesburg provides Julie with enough freedom for her to enjoy life but she doesn't; on the other hand, the unnamed Arab country imposes many restrictions on her that she shouldn't enjoy life, but she does as we see how she chooses to stay in a materially poor but spiritually rich country. One of these restrictions is placed on her wardrobe. The first thing that Ibrahim asks her to do as soon as they arrive is to cover up her chest bone. Her response shows little understanding of where she is now, "But it's hot. Don't I look all right?" (115). The liberal Julie has to mend her clothes, something she never had to do back home. Another important inconvenience is the language. It is a barrier that she cannot speak the language. The instant she meets Ibrahim's sister and cannot communicate with her, she feels the disadvantage and decides

to learn Arabic. Furthermore, Julie is faced with another restriction, one placed on her freedom of mobility. In this country, Julie cannot go anywhere she desires without the company of a man. When she says that she wants to see the city, Ibrahim tells her that she cannot go alone, and he cannot take her. In this culture, there are even places she simply cannot enter at all, "the mosque where she can only picture him on Fridays, she is a woman, and even she who may go anywhere in the world, do as she likes, cannot enter" (132). She cannot sit with men and have a conversation with them. Perhaps the restriction that flouts one of the most fundamental tenets of feminism is the one placed on her freedom to occupy the job of her choice. Ibrahim's sister secures her the job of teaching English to her employer and other women wishing to learn the language. Although she knew she didn't qualify, she had to settle for that job, for she couldn't do anything else, "she was like one who had to settle for the underbelly of a car" (143). She was like Ibrahim in her country. His skills and degree mattered nothing there, and he had to work with cars because he seemed to be able to do that just like she has just enough skills to be able to teach English. She entered a world where every aspect of life is different from what she previously knew. Time is measured differently, "Five times each day the voice of the muezzin set the time-frame she had entered" (124). Eating traditions are also different; people ate with their hands on the ground. Nothing about these restrictions and traditions inspires freedom, and fulfillment, but Julie finds a way to adapt to all these restrictions and manages to eventually find fulfillment.

In the spaces of this desert country, Julie manages to find everything she lacked in Johannesburg: people who need her, an extended tight-knit family, and a goal in life. She sets on the journey to self identification right from the moment the plane landed in the airport. The first moment that she realizes that her identity is blurred and that she does not know who she is

happens in that country, that airport, in contact with that cultural other. She says, "She was somehow as strange to herself as she was to them...If she was strangely new to them, she was strangely new to herself" (117). This first place (mathematically measured) and space (in which Julie is placed) is an acting place. The fact that she realized that she was also new to herself in the Arab country is really important and sets in motion the real quest for identity. A few pages later, we read that she even tries to find herself reflected in Ibrahim's eyes when she feels that he does not see her when he looks at her, "It is she who is looking for herself reflected in those eyes" (129). She cares about her image in his eyes and how she seems in this culture. From here on, Julie tries to find the adequate reflection of who she is; hence, she does her best to fit in and to overcome these restrictions in a way they become part of her traditions as well, even if she does that as part of her adventure as Ibrahim claims.

She first shows a great willingness to do everything and try everything. For example, when Ramadan approaches, and Ibrahim tells her she doesn't have to and cannot fast (because it is too difficult for her), she responds, "Of course I'll fast" (153). Also, when Ibrahim is pressured to force her to wear the veil, and he resists his mother's wishes, she willingly wears the veil and is even happy to look like one of the village women. She, who has never set foot in a kitchen to cook, insists repeatedly that she wants to help in the kitchen and eventually learns to cook from his mother.

Julie finds pleasure in doing the things she did. She, who has never worked without personal gain before now, finds herself really busy with her teaching job in the conversational tea circle and in the school, "She was fully occupied now. Strange, she had never worked like this before, without reservations of self, always had been merely trying out this and that, always conscious that she could move on, any time to something else, not expecting satisfaction" (194).

She finds a job not necessarily for the financial support alone but also for the emotional and personal fulfillment, avoiding by that the economic exploitation that nagged her in South Africa. Through her contact with the cultural other, the Arab women she teaches English, she found her place more and more within their culture, what she could not do in her country among her people. And according to Ibrahim, she also infused these women with some of her culture (256). She connects with her surrounding where she was needed since she loves to give as much as she receives and to learn as much as she teaches. She was never needed back home, but here the people she was teaching English needed her, "others who had come to her for - well - their need for her" (246). Mostly, in the space of the home, she finds a family, something she substituted back home with a table of friends in a café. She enjoys sitting with his sister and playing with his niece. His sister even calls Julie her best friend from another country. All these experiences lead Julie closer to her identity. Ibrahim's house becomes a symbol of everything she was looking for in her country: family, closeness, commitment. All these are values she lacked in her contact with her friends at the Table and in her father's house. In the private space of Ibrahim's home, Julie acquired a sense of fulfillment through the experiences she was exposed to like teaching English and choosing to fast and her reaction to each situation that she faced like mending her wardrobe and obeying the rules of Ramadan.

However, the space where she realizes who she is and what she is supposed to do is the desert, that vast, infinite, empty place. The desert is described as a powerful place, one that ends the houses, stops the cars, the lights, the vendors and the people (167). Julie is completely taken by the power of the desert, for it is "out of time...it has no measure of space, features that mark distance from here to there...the desert is eternity" (172). She explores the desert time after time like she explored herself time after time, and she finally realizes that there was "no fear of

getting lost; she could always return herself from the desert" (199) as if there were no fear of not knowing who she is anymore. The desert even functions as a friend if there were no one to talk to like the Table used to do. Unlike people, "the desert is always; it doesn't die it doesn't change, it exists" (229). The desert is just there, a certainty, what she needs to become herself. She tries to explain her decision to stay behind and not immigrate to America by attributing that sudden change of mind to the desert (262). The desert provides her a space where she can test her mettle away from the artificial paradise that South Africa provides for her. In the desert, she encounters the world on its own terms and not on those of an exploitative economy. The closer she gets to finding a true sense of who she is in the desert, the farther she moves from Ibrahim, the more the unexpected shifts in perspective occur in the novel as Julie and Ibrahim argue about her decision. The more she identifies with that desert country, the more she alienates Ibrahim. Julie finally embraces that space with its spirituality and family solidarity, for she finds in it a strong caring mother and a family. Having a family and living a simple life are aspects that matter more to her than having the freedom to do whatever she pleases.

In the second part of the novel, Julie lives in a seemingly unpropitious space, but in the midst of these unfavorable conditions, she finds the fulfillment that she longed for in her home country. In the confined spaces of Ibrahim's home and the bare space of the desert, she reexplores who she is. In that materially poor space, she finds out more about herself and what she is capable of doing and offering to the people around her. The experiences she faces, and the restrictions she embraces allow her to live freely in a country she was warned about. Having a variety of choices back home created an unstable environment for Julie, but the lack of choices and being forced to obey some traditions give Julie the chance to enjoy life without thinking about making any choices. The possibility of doing something she wants like growing a rice field

in the desert allows her to stand ground on her decision: the decision to stay there. "The initially materially spoilt but emotionally neglected Julie does not exchange her privileged position for another, but turns her back on material gains" (Cloete 2005), in order to savor the simplicity of life.

Susan Stanford Friedman says in her book *Mappings*, "Identity often requires some form of displacement – literal or figurative – to come to consciousness. Leaving home brings into being the idea of 'home'" (151). Julie's identity didn't come to consciousness until she left her home. *The Pickup* is the story of female liberation told in reverse. It is refreshing to read a tale of liberation that takes place where freedom is yet to be fully actualized. The spaces of both parts of the novel carry more importance to the character as she embarks on a journey of self-discovery. They gain more importance than just their measurable characteristics. Whether they are huge like the father's house and the desert or small like her cottage and Ibrahim's house, Julie re-explores her identity in the practices that unfold within these spaces and not in their physical features alone. *The Pickup* challenges the recent tale of female liberation by giving Julie more room to enjoy her life when she no longer has all the freedom to make the choices, and by doing that, it offers another perspective of that tale, a perspective to be explored and tested in the other ways.

