RE-CONFIGURATIONS OF GENDER IN THE CULTURAL EXPERIENCE OF ARAB WOMEN

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in PostColonial Studies

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2002

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

NOTE ON TRANSLATION

I have decided to refer to Nawal El Saadawi as "Saadawi" in my main text. Where I refer to her full name I include the pre-fix "El." Also, where others refer to her by another spelling of her name I have left the original. Similarly, although I have decided to use the spelling "Umm Kulthum" I have allowed it to remain spelled otherwise in several citations. I have not used enough Arabic words to necessitate a method of transliteration. Rather, I have spelled them so that they are easy to pronounce and I have provided a translation at every instant.

Where I have cited in any other language (Greek and French) I have provided my own translations unless otherwise stated.

ABSTRACT

This thesis engages with the concept of gender as a learned performance in order to locate subversive action, or "performative moments" in the cultural production of Arab women. The relationship between contemporary western feminism and Arab feminism is examined to show that enabling mediation is possible and can be fruitful for both parties. I advocate the viewpoint that we can locate performative situations in local contexts and intervene at the theoretical level in order to render these situations useful in a widely encompassing understanding of feminism. Also, it is my contention that gender theory is the most useful standpoint from which to examine the possible direction of today's feminisms. In other words, only through closely examining how persons understand and perceive themselves as gendered beings can there then follow a committed and fruitful feminist direction, whether on the political or the personal level.

The first chapter centres on the event of Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot's clinic in late nineteenth century Paris. I explore the phenomenon of hysterics housed at the clinic and question their confinement and diagnoses that were based on their supposed excessive femininity. This examination reveals that it is possible to induce gender requirements in the interest of an official discourse or figure of authority. This reveals the underlying unnaturalness of the oppositional dual status of gender and discloses gender as a fiction that requires repetitive performances in order to survive. Chapter two exposes how medical discourse can enslave perceptions of one's gender, especially in the absence of other enabling discourses. I look at the early novels of Egyptian novelist Nawal El Saadawi that centre on the experiences of women physicians who try to come to terms with the ways in which they are invoked as women and what is expected of them through this invocation. The third chapter examines the possibilities of music to create a feminine space where it becomes possible to experience emotions not acknowledged in official discourse. The music of Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum is considered for its regenerative qualities insofar as it seeks to provide for an imaginary domain where a physical reality can be experienced. Finally, chapter four endeavours to reveal how catastrophic events such as war can instigate a deliberation on how gender categories are constraining and debilitating. The context of war provides for a space where women can evaluate and recreate their experiences.

INTRODUCTION

[…] it seems crucial to resist the myth of interior origins, understood either as naturalised or culturally fixed. Only then, gender coherence might be understood as the regulatory fiction it is - rather than the common point of our liberation.

Judith Butler[1]

This introductory chapter will outline the main concerns of the thesis as a whole. It hopes to makes explicit that an examination of women's cultural experience, as well as the experience of women producing culture in the Arab world, can benefit from the selective, refined and contextualised use of feminist concepts borrowed from European and American contemporary theorists. The historical relationship between Western feminism (so termed by the Arab secular and religious states) and the Arab world will be outlined briefly to show that there has been a tenuous though continuous dialogue between them. Also, I shall make a case for the ongoing project of an Arab feminism that continues to admit influence from feminists world-wide yet pursues an ongoing battle to redefine this influence and render it local. Particularities of an Arab feminism and the problems specific to it will provide the positions from which intervention becomes possible. The contentions of postmodern feminists not working in the Arab world will be measured against specific situations in the Arab world. Thus, the firm establishment of context remains a significant aspect of this thesis and to any type of work that seeks to relocate a Western theoretical feminism.

Throughout the thesis, the main theoretical frameworks that I shall be working with are Judith Butler's important ideas of the performative qualities of gender. These ideas shall be continuously pitted against their political usefulness in radically different contexts from those for which they were probably intended. Butler's ideas will often be presented alongside the severe criticism that she has received since the publication of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) through to *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997) in order that this thesis remain in continuous contact with the controversies generated by her theories. This will provide a constant reminder of the uncertainties that are generated when translocating feminist theories.

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More specifically, in chapter one I shall present Butler's main ideas through a specific historical example: Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot's work with 'hysterics' at the Salpêtrière Clinic in Paris in the 1880's. This example will provide an original way of working through Butler's theories. Instead of providing a summary of Butler's main ideas I shall attempt to show how they can be used concretely to comprehend specific social phenomena and thus simultaneously test them for efficaciousness. Having outlined the crucial aspects of performative theory I will move on to the specific investigation at hand: Arab women's cultural experience. Here, Butler's ideas as well as the ideas of other contemporary thinkers (non-Arabs and Arabs alike) shall be used in conjunction with the specific contexts under examination to promote the possibility of a fruitful collaboration. The specific cultural productions that I shall be examining have emerged from Egypt and Lebanon and span the years 1920 to the present day. Explicitly, in chapter two I shall be looking at the early fiction of Dr. Nawal El Saadawi, feminist activist and doctor. Saadawi's works shall be examined for their singular investigation of the cultural and biological production of the category of woman. Her position as both medical doctor and feminist/writer has proved invaluable to this thesis. In chapter three I shall review the tremendous influence of Egyptian singer and icon Umm Kulthum. This performer's repertory shall be scrutinised in order to arrive at an understanding of how such power over cultural understanding was achieved. The final chapter will survey the production of Arab women's war literature, and specifically Lebanese women's war literature. The possibilities that war provides for a new understanding of gender shall be thoroughly investigated with the intention of yielding a new outlook on this type of writing. Throughout, this thesis proposes to balance specific areas of feminist theory with local situations in the Arab world. It is also the intention of this thesis to prove that these local situations are in a silent yet complex dialogue with contemporary feminist and cultural theory. Finally, it is the re-configurations of gender categories in a constantly changing cultural ambience that remains at the heart of this thesis. I hope to offer a creative and productive way to view present and possible future cultural influences.