## A Recipe for Fulfillment: Achieving Freedom in the Private Space of the Kitchen in Laura Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate

The title of Laura Esquivel's 1989 novel, Like Water for Chocolate, which is a popular Mexican expression meaning to be very upset, conveys the protagonist's anger as she struggles to overcome the obstacles that are set in front of her while she pursues her happiness in the private space of the kitchen. Tita de la Garza sets out on a journey of self-discovery, fulfillment and resistance in and from the kitchen while cooking and experimenting with ancient recipes, challenging at the same time the feminist notion of liberating women from the confinement of the kitchen. This chapter will argue that Like Water for Chocolate reveals how a woman can expand her boundaries to experience freedom in one of the most unexpected spaces – the kitchen. In narrating Tita's story in the kitchen among the ingredients and the recipes, which are at the foundation of every chapter, the novel challenges the traditional tale of women's liberation thus offering an alternative vision of women's self-actualization which is usually accomplished outside the kitchen. This chapter will examine the unpropitious space of the kitchen and, more importantly, the unpropitious practice of cooking that evolves within it to show how Esquivel's novel expands the frame of liberation to offer women a different space for achieving affective freedom.

Like Water for Chocolate tells the story of Tita de la Garza, the youngest daughter of a family living in Mexico near the American border. Literally born and raised in the kitchen, Tita's life revolves around cooking. When Pedro, the young man in love with Tita, comes to ask for her hand in marriage from her dictatorial mother, she informs him that, as the youngest of her sisters, Tita is destined to remain unmarried in order to take care of her mother till she dies. As a result, Mama Elena offers Pedro the hand of Tita's older sister Rosaura. Seeing that he cannot change

her mind, Pedro accepts to marry Rosaura just to be near Tita. After Pedro and Rosaura's wedding, Tita and Pedro find in the kitchen, through the passion for food, a way to communicate their feelings which grow even further after Rosaura gives birth to a baby boy who is left for Tita to feed. The intensity of their love spreads to affect the people around them, especially Tita's sister Gertrudis. Gertrudis is overcome by intense feelings which drive her to run away naked from home into the arms of a soldier in the revolution. When the baby boy dies because Mama Elena sends Pedro's family to live in Texas, Tita suffers from a mental breakdown, and Mama Elena decides to have her sent to an asylum with the American doctor. This event constitutes a turning point for Tita who decides from the doctor's house not to return home again. Dr. Brown falls in love with Tita, and he helps her to overcome her emotional problem. Mama Elena's injury, after bandits attack the ranch, forces Tita to go back home, and her consequent death brings Pedro and his family back to the ranch too. This gives Pedro and Tita a chance to finally consummate their love, something that enrages Mama Elena's ghost. Even though Tita is no longer a virgin, Dr. Brown insists on marrying her; however, she postpones the wedding. Years pass, and Rosaura dies freeing her only daughter from the obligation of taking care of her. Tita's niece, Esperanza, marries Dr. John's son. On that same magical night, Pedro and Tita reunite for the last time, and because of the intensity of their love, Pedro dies, so Tita kills herself and joins Pedro in the tunnel of light, ending the novel in an intense episode of magical realism.

Even though the story takes place over the span of almost twenty-two years, the novel is divided into twelve chapters corresponding to the twelve months of the year. Each chapter has a recipe that begins it and corresponds to the events that unfold in it. Therefore, some recipes are specific to the month they begin. Also each chapter begins with a list of ingredients to prepare each recipe. Some of these ingredients play an important role in Tita's quest. Having a recipe at

the center of every chapter makes the private domain of the kitchen and the practice of cooking the main space in the novel. Even when Tita loses her mind halfway through the novel and the year and moves to Dr. Brown's house, the kitchen and cooking still remain important for Tita to achieve affective and sexual fulfillment.

Through Tita's experiences in the kitchen, the novel re-inscribes the traditional liberation movement of women which dictates that in order to achieve freedom and independence away from the space of the home and the kitchen, women have to experience life outside those two spaces. *Like Water for Chocolate* portrays the life of women in nineteenth century Mexico at the time of the revolution. In her book *Space, Place and Gender,* Doreen Massey describes life in the nineteenth century as, "Danger and drudgery; male solidarity and female oppression." She adds, "Here the separation of men's and women's lives was virtually total: men were the breadwinners, women the domestic laborers" (193). Therefore, to be able to achieve freedom, the narrative of liberation has it that women have to break away from the confinement of the kitchen and join men in the public sphere. Women would have to break the cycle of oppression in order to assert a sense of fulfillment and identity. One of the main concerns of western women in the nineteenth century was to achieve a sense of economic freedom and equality. They no longer wanted to be confined to the kitchen just because they are women.

Gabriel Zoran identifies three levels of spatial structuring in the narrative: the topographical level, the chronotopic level and the textual level. Spatial relations can be formed at a basic topographical level, expressed by using direct descriptions, linking object and locations, but they can also be constructed at the chronotopic and textual levels through the movements of things and people around the narrative world (Zoran 315 - 319). In other words, places and spaces can be studied at the basic level of their physical features and also at the level of the

characters' movements and interactions within these spaces. More particularly, "objective spatial relationships between aspects of a narrative are helpful in enabling readers to visualize its content, but equally important here is the way in which characters inhabit the space of their world both socially and psychologically" (Herman 55). Therefore, the social practices that unfold in the spaces and their psychological impact on characters are as important as the spaces themselves.

The kitchen is the main space where, as readers, we are introduced to almost all the events in the novel. Therefore, by having Tita confined to it and turning that private space into her "own world" and thus finding in it an outlet for her emotions, Like Water for Chocolate offers an alternative to the traditional tale of female emancipation and fulfillment (Esquivel 8). Tita does not have many choices because she was born and raised in the kitchen, so her confinement seems normal in the beginning. However, when she is denied her basic rights and needs, she turns the space of the kitchen into a liberating one where she can achieve fulfillment and test her boundaries. Moreover, even if she doesn't want to leave the house or even join the work force, Tita wants more freedom in her own house. She wants to be able to marry Pedro and show him her love. She wants to be able to say what she thinks without receiving a beating from her mother for it. When she realizes that she cannot, she decides to use that space in her favor. Also, we are introduced to another private space that allows Tita to reach within and get in touch with her emotions and face her problems, the house of Dr. Brown. In the doctor's house, she learns to put herself ahead in order to control her inner flame, something that her mother usually kept put out.

Tita's desires and emotions are put to the test while she is confined to the kitchen. To begin with, Tita is the youngest of three daughters of a very dictatorial mother. Tita is born in the

kitchen "amid the smells of simmering noodle soup, thyme, bay leaves and cilantro, steamed milk, garlic, and of course, onion" (Esquivel 6). Although there is very little description of the physical aspects of the kitchen, the space or area of the kitchen is measured in comparison to the space of the house. Tita's grandniece, the narrator, describes the space of the kitchen in the beginning as both a space of confinement and liberation. Growing up in that confined space, "It wasn't easy for a person whose knowledge of life was based on the kitchen to comprehend the outside world" (7). For Tita, the world was first limited to the four walls of the kitchen and the herb garden. Since Tita did not know about the family tradition as she was growing up, the kitchen was first a place to learn about cooking and to have fun with Nacha, the family cook. However, when Pedro asks for Tita's hand in marriage, and they are both informed of the family tradition, the kitchen becomes a space of oppression. Mama Elena dictates the family tradition, which states that the youngest daughter is to remain unmarried in order to cook and take care of her mother, like a judge pronounces a lifetime imprisonment verdict. The walls of the kitchen close even further around Tita when Nacha dies, leaving Tita as the main cook for Mama Elena and the entire family. Therefore, once she becomes the family cook, she follows a very strict regimen imposed by Mama Elena who, according to the narrator, "had been killing [Tita] a little at a time since she was a child, and she hadn't quite finished her off" (Esquivel 49). It is only when Tita suffers from a mental breakdown and goes to Dr. John's house that we learn how much the kitchen was a space of oppression under her mother's control. In the doctor's house, she does not have to work; she sits and stares at her hands, she looks at them as she looks at a baby, and she moves them as she pleases because "at her mother's, what she had to do with her hands was strictly determined, no questions asked" (109). Before Tita turns that space into a favorable one through her cooking, her confinement to the kitchen makes her an embodiment of

every woman who was denied the freedom to do what she desires outside the domestic space of the kitchen.

Seeing that she cannot change her mother's mind concerning her marriage to Pedro, Tita resolves on using the space of the kitchen in her favor as a means of artistic expression of emotions. Tita grew up in a household where not only was she discouraged from communicating what she felt, but she was also forbidden from doing so. No matter what Tita thought or felt, Mama Elena didn't want to hear about it or see it. When Tita tries to discuss the issue of her marriage with her mother and tries to give her opinion, her mother responds, "You don't have an opinion, and that's all I want to hear about it" (11). Mama Elena's cruelty reaches the point where she forces Tita to prepare everything for her sister's wedding, and while doing so, Tita is not allowed to experience or feel any sadness. She has to be happy about the fact that her sister is marrying the man Tita loves. "I won't stand for disobedience, nor am I going to allow you to ruin your sister's wedding, with your acting like a victim," Mama Elena told Tita (27). Having to deal with her sister's wedding and her own bottled emotions, Tita turns to the kitchen to release some of these suppressed emotions because she, of all people, knows that in the kitchen "flavors, smells, textures and the effects they could have were beyond Mama Elena's iron command" (48), which is refered to in Spanish as rigorous control (riguroso control), even harsher and more oppressive than iron. As repressive as a society it may be, one cannot deny the importance of food. This pleasure opens up the door for another appetite, and Tita takes advantage of that in order to mediate her feelings and desires.

Destined to serve her mother and to serve as the family cook, Tita explores through her cooking all kinds of emotions. Because of her mother, Tita is unable to discover the extent of her anger freely like any human being would, she is unable to cry freely without fear, and she is

unable to simply say that she is sad. Therefore, she resorts to her cooking. While preparing her sister's wedding cake along with Nacha, Tita cries her eyes out in the batter, for she cannot cry in front of her mother. She releases her sadness, and by doing so, she slightly alters the cake's recipe and adds a personal touch. When the wedding guests eat Tita's cake, they experience strange feelings, "everyone was flooded with a great wave of longing" (39). They experience what she feels. She is sad and frustrated about her sister's wedding and about losing Pedro, so everyone at the wedding cries over lost love, felt pain and frustration, and eventually throws up. Even the rigid Mama Elena cries silently. The powerful imagery of the guests suffering and hurting over lost love reflects the magnitude of Tita's pain and love for Pedro and the mediating role of cooking. One would think by reading the description that the scenery is one of war or death, "she didn't notice that with every step the scenes of misery around her, pathetic and horrifying were growing worse" (40). Even the bride was affected. Rosaura was carried away by a "raging rotting river" (40), a river described in Spanish as "macilento" or suggestive of great sadness. Through the wedding dinner, we witness how Tita uses the space of the kitchen and her cooking to release the sadness that dwelled within her from the moment her mother denied her the right to get married. Her confinement becomes "one of expression when she is forced to prepare her sister's wedding dinner" (Perkins 2000). Her "creativity," even if not on purpose, results in an act of punishment for those who contributed to her pain and suffering.

Tita uses the kitchen not only to express sadness but also to explore her love for Pedro. In fact, "the kitchen also becomes an outlet for Tita's repressed passion for Pedro" (Perkins 2000).

After being forced to prepare Pedro's and Rosaura's wedding dinner, Tita has to endure the pain of seeing Pedro around the house all day long without being able to go near him or even talk to him, especially not around Mama Elena's watchful eyes. With this notion in mind, Tita finds

through her recipes and in the ingredients a way to show Pedro how much she loves him. Hence, in the month of March, we see how she alters the original recipe for pheasants in rose petal, which originally called for pheasants, but since there were none on the ranch, she uses quails and the bouquet of flowers that Pedro offered her. Instead, she cooks a dish called Quails in Rose Petal Sauce. After Mama Elena asks Tita to get rid of the flowers, she holds them very tightly until they turn red from the blood that flows from her breasts. Then she gets inspired by Nacha's ghost to prepare this old recipe. Soaked with her blood, the flowers are infused with Tita's love and passion. Everyone who tasted the dish that evening responded differently to it, but the response that mattered most to Tita is Pedro's reaction to her dish, for his reaction was an intense one. Apparently, "Tita's blood and the roses from Pedro provided quite an explosive combination" (Esquivel 51). Tita's love and Passion for Pedro are so great that she elicits a great response from him when he tastes her food. It is as if her entire being melted in that sauce to produce such a powerful alchemical reaction. The vocabulary used to describe the reaction shows the extent to which Tita was able to achieve to a certain extent affective freedom and to fulfill her physical desires that Mama Elena constantly repressed. In fact, we witness a kind of reversal of roles between Tita and Pedro as Tita assumes total power through her food and takes on the dominant role of the male in the relationship. Even though Tita and Pedro don't make love in reality, the description of the scene is suggestive of that. Esquivel actually uses phallic terms to convey the sexual act, "That was the way she entered Pedro's body, hot, voluptuous, perfumed, totally sensuous" (emphasis added; 52). Pedro surrendered to Tita; "he let Tita penetrate to the farthest corners of his being" (emphasis added; 52). Their sexual message is transmitted through Tita's sister Gertrudis who is the second person to have an intense reaction to Tita's dish. The reaction that Tita elicits with that dinner, and the glow that emanates from

Gertrudis, the medium through which the sexual message is transmitted, resemble to a great extent the "strange glow [that came] from the dark room" the night they really make love for the first time in the month of August and Tita loses her virginity (158). Her cooking gives her an outlet for her sexual desire. Since she could not show Pedro how much she loves him the traditional way, she does so through her cooking in the domestic space of the kitchen, and at the same time, she manages to overcome her confinement in some sort.

In the month of April, Tita manages to take her relationship with Pedro a step further. After the birth of Roberto, Pedro's and Rosaura's son, Tita decides to prepare a special meal for his baptism. Several months had gone by, and Pedro's and Tita's system of communication through her cooking in the kitchen developed tremendously to the point that Pedro can actually tell when there is something pleasurable for him. The sound of the pans and Tita's sweet singing as she cooked "had kindled his sexual feelings" (66). Tita and Pedro are like real lovers who know that "the time for intimate relations is approaching from the closeness and smell of their beloved, or from the caresses exchanged in previous love play," so Pedro knows from those sounds and smells that "there was a real culinary pleasure to come" (66). The scene that follows Pedro's entry into the kitchen as Tita is grinding the almonds is a very sensuous one. Again, although Tita and Pedro don't actually make love, this encounter in the kitchen is another step in the consummation of their love and in Tita's faith in Pedro's love for her. As Tita is working in the kitchen, Pedro sees her in an "erotic posture." He stops to look at her and their eyes meet in a passionate, sensual look that is full of desire for one another. However, the presumed act of penetration occurs when Pedro sees Tita's breasts moving freely under her blouse as she grinds the almonds. The previously passive Tita stops grinding, straightens up and proudly lifts her chest so that Pedro could see better, thus taking part in the act. It is then that she feels the intense desire for Pedro, "after that penetrating look that saw through clothes, nothing would ever be the same. Tita knew through her own flesh how fire transforms the elements, how a lump of corn flour is transformed into tortilla, how a soul that hasn't been warmed by the fire of love is lifeless, like a uscless ball of corn flour" (67). In those moments, Pedro's love transforms Tita from "chaste to experienced" (67). Their glances and movements mirror the ones from their last night making love before they die. They exchange the same passionate looks, "After caressing each other, gazing at each other with infinite passion, they released the passion that had been contained for so many years" (243). The movements of Tita grinding the almonds as Pedro stares at her breasts bear resemblance to the movements of the bed as they consummate their love again. Once again, the private space of the kitchen plays an important role in helping Tita achieve her affective freedom and somewhat fulfill her physical desire for Pedro.

In addition to the anger and passion that Tita releases through her cooking in the kitchen, the latter evokes the feeling of motherhood within her, which is another emotion that Mama Elena suppresses, and that brings Pedro and Tita even close together. After Roberto's birth, Rosaura produces no milk and is unable to breastfeed her son. Therefore, the baby is given to Tita since she might be able to feed him something from the kitchen as Nacha had previously done with her. The baby wouldn't eat anything that Tita gave him, so she tries to give him her breast to soothe him. Much to her surprise, she has milk flowing out of her breast, and the baby starts eating. Again, Pedro and Tita move forward with their relationship as Pedro glimpses at Tita's breast while she is breastfeeding his son. The scene describes a perfect little family, but that familial feeling is mixed with "a succession of conflicting emotions [that] took hold of them: love, desire, tenderness, lust, shame...fear of discovery" (77). Breastfeeding Roberto secretly with the help of Pedro allows Tita to experience a different kind of love for Pedro, "The baby,

instead of driving them apart, actually brought them closer together" (78). Of all the feelings that she has for Pedro and that she was able to experience through the kitchen, the feeling of motherhood is probably the one that Tita cherishes the most.