I have chosen to focus on Nawal El-Saadawi, Umm Kulthum and the Lebanese war writers, Al-Shaykh and Ghoussoub because I believe that they all transgress certain parameters within their cultures that need to be flagged. In particular I want to redress the importance of being a medic in a Muslim country and how Saadawi uses this position from

which to attack the non-contested division of gender. Saadawi's early work is very important as it allows us to see how medicine is promoted as an area from which women can benefit intellectually, but only in terms of a ruthless medical career. Saadawi shows how the learning and the practice of medicine can sometimes reinforce constructions of gender and how the medical profession needs to be examined on ethical and feminist grounds. Umm Kulthum was chosen because of her relative anonymity in the West compared with her hugely successful career and popularity in the Middle East and Muslim communities throughout the world. It is important that this popularity be scrutinised as it operates in contradiction to the notoriety endured by female public performers in the Middle East. Umm Kulthum's ability to sustain huge reverence throughout the fifty years of her career is truly astonishing and the manipulation of her repertory in the service of this popularity shall be examined. The Lebanese war novelists are integral to this thesis, as the Middle East has been involved in armed conflict for over half a century. In particular, the Lebanese war lasted for fifteen years and has had a huge impact on the social and political development of the country. Al-Shaykh and Ghoussoub's work emphasise how women understood and reacted to this war. War disrupts the daily norm and actions taken in war can often highlight the inadequacy of mainstream social expectations. In general, the choices I have made cover a broad area of Arab women's cultural output. I do not claim to cover the substantial amount of creative work available for scrutiny. Rather, I hope to illuminate particular significant moments that will in turn serve as starting points for the reception and criticism of other works by Arab women in film, music, art, literature, photography and theory. My primary aim is to show that Arab women are involved, on a daily basis, with conflicts based on their gender; conflicts that they seek to express and expose in their controversial work.

FEMINISM IN THE ARAB WORLD

Arab feminism has had a long and unsettled history. What is termed "feminism" in the Middle East is a problematic term defined as a hybrid concept that somehow signifies foreign intervention. The two important accusations from the dominant culture in the Arab world against feminism have been that on the one hand it is yet another example of the West (in Arabic, Al-Gharb) interfering and meddling in the affairs of the East (in Arabic, Al-Sharq) and on the other hand it re-affirms the position of the East as gullible

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and easily taken in by alluring Western ideas. Thus, as well as having to deal with the inherent obstructions to the setting up of groups and movements for the improvement for women's lives, secular liberals as well as Islamist women's groups have had to defend themselves against the allegations from conservative groups that they are working within Western models unsuitable for Arab women. Interestingly, in relation to this seemingly incontestable impediment, Mervat Hatem has shown that in fact there is a way to reconcile the problem. She states that she

> [s]eeks to develop an appreciation of the Western liberal ideal and its practice as well as the Egyptian transformation of both into something that reflects Egypt's cultural background and political challenges. [This] does not assume the superiority of the Western model, the inferiority of the Egyptian one, or vice versa. Examining both the external and internal critiques of liberalism is important for understanding the global, gendered discourse.[2]

The notion that Western feminism has an authoritative power to dictate and pave the way for a feminist re-working of ideals and political engagement can be replaced with Hatem's suggestion. Western feminism needs to be represented as a method and device that can infuse local contexts and understand them as unique instances of resistance and change. This is a desirable move not only because it emphasises an important selective use of Western feminism but also helps establish a cross-cultural feminism that continuously works to avoid pitfalls and misrepresentations. As Rajeswari Mohan has discussed in her article on Palestinian women and their militant participation in nationalist struggle as a site of self-understanding,

> recent theoretical interventions in Anglo-American feminist discourses provide some powerful concepts which allow us to trace the actual mechanisms by which women's participation in political movements bring about social transformation, not simply by disrupting gender divisions of labour and politics, but also by remapping the social symbolic of the sexual. However, the encounter with alternate sites of feminist theory and practice will remain incomplete if the circuit is not closed, and if the counter-pressure exerted by texts of post-colonial and Third World insurgency on Anglo-American theory is not acknowledged. Such an acknowledgement will make unique demands on any attempt to account for or understand the circumstances of non-western women's lives from the standpoint of western academic discourses, for such attempts are inevitably animated by the dialectical tension produced by the ambivalent and ambiguous

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distinctions between them and us, as well as by the different meanings the texts hold in the different sites they circulate.[3]

Multiple significant points emerge from these contentions. There is an obvious need to expand what we mean by feminism and especially active feminism. To do this we need to examine context more closely and to read certain incidences, historical or fictional moments, within a framework that takes into serious consideration the process of "self-understanding" or, in other words, what makes for a feminist experience in an individual's life. This can be a useful way of measuring the effectiveness of certain subversive acts within an understanding of feminism. As Haiden Moghissi has emphasised in her work *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of a Post-Modern Analysis*,

> feminism is diversified and flexible enough to embrace all individuals and movements which are self-identified or are identified by others as feminist based on distinguishable ideological and political characteristics.[4]

In order to engage with this statement, I will attempt first to distinguish the difficulties raised by the term *Arab Feminism* as well as what, and whom this term is supposed to include. Following this I hope to show how the selective and critical use of certain aspects of Western feminist trends can be used to understand certain events in an Arab context more fully. Thirdly, in this introduction, I propose to take the main ideas and propositions of Judith Butler's central thesis of gender as 'performative' to show its positive applications and serious pitfalls in the context of the Arab world where there is a very real and actual necessity for subversive acts for everyday survival. In a similar way to Rajeswari Mohan, I hope to show how Butler, in 'choosing sexuality […] as the central point of intervention […] perpetuates what materialist feminists have critiqued as the "sexualization of women," by ignoring the effects of sexual politics on women's roles as consumers, producers and political actors.'[5] In other words we need to connect subversive acts to their specific sites, 'class and race', in order to make these differences important.[6] Mohan also notes that 'while Butler's theoretical interventions make visible the subtle mechanisms and far-reaching effects of women's political actions, the linkages between women's positioning as sexual subjects and the other locations of their subjectivity and agency need to be mapped in detail if we are to appreciate the full range of political effectivity of subversive bodily acts.'[7]