When Tita sees the effect that her cooking has on Pedro and subsequently on the other members of the family, the kitchen acquires a different significance, for Tita starts to write down the recipe of each month with the accompanying story. On the last page of the novel, the narrator reveals to the reader that she has been reading from a cookbook that survived the fire that resulted from Tita's and Pedro's union. Tita finds the recipes closely linked to the events that happen when she prepares the dishes and when people eat them; somehow the recipes and the events that surround their preparation become inseparable in her mind. In the month of March, "she looked over the recipe she had written to see if she had forgotten anything. And added: 'Today while we were eating the dish, Gertrudis ran away...' "(60). Tita's grandniece informs the reader that it is this cookbook that has given us this love story, "All that she found under the remains of what had been the ranch was this cookbook, which she bequeathed to me when she died, and which tells in each of its recipes this story of a love interred" (246). Therefore, the kitchen allows Tita to express love not only through her cooking but also as an artist does, through her writing. This allows her to understand the relationship between her recipes and the emotions they communicate about life, so "the kitchen changes from a place of drudgery to an apprenticeship in an artisan's shop" (Spanos 33).

Interspersed within the pages of this novel and within Tita's story are recipes and preparation guidelines for each recipe. As we read about the events in Tita's life, we are constantly stopped by steps on how to prepare each month's recipe. Recipes are given to people to be prepared and enjoyed; they establish a relation between the giver and the receiver. Leonardi

says, "Like a story, a recipe needs a recommendation, a context, a point, a reason to be. A recipe is, then, an embedded discourse, and like other embedded discourses, it can have a variety of relationships with its frame, or its bed" (340). These recipes allow for Tita's story to be complete since they are at the base of every chapter.

Being an outlet for Tita to explore her emotions and desires through her cooking and allowing her to write down her story and preserve the recipes, the kitchen then "becomes highly functional and therapeutical" (Spanos 33). Aside from the numerous occasions where Tita was asked by her mother and Rosaura to fix a recipe to help them recover from their illnesses, the kitchen proves to be therapeutic for Tita herself when she suffers from a mental and physical breakdown after the death of her nephew. When she hears the news about Roberto's death, Tita locks herself up in the dovecote and tries to keep herself busy feeding the doves, not knowing that they are all dead. When she refuses to come down, Mama Elena decides to have her committed, but Dr. Brown takes her to his house instead and takes very good care of her. With such good care, any patient would show signs of recovery, but Tita kept silent to herself. It is the recipe for an ox tail soup that restores Tita to health. As soon as she smells the soup, she cries in relief, and she remembers her childhood in the kitchen. It becomes essential for Tita to remember at least one recipe in order to recover from her setback, "If only she could remember how to cook so much as a couple of eggs, enjoy any kind of food, if only she could...return to life" (Esquivel 124). Cooking is therefore the "objective correlative" which evokes love and all affective cathexis. Even Dr. John admits that the soup and ultimately the kitchen managed to accomplish what medicine could not. Following that recovery, Tita finally speaks to the doctor after six months of silence. It is as if the kitchen became a space that restores Tita to a sense of

herself (Spanos 33). She cannot function without her cooking, her ingredients and her recipes. They become part of her identity.

As Tita cooks dishes that evoke emotions in all those who taste them, she is able to fight her battle against Mama Elena's rule. Therefore, "the novel's public and private realms merge under the symbol of rebellion" (Perkins 2000). It becomes even more so when Rosaura's second child grows up. Esperanza, who was called hope by her aunt Tita because she had hoped that the child would have a better future, is also Rosaura's only child; therefore, she is destined to carry on the same unfair tradition that confined Tita to the kitchen. As the child grew up, it was clear to Tita that Esperanza would become like her. However, this time, Tita decides to fight for her niece the way she didn't fight for herself, openly and not through cooking. She argues with Rosaura about Esperanza's education, insisting that she go to school. She also takes advantage of the time that Esperanza spends with her in the kitchen to teach her the recipes of the family:

Tita wanted Esperanza to have a different education from the one Rosaura had planned for her. So even though it wasn't part of the deal, she took advantage of the moments Esperanza spent with her to provide the child with a different sort of knowledge than her mother was teaching her (Esquivel 238).

She also taught her the power of the kitchen based on her own story, "Tita, for her part, taught her something just as valuable: the secrets of love and life as revealed by the kitchen" (239). She teaches Esperanza the value of the kitchen as a center in her life which can promote learning and enjoyment. In turn, because of Tita's rebellion and as we learn from the narrator, Esperanza passes along the enjoyment of cooking to her daughter who reveals her happiness as she prepares the first dish from her great aunt's cookbook while she narrates her story (Spanos 34).

Perhaps another private space in Like Water for Chocolate which allows Tita to expand her horizons is the doctor's house where she learns to control her emotions and not to allow anyone to suppress them anymore. After Tita loses her mind and goes to live with Dr. John, she shuts down all channels of communication and sits silently observing the world. In an attempt to help her break her silence, Dr. John tells her the story of his great grandmother and her "box of matches" theory. The theory states that within each one of us there is a box of matches, and to strike them, one needs someone to love. The fire that results is the food for the soul, and one needs to find out what will ignite the matches before they become damp and what or who can put out the fire in order to stay away from them. In Tita's case, Mama Elena is the person with the frigid breath who puts out her fire. During her stay at Dr. John's, Tita learned how to manage her inner fire and communicate her feelings even when she didn't want to. She manages to gain control over her feelings to the point where she stands up to Mama Elena's angry ghost and proclaims her love to Pedro, "I know who I am! A person who has a perfect right to live her life as she pleases. Once and for all, leave me alone; I won't put up with you! I hate you, I've always hated you!" (199). For the first time in her life, Tita manages to put her feelings into words and not into her cooking. She clearly expresses her desire which is not limited by her mother's realm of stifling values. By doing so, she demonstrates a fundamental American value that Dr. John introduced to her in his talk about the person's inner fire and which entitles her to fight for her emotional freedom, something that her mother and tradition constantly suppressed. Tita finally believes that her freedom is closely linked to her own desires and not to a rigid tradition.

Having Tita release her bottled emotions through her cooking and fight her battle from the kitchen, *Like Water for Chocolate* presents a different space for women to achieve their freedom. However, it also promotes, in the character of Gertrudis, the traditional path for

women's self-actualization. Unlike Tita, who cannot surrender to her feelings and give in to her desires, Gertrudis "responds to her emotions and passions in a direct manner unbecoming a lady" (Valdes 2000). When she tastes Tita's dish in rose petals, she is overcome, just like Pedro, with an intense heat as if she was on fire. Her sweat was pink and smelled like roses. She couldn't sit still, and she imagined herself on the back of a horse holding on to Juan, one of the revolutionaries. She was feeling so hot that when she tried to take a bath, the shower caught on fire from the heat that was emanating from her body, and she started running naked through the field. She ran all the way until she was stopped by Juan himself who took her on his horse and made love to her as the horse galloped away. Gertrudis manages to escape Mama Elena's control and goes on a journey of self-actualization. "Private and public worlds merge as Gertrudis escapes the confinements of her life on the farm and begins a journey of self-discovery that results in her success as a revolutionary general" (Perkins 2000). Gertrudis manages to reverse the male/female roles as she becomes a general in the revolution with almost one hundred men under her command. She is even the dominant lover in her relationship with Juan. By leaving her mother's iron command and the private space of the house, Gertrudis achieves happiness and freedom, following the dominant notion of female emancipation.

Like Water for Chocolate reveals how the kitchen and subsequently the practice of cooking can be a place of oppression where one can be confined to household tasks, a place of creative expression where one can provide nourishment and pleasure, and a place of rebellion where one can defy repressive traditions and boundaries. Tita's story evolves in each one of these places. Like Water for Chocolate is the tale of freedom told in the most restrictive space and through one of the most unpropitious practices—cooking in the kitchen. As small and closed as it is described. Tita manages to achieve the affective freedom that she desires through the

recipes and dishes that she prepared in that domestic space. Cooking in this novel tropes the power of sheer affect – love, longing, hate. Through it Esquivel demonstrates an efficacy beyond logic and cause – effect relations. In a Marxist idiom, money is "congealed labor" and the representation of labor; in *Like Water for Chocolate*, cooking is congealed passion with all the power this implies.

This novel challenges the fairly recent tale of female liberation by giving Tita the means to communicate her feelings and speak out against tradition in a space where she is normally not supposed to be able to do so. She is able to externalize her feelings and desires in the most creative way and most beautiful narrative. The practice of cooking in the kitchen gives Tita a means to fulfill her physical and emotional desires and to achieve her affective freedom since she cannot do it otherwise. It also shows the resilience of the human spirit to pursue one's freedom when faced with oppression. *Like Water for Chocolate* offers a new look at the kitchen, one that can be considered as a new perspective in the study of female emancipation.

## Resisting Patriarchy from Home in Hanan al-Shaykh's 1986 Novel The Story of Zahra

Hanan al-Shaykh's 1980 novel The Story of Zahra is a homodiegetic narrative told by its eponymous hero. She is lonely, alienated from her surroundings, hysterical, and unattractive. It is also the story of Lebanese traditions, values, and more importantly war. Zahra leads a double life during a time of war in the midst of sexually conservative traditions and values. She goes through experiences early on in her life which open her eyes to matters beyond her age. She leaves her home in search of stability, safety and fulfillment thinking that her liberation lies in the public space of Africa. However, soon she realizes that she has not achieved what she sought, and so she returns to the private conflicted space of her house in Beirut in the middle of the civil war where war paradoxically and temporarily frees her from the rigid confines of home life. This chapter will argue that The Story of Zahra depicts the private space of the home in war-torn Lebanon as a space of liberation and fulfillment. In following Zahra on her journey from Lebanon to Africa and back to Lebanon, and in narrating her story in these various spaces, the novel reverses the traditional notion of female liberation and fulfillment, bringing the woman back into the home and presenting an alternative vision of women's self-realization. Furthermore, the novel shows how this return to the home is not simply a return to patriarchy but a war-driven opportunity to reconfigure the space of the home. This chapter's study of spaces and the practices and social norms that evolve within them will reveal how The Story of Zahra allows for the space of the home to be a space of fulfillment.

The Story of Zahra recounts the life of a young Lebanese Shiite Muslim as she searches for maturity. As a child, she would accompany her mother on her numerous encounters with her lover where she gets introduced to illegitimate sexual relations, and secrecy. When her father starts to doubt all the lies that her mother tells him, he tries to get the truth from Zahra by hitting

her. Zahra, in turn, grows up and starts to lead a double life herself. She pretends that she is a well-brought up virgin who is still living with her family, but in reality she is a single woman with sexual experience. She has an affair with a married man. They continue to meet secretly in a garage even though she is not really happy with the relationship. She becomes pregnant twice and has to undergo two abortions in a back-street clinic. When she gets sick after her second abortion and can no longer tolerate hiding the truth from her parents and their constant nagging about her becoming a spinster, she decides to travel to Africa and stay with her uncle Hashem. However, she is uncomfortable in Africa, and especially in her uncle's house as he tries to molest her several times. In order to escape this situation, she decides to accept her uncle's friend Majed's sudden marriage proposal. Everything goes well until Majed discovers that Zahra is not a virgin. Being a Lebanese man who abides by his society's norms concerning a woman's sexuality, he makes a big deal about Zahra's virginity. In the meantime, Zahra becomes hysterical and further alienates herself from her husband and her uncle by locking herself in the bathroom. In an attempt to help her, her uncle decides to send her back home for a month. Back in Lebanon she is greeted with questions and concerns as to why she left her husband and came back alone. Her parents worry more about what the society and Zahra's in-laws will say than about what is actually happening with her. To put an end to all the gossip, her father sends her back to Africa where her mental condition worsens, and she gets a divorce. She returns permanently to Lebanon during the civil war. Although she is repelled by the war and the sectarian killings, she manages to find comfort despite the atrocities of the war. She stays home alone while her parents go to the south and her brother joins a militia. She gets involved in the war too by having an affair with the neighborhood sniper. She gets pregnant again but cannot get an abortion, so she tries to convince the sniper to marry her. He apparently accepts to marry her, only to shoot her in the street as she leaves.

Whether in Beirut or in Africa, the space of the home gains a lot of importance in The Story of Zahra, for the protagonist moves from one home to the other in search of the sense of stability and safety that she lacked in the previous home. By having Zahra return to her parents' home under such unfavorable conditions such as the eruption of the civil war, the novel challenges the traditional notion of female liberation which usually takes place outside the parents' home. In a male dominated society, such as the Lebanese society, the home is identified as a feminine space. It is a space where the woman can exist and do "womanly" activities that can contribute to the formation of her identity: bearing and taking care of children, protecting the honor of the family, obeying the male figure in the family, in addition to performing the household chores. Confining the woman to the private space of the home ensures that she does not participate in any decision-making or enjoy any freedom in the public space which might impugn her honor, particularly that the space of the home is coded as a feminine space. In her article "Domestic Space in Lebanese War Fiction: Entrapment or Liberation?" Samira Aghacy writes, "Houses are a hindrance to self-realization; the model home is seen as a rigid construct imposed to establish male order and ensure the depoliticization and stasis of private space" (84). In western societies, the space of the home acquires almost the same definition but is often less rigidly defined. Although it is a space where certain gender roles are maintained, "the notion of the home as a physical location and a psychological concept is often a positive one of warmth, security, and a haven from the pressures of paid employment and public life" (Bowlby 343). To be able to achieve that sense of fulfillment and freedom in societies such as the Lebanese,

women would ostensibly have to take part in the public sphere and break away from that rigid construct.

About the representation of location and space, Mieke Bal says that it is important to note the relations between the spatial elements, which play an important role, and the events and characters. Spaces carry meanings within them. Bal adds:

The subdivision of locations into groups is a manner of gaining insight into the relations between elements. A contrast between inside and outside is often relevant, where inside may carry the suggestion of protection and outside that of danger. These meanings are not indissolubly tied to these oppositions; it is equally possible that inside suggests close confinement, and outside freedom, or that we see a combination of these meanings, or a development from one to the other (215).

In *The Story of Zahra*, the interior space of the parents' home evokes danger and confinement because of the father's beatings. His physical abuse eliminates any feeling of protection. The interior space of her uncle's home also evokes danger because of his sexual harassment. The only space within these homes where Zahra feels safe is the bathroom. It is only upon her return to her parents' home during the war that the house begins to suggest protection, and the meaning of that space changes. In his book *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard defines the house as "our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word" (4). The home is the first space where, we as human beings, experience the world. Our perception of every aspect of the home helps shape our thoughts, memories and dreams. As mentioned above, the space of the home is usually coded as a safe one. Therefore, "the private domain of the household is where caring is seen as most appropriately taking place"

(Bowlby 345). Nevertheless, as caring as it can be, the private space of the home becomes an unsuitable space for female actualization, for when one of the parents, namely the father, replaces the parental care by dominance and physical abuse to assert that dominance, patriarchy and abuse taint and corrupt that caring view of the house.

In an article entitled "The Meaning of Spatial Boundaries," Fatima Mernissi says, "Muslim sexuality is territorial: its regulatory mechanisms consist primarily in a strict allocation of space to each sex." Women do not trespass public, male spaces apart from the ritualized occasions. There is no interaction between unrelated men and women. Therefore, just as in many typical Lebanese Muslim families, Zahra is born and raised not to leave her father's house or live alone until she gets married. Also, her parents, and certainly society, do not allow her to go out on her own; another family member must always accompany her. Therefore, Zahra's confinement to her father's home is traditional within her society. However, in the traditional tale of female liberation, the space of the home remains a private and somewhat unfavorable space. In Zahra's case, it becomes even more so when her childhood rights are violated. As she grows up and tries to break loose from the injustice of patriarchy and rid herself of the fear and the boundaries that surround her, she decides to travel to her uncle in Africa in an attempt to free herself in a more public space. The Story of Zahra offers an alternative to that traditional tale when the space in Africa away from her home turns out to be unpropitious, and the horrible conditions of the war surrounding the parents' house become favorable. Paradoxically, this is exactly what Zahra needs to gain control over her life. Zahra shows a great will as she survives what patriarchy, and eventually the war, throw her way; she fights without completely breaking down as she finds a way to wrest fulfillment out of the horrible conditions of the war. She no longer withdraws to herself or locks herself in the bathroom because she willingly begins to take

part in the world by taking part in the war. She attempts to work in a hospital during the war; she interferes on behalf of a group of war prisoners to save them from being killed. She even stops thinking about her father's and her uncle's abuse and the time she spent in Africa. "The war had given Zahra a purpose: awareness" (Cooke 57). She becomes aware of herself and of her place in the world. She is no longer a victim but a person who occupies a place among the others.