In her introduction to the collection of works entitled *Re-Making Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, Lila Abu-Lughod notes how in the Middle East 'feminism, defined sometimes in quite different ways, [has] become by now an inescapable term of reference.'[8] She also points to the 'complex ways that the West and things associated with the West [are] embraced, repudiated and translated [and] are implicated in contemporary gender politics.'[9] In her essay 'The Marriage of Feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective Repudiation as a Dynamic of Postcolonial Cultural Politics' Abu-Lughod argues that Islamic groups only demarcate certain features of feminism as Western while appropriating obvious Western influence in other areas as their own.[10] This complicates even further what Arab Feminism should include. In their unique work *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*, Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke try to trace feminists who may not have understood themselves as feminists but whose actions and writings tell a different story.[11] Their contention is that an examination of specific locations and contexts is essential because 'much of Arab women's feminist expression has eluded people because of its invisibility.'[12] Invisibility here suggests not only the invisibility of feminism within the society where this expression is introduced but the invisibility of an Arab feminism in the spread of culture and knowledge. Thus, Badran argues, there is a distinction to be made (and although Badran speaks specifically of Egypt this argument can be extended to include much of early Arab women's writing) between 'invisible and visible feminism.'[13] In fact, she argues that

> [this distinction] rescues feminism from being understood as an exclusively public and explicit phenomenon, and thus provides an analytic framework within which to locate and explain the more comprehensive feminist historical experience [...]. Feminism may be removed from sight, but it is not necessarily extinguished.[14]

It would appear then that an identifiable Arab feminist discourse can emerge. In fact, as we try to understand and interpret what can qualify as a feminist experience or a feminist realisation it is important to pay attention to, in Abu-Lughod's words, 'the fascinating subtleties of the debates about women at particular historical moments.'[15] Abu-Lughod also significantly points out that the aim of the collection of essays entitled *Re-Making Women* has at its centre the need to go beyond 'recognis[ing] that women [are] caught in polemics about cultural authenticity [and] to investigate in detail the dynamics

by which local and Western discourses and actors played off each other.'[16] In a sense, this thesis invokes and reflects these issues and concerns precisely; local and Western discourses are ever present when we speak of Arab feminism as they cannot be discursively separated. The following chapters are an examination of the influences of Western feminist and philosophical ideas and the inevitability of influence. However, what remains at the core of this thesis is the need to, in Mohan's words, close the circuit of influence. In other words, what we need is a return of information that *informs* as well as *transforms* the ideas of Western feminism. Abu-Lughod's interesting use of the word 'actor' here would suggest that the parties involved in debating today's feminisms are well aware of the paradox that they have indeed adopted some Western feminist notions that they do not always acknowledge. This in itself creates a space where we can critically test Western feminism on Arab contexts to establish their value. This need not suppose, as Mervat Hatem has claimed above, that the Western feminism that is used is superior or that the material it is tested on is in need of Western explication. On the contrary, as Abu-Lughod (whose arguments I shall outline below) has proved, the selective use of Western feminism has been a common factor in the women's emancipation movement in the Arab world for a long time. I will use this phenomenon to argue that it is in keeping with this discourse that we continue to use certain Western feminist ideas in the context of the Middle East to test their efficaciousness and to view various Arab women's works and achievements from this perspective. Were we to forfeit the new and invigorating principles behind Western feminist and cultural thought we would be committing a second injustice. Testing the theories in the context of the Middle East will hopefully delineate the pitfalls as well as the usefulness of the application of this trans-cultural technique.

UNACKNOWLEDGED EXISTING WESTERN CONCEPTS IN ARAB SOCIAL THOUGHT

> In Egypt ever since the late nineteenth century when reformers and nationalist modernisers took up the question of women's status and role in society, there has been a struggle between those who seek to locate women's emancipation, variously defined, at the heart of the development of nation and of society and those who try to dislocate such a project as an alien Western import. However, the contemporary form this debate takes reveals something that is often overlooked: those who claim to reject feminist ideals as Western imports actually practice a form of selective repudiation that depends on significant occlusions.[17]

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This statement by Abu-Lughod suggests that there are certain unacknowledged influences that help form the Arab discourse on women. The influences rejected are labelled 'Western imports' and 'alien' whilst the ones incorporated are presented as innate to Arab thought. Abu-Lughod questions how these two sets of concepts became separated in Arab discourses on feminism and suggests that there is a 'clue' in the 'Islamists' rhetorical claim to cultural authenticity and traditionalism.'[18] In other words it seems that the Islamists, as well as their 'secular progressive counterparts', have taken notions of cultural authenticity and tradition from a pool of historical incidences that *seem* to be influence-free at face value (that is, they present ideas that would seem to be free-floating as their own, for example, a woman's right to choose her own husband). Abu-Lughod suggests that the sources sectioned out as authentically Arab or Muslim are in fact sources that she proves have been influenced by Western thought and can no longer be thought of as traditional.[19] Her argument suggests that locating a cultural authenticity or tradition no longer remains possible after Egypt's long history of colonisation. Herein also lies the impossibility of claiming certain feminist ideas as influence-free.

This important argument suggests that there is a silent dialogue between the Arab world and the West as well as an exchange of ideas that goes unacknowledged and certainly undisclosed. As Abu-Lughod argues, certain unwanted occlusions are labelled as Western. As I hope to prove in this study, these occlusions find their way into mainstream popular culture and literature because they cannot forever and indefinitely be occluded. Their obstinate return marks their existence outside of Western influence and ultimately reveals concerns that arise from indigenous contexts. This remains the most significant contribution of this thesis; that a discourse on emotion and the body remains absent from official discourse and from ideas of an imagined traditional Arab feminism yet returns or is reproduced in literature and popular culture as well as in historical moments. This proves that there are certain discourses that we can still argue remain 'nationless.' However, Western feminist theory has and does engage with ideas on the body and emotion. Nonetheless, we may find that we are using theories in contexts for which they may not have been intended. It is also significant to acknowledge that the theories provide interpretations of contexts that may not have been meant to be read in the specific ways that I read them. This is a risk that remains at the heart of all research and interpretation.

However, as discussed above, the Middle East has a history of rejecting and embracing Western feminist (and other thought) when convenient, as well as re-defining these rejected ideas and making them seem their own. Taking this into account we can assume that using Western feminist discourse to understand certain Arab feminist contexts is not a laboured imposition but the continuation of a tradition set out by the Middle East itself. In support of this, Abu-Lughod has argued that

> the enmeshment [of the Middle East] with the West of an earlier period of such notions about the organisation of family and the roles of women, like the colonial roots of many of the socioeconomic transformations that went along with these, are conveniently forgotten by the Islamists. This occlusion enables them to gain the moral high ground by seeming to reject the West, in their fixation on the chimera of sexual or public freedom, while not fundamentally challenging widely held ideals - like conjugal love, the nuclear family, the companionate marriage, and women's education - and economic necessities, like women's work, of late-twentieth-century middle-and lower-middle-class life in Egypt.[20]

'Sexual' or 'public freedom,' then, remains the most highly contested site in the history of women's emancipation in the Arab world. Since it is often access to public freedom that enables sexual freedom, this will be the first locus of investigation; the access of women to the public domain via the various cultural and historical possibilities; medicine as a career, artistic performance and the situation of war. These loci of 'public freedom' enable us as critics to search for the feminist inclinations that occur within them.

This emphasises another problem of how and with what tools to intervene. It is significant that Haiden Moghissi has located a 'lopsided' situation in the Middle East where 'modernisation' but 'not modernism or modernity' has occurred (and which are obviously not to be confused for modernisation 'alters aspects of the urban economy but without fundamentally transforming social and political structures or relations and forms of cultural expression').[21] The question of how to apply postmodern thought to a society that has not, strictly speaking, had a period of modernism is a problematic one for many Arab feminists working from outside the Arab world. Moghissi has argued that if the postmodernist outlook is to view changes from other cultures as movements that do not require foreign feminist intervention, then this can sometimes leave local Arab feminists or

would-be feminists helpless in the face of what they perceive to be negative circumstances. Thus,

> in supporting the rights of minority cultures and indigenous traditions, we should ask ourselves: do we know with any precision whose cultures and whose rights to self-expression we are supporting? [...] To avoid mystification we need to take into account the particular setting for such events and not to be intimidated by charges that this insistence constitutes a metanarrativist intrusion.[22]

Moghissi argues that 'the public domain has become the primary site for women to demand removal of legal and social obstacles to gender equity, providing the terrain for more effective collective struggle' even though this public domain sometimes remains unavailable to them.[23] Moments of so-called subversion of the norms remain individual and are not always *seen* but rather experienced personally. Moghissi asks if in fact 'cultural relativists [have low expectations] when it comes to the rights of women in non-Western societies.'[24] In fact by,

> placing emphasis, instead, at least in theory, on including all women by accepting the multiplicity of each woman's identity and self-identification, feminists are now urged to respect difference, affirming the singularity of each woman's experiences and struggle, and validating self-understanding and self-analysis.[25]

This, I believe complicates issues even further. Though many contemporary feminist theorists seek individual moments of self-understanding and awareness and term them feminist, these moments often remain divorced from the bigger picture where the effect of the experiences is not translated into a more *lasting* one; thus, the experience loses any political/social effectiveness it may have had (as well as the chance to enter the arena of policy and law making). The *permanence* and lasting effect of *experience* is important yet it is a process which needs to be completed by practical researchers and theorists alike so that an important event that prompts this 'self-understanding' or 'self-analysis' can be utilised discursively and effectively. Butler's theory of the performative as a conscious move that can render personal 'self-understanding' offers a singular and original opportunity to view individual women's actions as self-liberating as well as exposing social defects for a short period of time, or even for a longer period of time within the

framework of individual personal experience. It does not always however offer a way to incorporate these memories or experiences into the wider frame of politics and social reform. These issues will be discussed in more detail within each individual chapter. Ultimately, in the context of the Middle East, reform remains important because, as Moghissi's study *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of a Post-Modern Analysis* has shown:

> It is troubling and revealing that the new generation of Middle Eastern feminists are still struggling for [these] rights under the same if not more hostile conditions in societies which are much more developed, socially and economically, than in the 1930's.[26]

In order to continue this project, research needs to continue into the contexts that Middle Eastern women are faced with and to reveal and bring forward a different understanding of feminism, one that not only compromises 'organised women's movements' which has already been well documented[27] but to discuss, as Abu-Lughod has claimed in her introduction to *Re-making women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East,* 'a wide range of projects that have or had as an explicit goal or necessary foundation the remaking of women' without having to justify or promote 'historical individuals as heroines or icons of modernity, making their complex lives signify the story of progress.'[28] It is this particular standpoint that falls within the range of what I shall call a successful application of Butler's performative theory. In fact, the importance of certain events needs to derive from a combination of motive on the part of the women 'actors' and an investigation of particular contexts. However, contrary to Lughod's comments, these events also need to be carefully measured, as Moghissi has argued,

> without getting caught in an apologetic or self-denying defence of Islamic gender practices or a justification of the oppressive discourses and actions of Islamic ideologies and rulers.[29]