The different spaces she occupies constantly affect Zahra's sense of security and stability. To begin with, she is the only daughter in her family. Her father is described as violent and "always brutal" (al-Shaykh 24). That house and Zahra's memories in it recur throughout the novel, mainly whenever she is faced with a difficult situation. There is very little description of the physical aspects of the house at the beginning. We are introduced to certain rooms of the house and certain hideouts like the bathroom and Zahra's room. Also, we realize that, being a private space, the house carries within it a form of patriarchy and gender discrimination. Zahra is quite aware of that division within her house. The first form of discrimination that Zahra suffers from is around the kitchen table at dinner time. Zahra remembers one time when her father returned from work, and they all sat around the table, how her mother served her a plate of melokhia without any pieces of chicken, for her mother would never give her a single piece of meat; she would give all the pieces to her brother Ahmad. Zahra associates this with the love of her parents:

Every day, as we sat in the kitchen to eat, her love would be declared: having filled my plate with soup she serves my brother Ahmad, taking all her time, searching carefully for the best pieces of meat. She dips the ladle into the pot and salvages meat fragments. There they go into Ahmad's dish. There they sit in Ahmad's belly (11).

Furthermore, in her house, she experiences the pressure of the social norms because her parents constantly remind her that she has to get married before she turns into a spinster. Her mother of all people, the woman who embarked on extra-marital relations, conforms to this belief and also pushes Zahra to get married because no one would marry her if she gets old, "You will become an old maid! Already you are an old maid! Buck up and accept before he changes his mind" (30). Al-Shaykh uses a term in the Lebanese dialect that implies that a woman is no longer viable for marriage, "و لك بتبوري". Even her father contributes to demoralizing Zahra by pushing her into marrying her brother's friend. His words lack the sensitivity and the love of a father, "I only wish to know why on earth Samir wants to marry you? What does he see in you? You, with your drawn cheeks and pimpled, pock-marked face?" (29). Moreover, her parents reinforce these social norms after Zahra returns from Africa for a while after Majed discovers she is not a virgin. When she arrives at the airport, the first words uttered by her father even before greeting her were out of concern about what to tell people, "Zahra tell me, why have you returned? It's only a month since you were married. What are we to say to people? What are we to say to Majed's family? I hope his affairs prosper and that is why you became his wife" (102). Being constantly faced with this social pressure from her parents, Zahra does not feel her parents' love or that she belongs there. She wants to be able to respond to all their questions honestly and live her life and experiences, but she can't, and that keeps a distance between her parents and her. Her return to Lebanon at that point does not constitute an escape but a return to the same space she left before, with the same questions and control. "All at once I realized to where and to whom I had escaped," she realized that she returned to the same controlling parents (103).

In addition to the emotional distance and social pressure that she experiences in her parents' home, the physical and sexual abuse make this house more confining for Zahra and even

less favorable for her to achieve any security and fulfillment. One of the practices that unfolds in her home and contributes to the sense of fear is the beatings she used to get from her father. Whenever her father suspects her mother's behavior, he hits Zahra and her mother to get them to confess. Zahra remembers at one point when "the blows fell on my face and head. I tried to think clearly as the words of the Lord of the Tram-car thundered and drowned out the nervous voice of my mother, afraid I might reveal all" (14). Her father even hits her when he sees her playing with her pimples. She also witnesses how he brutally hits her mother with his belt as she is stretched out on the kitchen floor. Her mother's behavior is a product of patriarchy. She is sexually unfulfilled and emotionally unhappy with the father, so she tries to find an alternative. She exhibits what Freud calls "the return of the repressed". Her repressed sexual impulses resurface; the father abuses her physically, so she embarks on affairs to fulfill her primitive instincts with a man who treats her well and equally enjoys her company. However, the mother is no different from the father and society when it comes to Zahra. She reinforces the same social norms when it comes to her daughter's social status.

Whenever Zahra thinks of her house, she relives the fear that she always felt there. Her fear is mainly linked to her father. She calls him the "Lord of the Tram-car" and "this god in his khaki suit" (14). Through her words, patriarchy appropriates religious discourse to show how, just as in religion the lord is the power that evokes fear and control, her father is the higher power in her life. Her fear of her father is so great that at one point she wants to jump out the window for fear of him (16). She grows up learning to hide from his penetrating eyes. She portrays him as a dictator who exercises control over people's lives. Through her words, patriarchy appears totalitarian. When she describes him, she depicts a hard person with "a frowning face, a Hitler-like moustache above thick lips, a heavy body…and a stubborn

personality" (24). Zahra's confinement to her house as she is overcome by fear of one of the closest people to her makes the space of the house an unfavorable space for her to achieve fulfillment. Her fear of her father confines her even further since whenever she feels afraid, she locks herself in the bathroom, "I used to seek refuge in the bathroom back home in Beirut" (24). Her constant fear of her parents and ultimately of society with regard to her secret sexual experience adds to the lack of security and stability.

The physical abuse that Zahra suffers from in her home is also accompanied by a form of sexual abuse by an unidentified male member of the family. As she was sleeping on the ground next to her grandfather, she feels a "cold hand furtively moved up her panties" (22). Even though she doesn't see who it is, this incident still shakes her and deepens her fear and insecurity, "the fear and the coldness had gripped me and shaken me" (22). Therefore, the walls of the domestic space start to gradually close in on her. For Zahra, "far from being the arena of pleasure, desire, refuge, and comfort, the domestic space is an unwholesome and restraining place" (Aghacy 94). These conditions that Zahra goes through are not ideal for her to develop and grow.

Thinking that her safety, stability and freedom from her domestic confinement lie in the public spaces away from her home and her parents, Zahra is crestfallen to encounter certain difficulties that render the space of Africa unpropitious. Hashem sees Zahra as an extension of his country, so as soon as she arrives, he starts to tell her about the Lebanon he knows and his ideals. He paints her a picture of the "ideal Lebanon" that he misses a lot, and how he is living off of that memory. But at the same time, his intense idealism begins to bother Zahra shortly after she arrives, and that picture begins to shatter in front of her eyes. Zahra recounts how her uncle would come into her room while she was sleeping and open the curtain in order to wake her up. "Next he would come back and sit on my bed and touch my face" which is something she

does not appreciate (al-Shaykh 20). Her uncle's home becomes even more abusive when he tries to hold her hand in the movie theater and behaves towards her "like a man to a woman," and she cannot say anything about it for fear of what would happen when they return home. Since she cannot run to hide in the bathroom, Zahra suddenly remembers the molestation incident back home after she meets uncle Hashem. The reader cannot help but link that unidentified hand to Hashem, even if Zahra does not say it. His molestation taints that picture of the ideal Lebanon and brings into question the traditional family where abuse is practiced in the dark. Having to live in Africa, Zahra again would run and hide in the bathroom which is the only safe place for her in her uncle's home. It becomes the space she runs into every morning when she wakes up, the space she hides in when her uncle ravages her privacy by reading her diaries and the space that protects her after her uncle gets in her bed and tries to have sex with her.

Her constant recourse to the bathroom as a refuge relates to its nature as a cleansing space. In general, the bathroom is a location of cleanliness and riddance from impurities, and women, mostly, spend a great deal of time in bathrooms tending to themselves. Referring to the bathroom in her uncle's home, Zahra says, "There is no parting from you, bathroom. You are the only thing I have loved in Africa" (27). Not only is Zahra physically unsafe in her uncle's home, but she is also emotionally and mentally unstable there. Later on in the novel, Zahra refers to her uncle as "my close relative, that other stranger" (99). Also, Zahra should be able to speak out in a supposedly favorable space such as her uncle's home, but she does not; instead, she constantly wishes she could have said something, or she gets enraged but only on the inside. The space becomes emotionally confining to her; she starts to lock herself in the bathroom for days and loses track of time. Thus, the home-refuge again turns out to be unfavorable.