It is also significant in this project to remember that a postcolonial analysis need not blind us necessarily to possible unacceptable conditions; this becomes in fact a double act of repression that is blind to the oppressive forces of the indigenous patriarchy itself. In fact,

opposing foreign intervention in Islamic societies does not require one to obscure the actual conditions of women's lives under Islamic rule or to soften the coercive power of Islamic movements and regimes.[30]

And that actually,

By manipulating the female body as a playing card in oppositional politics, fundamentalists, in fact, embrace, however unsought and uncomfortable, the views of the Western coloniser.[31]

The above arguments suggest that we can ultimately

consider feminism as a universal movement against sexism (which takes different forms and is practised with differing vigour in different societies).[32]

At the same time, 'most of the best recent literature in Middle Eastern women's history and anthropology can be conceived of as working against universalising discourses about patriarchy, Islam and oppression,' in that it seeks to present 'feminist stories' conceived of as specialised work on gender and women in particular.[33]

In short, it is a daunting task to tackle feminist issues in the Middle East whilst remaining sensitive to all the above problematics; however, what makes this type of work exciting and productive is the constant need to redefine itself against the various obstacles outlined above. To summarise, a work that seeks to display an instance of Arab feminism or to account for a certain event as feminist has to first of all overcome the boundary of terminology. There is still 'no fully acceptable' term for feminism or feminist in Arabic.[34] It is difficult to agree upon a term that is enabling yet which does not echo foreign influence. As the above arguments have suggested, certain concepts have filtered through and have been re-shaped to suit the needs of women living in the Arab world, often within the remits of a religious society or a secularist one that does admit religious influence.[35] It seems that while certain 'feminist' activities have been acknowledged and embraced as necessary, such as the need for the education of women and the benefits of a marriage based on friendship as well the integration of women in the workplace in times of economic necessity, other needs such as public freedom are rejected and posited as Western influences. However, as Moghissi has argued, researchers who uphold a

postmodernist (as in, a cultural relativist position) stance toward gender equality and the treatment of women are in danger of committing a crime worse that colonialism. Although Moghissi discusses Iran in particular, her comments are useful if we are to remember that although Western feminism can no longer assume its superiority of value, it can continue to work with women of other nationalities in order to expand and modify important theoretical and practical "feminisms." What remains important however, within the confines of this thesis, is how Western feminist ideals and ideas can already be shown to be at work in an Arab context. Also, if we understand issues of feminism in the Middle East to have always been in dialogue with the West, then we can claim this work to be a continuation of this dialogue rather than an imposition.

Abu-Lughod has also made it clear that if we are to extend a 'loose' and 'inclusive' definition to feminism then it becomes 'impossible for us to forget that feminism always occurs in particular contexts, historical or social.'[36] Gayle Rubin, in an illuminating interview conducted by Judith Butler discusses whether "looking at" 'various events [can be considered] a theoretical activity.'[37] More specifically, Butler asks Rubin whether

> we look with or through certain kinds of theoretical suppositions? And are there certain
> kinds of practices 'seeable' or 'unseeable' depending on which theoretical presuppositions
> are used?[38]

Butler's question is very important here as it reminds us that there is a difference between 'descriptive' and 'theoretical' works that needs to be addressed when doing one or the other (or both).[39] Although Judith Butler is interviewing American anthropologist Gayle Rubin over the research that Rubin undertakes in her own field of feminist and gay and lesbian politics as well as more specialised areas within this field,[40] the discussion over 'descriptive and theoretical work' remains important in its attention to the role of theory and how this is used. In the particular context under discussion, it is difficult to decide whether the 'seeable' is indeed seeable of its own accord or because of the 'theoretical presupposition' underlining it. In order to avoid such pitfalls, this thesis proposes to acknowledge these very obvious problems and to emphasise that this is a two-way process where theory is also threatened with losing its legitimacy in the face of contextual detail.

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Instead, I hope to show that theory is simultaneously enabling and disabling as the women in each individual context re-negotiate ways of being a woman, ways of being feminist.

PERFORMATIVE THEORY: THE CRITICS

Chapter one of this thesis uses the historical event of Charcot's 'theatre of hysterics' to exemplify Butler's main theories. This section will therefore present some current criticism on Judith Butler's theory of the performative; its problems as well as its enabling arguments. It will also make distinct which aspects of the theory we can utilise, thus allowing this study to be a specialised one where the theoretical angle is in service of the contextualised material.

In her article 'The Professor of Parody' Martha C. Nussbaum provides an extremely critical view of the works of Judith Butler. Although she heralds the importance that Butler's theories hold for today's definitions of feminism, she is very prompt in voicing her concern over the deteriorating state of present day political feminism and how Butler's work may be promoting this situation.[41] Butler's main arguments shall be viewed in the terms of Nussbaum's article and later from those of subsequent critics. This will provide the necessary juxtapositioning of the reception of her work, alluding to its problems as well as its appeal.

Nussbaum writes convincingly of the way in which feminism in American academia is slowly moving away from daily feminist activity. She argues that,

> [I]n the United States, however, things have been changing. One observes a new, disquieting trend. It is not only that feminist theory pays relatively little attention to the struggles of women outside the United States (this was always a dispiriting feature even of much of the best work of the earlier period). Something more insidious than provincialism has come to prominence in the American academy. It is the virtually complete turning from the material side of life, toward a type of verbal and symbolic politics that makes only the flimsiest of connections with the real situations of real women.[42]

This echoes Rubin's concern that sometimes 'philosophy, literary analysis or film criticism' are 'indiscriminat[ely] use[d] to generate descriptions of living populations or

explanations of their behaviours.'[43] Rubin and Nussbaum here articulate their fear that theory may be manipulating what we term *experience* in order to create an unwanted and unappreciated explanation. Nussbaum argues that new feminist thinkers place too much importance on subversive words rather than subversive action. This promotes the idea that 'we are all, more or less, prisoners of the structures of power that have identified our identity as women; we can never change those structures in a large-scale way, and we can never escape from them', an idea that Nussbaum parodies.[44] The fact that no matter how hard we try to suggest or mobilise 'real-life reform movements [we] usually end up serving power in new and insidious ways' is an idea of Butler's that Nussbaum cannot agree with.[45] Nussbaum appears to be rightly concerned with a new surge of feminism which she argues has been shaped by the works of Butler, that 'have led so many to adopt a stance that looks very much like quietism and retreat.'[46] Likewise, in a review of Susan Gubar's most recent publication *Critical Condition: Feminism at the Turn of the Century*, Lorna Sage points to similar problems within the field of academic and practical feminism. She stresses that Gubar

> look[s] at the relation between what 1970's feminist teachers and scholars wanted, and what has actually happened [and finds herself in] a similar paradox; there are more women students, teachers, women's studies programmes in universities, particularly in the Humanities, than anyone would have dreamed, but there is less and less common ground on what women mean.[47]

Gubar points out that this seems to have come from the enormous pressure on feminist theorists to 'distance [themselves] from [their] predecessors in the name of originality.'[48] Though this kind of variation leaves everyone free to create a system that works for themselves and promotes the idea, in Sage's words, that only 'theory promises to give you symbolic capital, the only kind most of us are going to accumulate much of', Gubar is careful not to fall into this type of 'cynicism.'[49] In fact, unlike Elaine Showalter who has been quoted as saying 'I don't care what the latest development is in feminist theory or gender theory. It's completely irrelevant to me', Sage argues that Gubar is more interested in 'continuing to search for common ground, or at least new ways of disagreeing, since fractures and fault-lines are not going to go away.'[50] One need not accept theory blindly, in fact one can keep testing the theory to see if it can withstand the ever changing contexts.

Before I go on to elaborate further on the various problems that Butler's theories have generated amongst feminists, I would like to invoke a statement made by Butler in a 1997 interview:

> [...] I think what's really funny - and this probably seems really odd considering the level of abstraction at which I work - is that I actually believe that politics has a character of contingency and context to it that cannot be predicted at the level of theory. And that when theory starts becoming programmatic, such as 'here are my five prescriptions', and I set up my typology, and my final chapter is called 'What Is to be Done' [here Butler is referring to her work *Excitable Speech*], it pre-empts the whole problem of context and contingency, and I do think that political decisions are made in that lived moment and that they can't be predicted from the level of theory [...].[51]

This presents the even more difficult problem of separating theoretical success from political success. It is this distinction that offers the possibility of success in the private as well as public realm and it is here that Butler's theories are most useful. Another significant point in Butler's work is that she admits to the 'unforeseeable' element of individual subversive performances. In a recent interview (1999) Butler claimed that:

> I do think that one cannot work with political theory without a sense of the unforeseeable, without anticipating a break within the present regime that cannot be known in the present. I'm always searching for such breaks. I also think that what appears as a radical rupture usually turns out to have within it a trace of the past. That produces a certain irony in the end.[52]

This statement marks a profound and important suggestion. I understand the above statement to suggest that we cannot know whether an individual performative moment (that is, a moment that breaks with the norm whether at the private or public realm) will have resonance in the realm of the political at the time of its performance. Each subversive moment or action carries within it the possibility of acquiring far-reaching consequences. By forcing such moments to become 'public property' (possibly by practical researchers and theoreticians alike) as it were, one forces their claims to be tested against a very real context; everyday life. The 'breaks' that Butler speaks of are very significant to an ongoing discursive and practical feminism. The feeble claim to 'radicalness' that she criticises is a correct one in my view as it annihilates all contexts that

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may have preceded a radical break and which may go unnoticed, unvalued, undocumented and subsumed under the authority of a single event, or what Butler calls a 'radical rupture.' All radical ruptures have a 'trace in the past' and it is important that this trace be identified.

However, having underscored the particular points of Butler's work valuable to this thesis, I would like briefly to return to questions and problems concerning her theory of performativity and the reception of her claims and suggestions. Again here, Nussbaum summarises Butler's ideas as follows:

> [...] gender is a social artifice. Our ideas of what women and men are reflect nothing that exists eternally in nature. Instead they derive from customs that embed social relations of power.[53]

For Nussbaum, these ideas are unoriginal and unprovocative though they may seem original and provocative.[54] In fact, for her, Butler's only original claim is that

> when we recognise the artificiality of gender distinctions, and refrain from thinking of them as expressing an independent natural reality, we will also understand that there is no compelling reason why the gender types should ever have been two (correlated with the two biological sexes), rather than three or five or indefinitely many.[55]

However, Nussbaum argues that her understanding of Butler's claim does not allow us to 'freely reinvent the genders as we like' and that Butler 'insists that we should not naively imagine that there is a pristine self that stands behind society, ready to emerge all pure and liberated.'[56] These ideas seem restrictive to Nussbaum who sees them as obstacles to any affirmative notion of change not implied in Butler's theories. Nussbaum states that although Butler claims that

> we can create categories that are in some sense new ones, by means of the artful parody of the old ones [...] her best known idea, her conception of politics as a parodic performance, is born out of the sense of a (strictly limited) freedom that comes from the recognition that one's ideas of gender have been shaped by forces that are social rather that biological. We are doomed to the repetition of the power structures into which we are born, but we can at least make fun of them; and some ways of making fun are subversive assaults on the original norms.[57]