In an attempt to escape the confinement of her uncle's home, Zahra decides to accept Majed's rather hasty marriage proposal. Although she escapes her uncle's abuse, her situation does not change; in fact, she finds herself facing what she ran away from in Beirut, the exposure of her secret as a sexually active woman and the immense social pressure this occasions. The space she inhabits with Majed also reinforces patriarchal oppression. To begin with, Majed is a Lebanese man who wishes to marry a girl who is a virgin and from a good family. He believes Zahra is that girl because she is Hashem's niece and more importantly because she will settle for less and cost him less money since she is already in Africa and away from her parents. Majed is no different from the people back in Lebanon and what they expect from a man and a woman. He upholds the same patriarchal beliefs. He wants to marry a young virgin and have children because this is the only way to become like everyone else, "to become a real human being" (74 -75). He believes that men and women have specific roles, and Zahra's role is to stay at home to help him in his work and give him children (104). Thus, when he finds out, on the wedding night, that Zahra is not a virgin, he reacts typically and shouts in shock, "Cursed woman! Daughter of a cursed woman!" (84). Also when Zahra fails to fulfill her womanly duties towards him, and when he finds himself taking care of her instead of her taking care of him, his dreams of building a house and starting a family collapse. Majed's dreams are not the only thing that deteriorates in his house; Zahra's mental health regresses too. Zahra gradually falls into a depression, and again the space of the house becomes smaller as she confines herself to the bathroom and a couch. The couch provides the physical comfort that one usually gets after hardships, and the bathroom shields her from the chaos that is outside it. She even says that when she locks herself in the bathroom, whatever happens outside its door does not concern her. She feels like a trapped animal as soon as she lands in Africa again, "I feel the trap shut again" (107).

In Majed's house, she comes to the conclusion that she wants to be in control of her life. She wants to own her body, to stop allowing people to abuse her, "I wanted to live for myself. I wanted my body to be mine alone. I wanted the place on which I stood and the air surrounding me to be mine and no one else's" (93). The fact that she comes to this conclusion in her husband's house in particular makes this what Bal would call a "thematized" space because when a girl gets married, she offers her body to her husband; instead, for the first time in her life Zahra denounces any external male dominance over her and her body (136). She realizes that this space and Majed are not contributing to her welfare; instead, whenever she locks herself in the bathroom to run away from him, her past returns accompanied by fear and instability. Just as in her uncle's house, in Majed's house, she is also unable to express an opinion, reveal information about her past or even make a choice. With Zahra unable to feel safe in the supposedly liberating space in Africa, her return to the initial space of patriarchal dominance puts the notion of female liberation to the test.

Unable to live in Africa, Zahra returns to Beirut where the civil war takes its toll on the country. Surprisingly and unlike everyone else around her, Zahra finds comfort in the horrors of the war because the war has made everything insignificant, "This war has made beauty, money, terror and convention all equally irrelevant" (161). A violent and barbarous act, the war is also an absurd practice, killing some and imprisoning others, and before she comes back to Lebanon during the war, Zahra's life is also senseless. She roams around, running away from one place to the other to find a shelter from patriarchy in its different forms. In her mind, she was constantly the victim and never in control of her life.

Despite such an absurd context, Zahra eventually manages to lead a self-controlled life. She develops a different outlook on life and on the events around her and how to understand them. Cooke explains that "the madness of the war opened up new channels of expression" that call for adopting the bizarre logic of the war (66). Even though Cooke is referring to a literary practice, The Story of Zahra shows how this also applies at the level of the diegesis. Zahra does not try to fight the war or run away from it; she simply accepts it. She finds such comfort in the war to the point that when she leaves to the village, she feels wrong to be away and goes back to Beirut. The threat that hangs over everyone's head undermines the importance of her previous experiences, and the atrocities that she witnesses undermine the importance of her problems in her head, "If I were to measure my pain in Africa and place it beside the agony the war created, then no comparison was possible" (al-Shaykh 134). It is not her father or any other male figure that imposes this confinement to the home on her. It is the war that confines everyone equally to the same private space, the space of the home, so her isolation is not seen abnormal or a sign of madness. She does not care how long the war takes because as long as there is war, she is home just like everyone else; "even the beautiful women we saw in the society pages of the magazines were in the same fix" (124 - 125). The house becomes her refuge from the violence of the war just like the bathroom before it was her refuge from the violence of patriarchy. Her biggest fear is that the war would end and the social pressure of her getting married would find its way back into her parents' minds again, so "when I heard that the battles rages fiercely and every front was an inferno, I felt calm" (125). The narrow spaces of her room and the kitchen become her world, outside which lay her misery and the fear of having to talk to people and be subjected to their looks and words. The war gave her the control that she lacked before.

Perhaps, the most liberating incident in Zahra's life during the war is her relationship with the neighborhood sniper Sami. When everyone else around her hides from the war, she fearlessly walks into the turmoil of the war and goes to see the sniper. When she returns from

their first encounter, Zahra uses the word happiness for the first time in the novel, "The apartment was empty. A thread of happiness ran through me" (150). For the first time in her life, Zahra enjoys a sexually liberating relationship. After years of not being in control of her relations and not enjoying them, she finds a way to fulfill her repressed sexual impulses. After all, he is the one "who had succeeded in making my body tremble with ecstasy for the first time in thirty years" (154). Just as her mother's affairs compensated for her unhappiness with her husband, Zahra's adventure with the sniper compensates for years of sexual abuse. In fact, she starts to do things she has never done before, "Back at home, as if the war had ended for me already, I watered the plants I had been neglecting. I cleaned the mirrors with the newspapers I no longer read" (163). For the first time, her body belongs to her. Zahra's adaptation to wartime is akin to loving war; it is a perverse kind of socialization.

Furthermore, her return to the home is not simply a return to patriarchy. Her relationship with the sniper gives her confidence in herself, for she no longer cares about what her father or anyone else thinks. Zahra finally finds the safety that she was looking for, and her fear disappears as she ventures around in the city. Her relationship with Sami empowers her to fight her father's past and current dominance over her. Patriarchy embodied in his belt becomes powerless, "My father's belt no longer holds any fears for me. The war has made it powerless" (173). She learned to see though his power. Her fear of her father disappears as she stops referring to him as a god and as she vows a different kind of submission to a different god — sexual submission to the god of death, "Oh Sniper, let me cry out in pleasure so that my father hears me and comes to find me sprawled out so...Let my father see my legs spread wide in submission" (161).

Zahra's return to the home is also a war-driven opportunity to reconfigure the space of the home. The war takes over the home and changes its spaces. It pushes everyone to hide. It forces the men to move inside the home, into the woman's space, thus changing the dynamics of the house. With everyone inside the home, Zahra ventures outside, into the man's space. She goes outside, to the sniper's commandeered home. Her relationship with the sniper in his private nest affects her life in her home. The narrow, dusty, painful staircase becomes a source of pleasure for Zahra. Although the staircase is not her home, it is still a space where the man dictates the rules and where patriarchy imposes a different kind of law than the one imposed by her father. Yet Zahra ventures into that space and extends the site of her liberation. Her previous need to confine herself to her room and her bedroom is replaced by her need to move and to be free. This change in her and her ability to make the choice of going out and meeting the sniper allow her to look at the space of the home from a different perspective, that of the actual nurturing space. In this private space during the war, Zahra is supposed to be afraid of what is happening around; however, she is not. Unlike in her house before the war, her uncle's house and her husband's house, Zahra's emotional and mental health is just fine. The house that used to be an unfavorable space for Zahra to find security and stability becomes a favorable space as she experiences certain emotions for the first time in her life. Yet Zahra's fulfillment within war cannot endure as war, by definition, is lethal. The sniper is ultimately no less patriarchal than the others and, indeed, he is an apotheosis of patriarchy inasmuch as he will commit murder rather than recognize a woman's prerogative.

The Story of Zahra reveals how the space of the home, more particularly the home in war time, can be a space of liberation. Zahra's story evolves as she occupies different homes before returning to the one space that liberates her. It is the story of a girl seeking safety and physical

and emotional stability, in one of the most unexpected places, during one of the most unexpected times - the space of the home in war time. Zahra manages to break the separation between private and public; she trespasses into the male space, for she has no right to be there (Mernissi 144). She imposes her individuality through a relationship with a sniper, and in the midst of the death, chaos and destruction, she develops into a human being aware of her own existence, and she finally experiences the safety that she pursues for so long. Even though the novel ends in Zahra's death, it still challenges the classic tale of female liberation by giving Zahra a space in which to exist freely without the pressure of patriarchy and social norms. Therefore, at the end of the novel, when Zahra decides to abide by the same patriarchal rules that she previously ran away from and marry the sniper to save her honor, he kills her. In war-torn Lebanon, Zahra is finally able to take charge of her life and her body as she gets rid of the fear that controlled her life. The Story of Zahra sheds light on the private space of the home as a new possible space of female liberation.

## The Element of Space as a Factor in Textual Interpretation

This study has shown how spatial elements in three culturally different narratives can contribute to the interpretation of texts. I have tried to analyze the texts by examining the different spaces the female protagonists inhabit, which play an important role in cultural and gender relations. Therefore, the spatial elements and the practices that unfold within them in *The Pickup, Like Water for Chocolate*, and *The Story of Zahra* contribute to a range of possible models of female liberation and resistance: first, a rich woman leaves a western-like South Africa for a third-world Arab country and manages to re-explore her identity. Second, a daughter fights for her rights and desires from the kitchen. Third, a Lebanese woman returns to her home in a war-torn city and manages temporarily to find fulfillment. All these women manage to actualize an inhospitable space and find happiness where they shouldn't.

My analysis of the spaces in *The Pickup* shows that the encounter with the cultural other gives the protagonist what she is looking for. The supposedly favorable spaces in Julie's home country turn out to be unsuitable for her to re-explore her identity. She cannot locate herself in her recently freed country where she is allowed to do what she pleases without any constraints. The spaces in her country are characterized by material riches, a friendly support system and complete freedom. However, the sudden shifts in focalization in the novel to Julie's point of view as these spaces are described reveal how she sees these spaces and show that Julie cannot identify with these spaces after she meets Abdu. Her pickup Abdu, the cultural other, wants what she has but does not want. Eventually, Julie finds her place in a poor Arab country, where she is the cultural other. As Abdu constantly tries to put down his home and country in front of Julie, she finds what she lacked in her home country: the purpose for living and the clarity of mind. More important than the spaces themselves in this Arab country are the aspects they lack: the pretentiousness and the complete freedom. On the other hand, they offer Julie a family that cares,

a job she enjoys, and traditions to value and follow. This forces Julie to interact with the others around her, and only then does she discover what she needs. The space of the desert at the end of the novel allows for Julie to reach deep within herself and achieve fulfillment. This barren land and the unfavorable conditions of the Arab country present one alternative to female liberation.

In *Like Water for Chocolate*, the alternative to female liberation comes in one of the most unexpected spaces. If women fight to break their confinement from the private space of the kitchen, Tita's confinement to the kitchen turns out to be a chance for her to accomplish what her mother does not allow her to accomplish otherwise. The kitchen allows for Tita to explore emotions that her mother constantly tries to suppress. Tita does not complain about her mother assigning her as the family cook, but she contests her mother's denying her rights to pursue happiness. The kitchen gives her the tools to fight the oppression of an unfair tradition that is reinforced by her mother. The embedded recipes become Tita's way to externalize her emotions as an artist would. With the use of magical realism, Esquivel turns the kitchen from a space of domestic oppression to a space of artistic expression, where Tita fulfills her emotional and sexual desires, and a space of rebellion. The unfavorable space of the kitchen and subsequently the practice of cooking offer a new perspective of the resilience of women in pursuing their freedom when faced with oppression.

The analysis of the spaces in *The Story of Zahra* reveals how the unbalanced relationship between genders affects the development of Zahra's individuality. Zahra's story begins and ends in the space of her home. However, the function of that space changes as Zahra returns to it during the war. Zahra's relationship with the men in her life and the spaces she occupies with them is an abusive one. In other words, the different forms of abuse she suffers make each space unfavorable. In her home at the beginning, patriarchy is the law. To further reinforce his

dominance, Zahra's father upholds the law the only way he knows how, with his fist and belt. In the space where Zahra is supposed to grow up happily and develop into a decent human being, she lacks the security and stability to do so. It is the first space where patriarchy weighs down on her. The same social norms that allow a man to behave anyway he wants and that condemn the woman if she makes a mistake push Zahra to escape this dominance. Africa is the second space where the social norms and patriarchy weigh down on her and drive her to return to Lebanon. However, her return to her home during the war reveals different traits in Zahra and the space of the home. The war presents Zahra with the courage she lacked before. She is more assertive, she manages to impose her individuality, and she begins to enjoy her relationship with Sami. Eventually, the space of the home is reconfigured into a space of self-realization for Zahra and a new possible space for female liberation.

The Pickup, Like Water for Chocolate, and The Story of Zahra are narratives of female liberation. Each one of the protagonists is in search for some kind of fulfillment. Also, each one of them finds it in an unexpected and unfavorable space. Both Julie and Zahra voluntarily move to that unexpected space whereas Tita is forced into it by tradition. What characterize each narrative of female fulfillment are the spatial elements that render some spaces more favorable than others for these women. In The Pickup, Julie, a woman who has had abundantly all her life, seems to be attracted by how little Abdu has to offer her. In fact, the less the space of Abdu's home in his country has, the more appealing it is for Julie, for she finds a way to interact with her surrounding and becomes useful for the first time in her life. She re-explores her identity in the practices that unfold in the spaces just as much as she does in their physical features. Just like Julie who moves around in a different number of spaces and settles down in the most unexpected space, Zahra in The Story of Zahra travels around too and returns to find fulfillment in the most

unexpected space as well. Also, unlike Julie who does not experience any form of abuse, constraint or oppression in her life, Zahra experiences the harshness of patriarchy and abuse as she moves around from her home to Africa. Her return home is also instigated by sexual abuse and the narrow mindedness of Lebanese social norms. Their absence provides Zahra with the opportunity to reach her desires. Back home, she finds fulfillment and security, and asserts her individuality in one of the most insecure and unexpected spaces, in a space where patriarchy and social norms temporarily seize to exist, a space that widens the possibilities of female liberation. Most unexpected than the spaces of an Arab country and the space of the home during war is the space of the kitchen in Like Water for Chocolate. Unlike Julie and Zahra who have a choice as to where they might find fulfillment, Tita's cooking skills allow her to turn her confinement in the kitchen to an asset for her to fulfill her desires and express her repressed emotions. More important than the actual space of the kitchen is the practice of cooking that offers a new look at the kitchen as an unusual space for resistance and liberation. All three women defy the circumstances in their lives and fight for their happiness in a space that defies the feminist logic of liberation.

Writing this thesis gave me an unusual perspective on these novels. However, I cannot deny that I encountered some difficulties as I studied the novels. In the case of *The Pickup*, the novel lent itself concretely to the study of spaces and spatial elements and their role in the development of Julie's identity. In contrast, in the case of *Like Water for Chocolate*, the difficulty lies in the fact that Tita's liberation does not lie in the space of the kitchen itself but rather in the practice of cooking which takes place in the space of the kitchen. The novel does not offer any physical description of the space or the objects present in it. Therefore, I reconfigured my thesis to include not only the spaces in the novel but also the practices and

Zahra also presents a challenge in the fact that Zahra does not find fulfillment in her home but in the sniper's commandeered space. However, I believe that the fact that this space in a war-torn country is also controlled by a man offers me a perspective to incorporate it as an unfavorable space for female resistance and liberation. Working on these challenges gave me the advantage of presenting my point of view on each novel and challenged me to critically find an answer to all my questions.

Each one of these novels carries a lot of importance in its different elements. However, a close look at the different spaces that the female protagonists occupy in these novels reveals an equally important aspect of these novels: an unusual space for female resistance. The representation of space in each novel conveys a range of possible models of female liberation and resistance, introducing unlikely spaces such as an Arab country, a kitchen and a home during the war. Thus, this thesis seeks to situate itself as a contribution to an ongoing revision of feminist studies.

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