This is a rather unsettling resolution as it suggests that Butler may have a 'narrow vision of the possibilities for change', especially if we take into account the absence of an autonomous agent.[58] Nussbaum intriguingly argues that this suggests the absence of instinctual needs, such as the desire for 'food, for comfort, for cognitive mastery, for survival' and releases them from the make-up of the individual. As this thesis will show, the need for comfort and the struggle for survival are indeed two elements that fuel the actions of all the women in question. This would suggest that whether we philosophically agree or disagree on the existence of an autonomous agent (that is, the doer pre-existing the deed) it remains an essential element in the quest for self-understanding and change. Nussbaum also takes issue with Butler's claim that 'the body itself, and especially the distinction between the two sexes, is also a social construction [...] the binary division of sexes is taken as fundamental, as a key to arranging society, is itself a social idea that is not given in bodily reality.'[59] This creates numerous problems for women world-wide who are still struggling for respect and validation based on their bodily differences. To take away the body from an individual's control is to, on a very abstract level, remove any and all material connection to the world. Again, this is an obstacle for new emerging feminisms that still require the solid surface of their bodies as a platform from which to pitch their struggles. These ideas are developed in more detail in chapter one and further elaborated in the remaining chapters. Nussbaum oversimplifies Butler's practical suggestions when she writes that Butler

> tells us to engage in parodic performances, but she warns us that the dream of escaping altogether from the oppressive structures is just a dream: it is within the oppressive structures that we must find little spaces for resistance, and this resistance cannot hope to change the overall situation.[60]

Nussbaum fears a situation where women will no longer voice the need for real and concrete change and accuses Butler of 'eroticiz[ing] power structures' and finding peculiar satisfaction in nudging the existing system of domination and control as opposed to making efforts at real change.[61]

In stark contrast, Lisa Disch in her review of Butler's recent works points out that Butler's success relies on the fact that many women do not accept the underlying

assumptions generally acknowledged to make up the category of 'woman'[62] and that this is where her popularity and success lie. In other words, Butler's theories appeal to women 'and feminists who [do] not consider themselves oppressed as "women." '[63] The current issue at stake here is whether feminism can really represent all women and all the concerns and differences of the women it claims to represent. The question is whether a politics based on the significance of individual or collective performances with no specific outlined political agenda can offer the best solution against a feminism that might request more decisive political action at the expense of difference, particular circumstances and moral beliefs. The valuable constituent of the theory of performativity is that it allows for power to see itself parodied in the performer. This suggests that what we usually see in political reform is the result of the workings of power rather than the power structure itself. Although I am not sure whether Butler, or Disch in this article intend to suggest that performative actions can act as mirrors of power structures, I argue that within the matrix of this theory this seems to be the only suggestion that is legitimate and that can simultaneously assign some political validity to the performative action. Disch does point out, and this acts in direct opposition to Nussbaum's point, that Butler does finally take into account the 'desire to survive' as an indicator of agency in *The Psychic Life of Power: A Politics of the Performative*.[64] That this desire exists independently of choice suggests that there is something of the doer before the deed. However, politically speaking, once the child enters the realm of speech, a speech that belongs to the political majority, anything that he or she will say will already be drenched in a language that is not original, in an argument that borrows the language of the other. Disch claims that

> Butler's work has been most inspiring [to her] for the insight it offers into how everyday resistances work against patterns of authority that brook no argument. There are many readers, however, who consider her to have carried the critique of autonomy so far as to paralyse political agency.[65]

In fact, in her most recent works, particularly *Excitable Speech*, Butler does offer some way of translating performativity into politics. However, Butler reveals instances where this has worked rather than suggesting ways of inducing new changes. Butler goes as far to suggest, that sometimes directly interfering with a political or social "wrong" jeopardises the various modes of expression that this injustice could lead to. In other words, by proclaiming something as unjust and by confining it to a law, we severely limit

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the ways in which individuals might fight against this injustice; it might eliminate empowering individual performances. Although Nussbaum fears that this is a ludicrous injunction on Butler's part, I hope to show how, if treated carefully, this delicate theoretical assumption can have some benefits where the possibility of reform at the juridical level is but a dream. Ultimately, Butler's assumptions may help to reveal 'traces of the past' that could lead to a 'radical rupture.'[66]

POSTMODERN FEMINISM AND THE QUESTION OF SPACE

In the edited collection entitled *Feminism/Postmodernism* Linda J. Nicholson argues in her introduction that,

> the scholarship of modern Western culture has been marked by the attempt to reveal general, all encompassing principles which can lay bare the basic features of natural and social reality.[67]

However, the aim of this collection and of many other works since has been to criticise these principles and take into account and question these so called underlying truths. By challenging structures of power such as 'science, justice and art' as ideals that can have universal implications,

> postmodernists urge us to recognise the highest ideals of modernity in the West as immanent to a specific historical time and geographical region and also associated with certain political baggage. Such baggage includes notions of the supremacy of the West, of the legitimacy of science to tell us how to use and view our bodies, and of the distinction between art and mass culture.[68]

In summarising Judith Butler's contribution to this postmodern exercise, Nicholson points out that 'notions of gender identity are not the point of our liberation but rather the grounding of our continuing oppression.'[69] In revealing how we have been geared towards a heterosexual understanding of the world, Butler reveals that there is no pure gender-identity to be located outside of a complex social structure that demands a distinction of the sexes.[70] In her essay within the collection entitled 'Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse' Butler's pre-*Gender Trouble* arguments seem to emphasise a more concrete problem of how to represent 'woman' without reproducing yet another

system of oppressive rubrics within which to define her. In other words, is there a way of giving all women a voice that does not dictate, to some degree, what that voice should be (as opposed to any other voice)?[71] Butler is here concerned with the issues of 'fragmentation'[72] and what we mean when we say that oppression creates a fragmentation of the self. In her own words:

> Clearly, the category of women is internally fragmented by class, colour, age, and ethnic lines, to name but a few; in this sense, honouring the diversity of the category and insisting upon its definitional nonclosure appears to be a necessary safeguard against substituting a reification of women's experience for the diversity that exists. But how do we know what exists prior to its discursive articulation? Further, the critique of the subject means more than the rehabilitation of a multiple subject whose various 'parts' are interrelated within an overriding unity, a coalitional subject, or an internal polity of pluralistically related points of view. Indeed, the political critique of the subject questions whether making a conception of identity into the ground of politics, however internally complicated, *prematurely forecloses the possible articulations of the subject-position that a new politics will generate.*[73] (emphasis my own)

Butler is here rather controversially suggesting that because we are unsure of what exists prior to 'discursive articulation', that is, speech, we cannot make political decisions based on a need that is somehow prior to its articulation. When we do so we foreclose all other possible political needs. In a sense, this works well with Abu-Lughod's contention that we cannot always read political agendas into feminist stories and that feminism cannot always have political aims. This does however present a problem in finding what Gubar has called 'common ground' (see above) that will make the feminist stories *feminist*. Butler and Abu-Lughod are problematising what it is to be a feminist or a woman while Gubar still acknowledges the idea that there needs to be a common aim from which we can advance. Butler agrees that this is a problem too when she evokes Spivak, of whom she says:

> Gayatri Spivak has argued that feminists need to rely on an operational essentialism, a false ontology of women as a universal in order to advance a feminist political program. She concedes that the category of women is not fully expressive [...] but she suggests that we need to use it for strategic purposes. Julia Kristeva suggests something similar, I think, when she recommends that feminists use the category of women as a political tool without

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attributing ontological integrity to the term, and she adds that, strictly speaking, women cannot be said to exist.[74]

Butler's problem with the use of the category of woman for political aims is that although it may 'establish a transhistorical commonality' it does simultaneously deny us a more 'complex cultural identity - or non-identity as the case may be.'[75] In other words, if gender is but a replication of the power structures that form us, and if what we are doing is in fact creating an identity based on a gender that has no recourse to anything but the performance preceding it, then using gender to foreground a common identify is a dangerous move, a move that only re-instates the power structures already in existence. What Butler makes clear is that any study that looks to use gender as its 'common ground' needs to take into account the various 'performances' of gender located in each specific context. Only after doing this and locating at which point these performances are actually repetitions of power structures can we say that a performative moment has been successful. Each instance of so-called "subversion" needs to be tested against its result, be it on a personal or public level. Also, each act of subversion needs to be weighed against what it reveals of the working of the systems of power. As Abu-Lughod has argued, if we cannot assign political significance to all feminist stories then we need to at least assign a personal significance that can then be translated into a past of 'feminism' that accumulates and contributes to Butler's 'radical rupture' (see above). Identity politics based on gender distinction can result in a dangerous politics, since, as Butler warns, 'identity categories are never merely descriptive, but always normative, and as such, exclusionary.'[76] Indeed, what makes the idea of an identity category even more difficult to conceive of and mobilise is the geographical space involved when discussing Western theory and the Arab context. One of the problematics involved in setting up a postmodernist but active feminism is that we need to 'examin[e] the prospects for the construction of a feminist politics that reaches across boundaries.'[77] A critique of how the position of the theorist is blurred by questions of space is addressed by Alison McDowell in her essay 'Spatialising Feminism.' In short, McDowell argues for a more concrete postmodern feminism that does not forget context, an issue easy to ignore if we take into account the physical distance involved between cultures. To take this a step further, McDowell suggests that it is also easy to forget the absolute necessity for a type of functional feminism. What she suggests is that we have to address the issue of 'how to construct contextual theories of

difference in which the associations of gendered identities with place and location are seriously addressed.'[78] Finding ways of redefining space and of eliminating the fear of the physical distance that does not always allow for a first-hand experience is to remain attendant to the possibility that local knowledge can have global importance. To link this to what I have been arguing thus far, if we are to close the circuit of knowledge that Rajeswari Mohan speaks of between Western theory and Arab experience, then one way of doing this that lessens the significance of space is by accepting that Arab women's experience could have global importance; in other words, an importance that does not remain 'local' due to its historical, cultural and geographical specificity.[79] McDowell expands upon her initial concept by suggesting that 'if we move towards a definition of both identity and place as a network of relations, unbounded and unstable, rather than fixed, we are able to challenge essentialist notions of place and being, and of local, face-to-face relations as somehow more "authentic." '[80] This leaves the path open to test experiences for effectiveness and usefulness rather than for authenticity which pre-empts a somewhat closed political agenda: 'for feminists the challenge is to begin to forge alliances between groups who are differently positioned through technological as well as personal means of communication that recognises the geographical space' but does not let this indifference interrupt the beneficial construction of 'non-hierarchical [...] knowledge.'[81]

In her essay 'Reflections on Postmodern Feminist Social Research' J.K Gibson-Graham confronts the problems of positioning the postmodern feminist researcher. She claims that,

> while the turn to postmodernism has engendered a plethora of exciting philosophical, political and cultural endeavours that tackle the essentialism around women embedded in both feminist and non-feminist texts, feminist social analysts find themselves confronting an ironic impasse as the unifying objects of our research dissolve before our eyes.[82]

Although Graham is trying to reconcile her role as feminist social researcher in the face of a new theory, her essay is significant in that she tries to marry these two seemingly disjointed concerns. Her initial concern is that 'without unity of woman's identity [...] postmodern feminism [may] open the doors to fragmentation, factionalism and political disempowerment'[83], this fragmentation being one that Butler views as having initially

come from the belief in a shared identity based on a false idea of gender. Graham does believe however that theory is itself a mode of political intervention as is 'self-consciou[s] political (identity-based) political organisation.'[84] It is the way in which these two could interact that might 'have concrete political effects.'[85] The conclusion of the essay is powerful in that it suggests that the role of the researcher is to give power to as yet *unknown* sites of power through dialogue and through leaving oneself open to criticism, discussion and difference. In Graham's own concluding remarks,

> As a feminist researcher, I am coming to understand my political project as one of discursive destabilisation. One of my goals is to undermine the hegemony of the binary gender discourse and to promote alternative subject positions for gendered subjects. I see my research as [participating in] creating identity/subjectivity, and in that process as constituting alternative sites of power and places of political intervention.[86]

More significantly, Graham understands trans-local dialogue as a space from which 'new subjectivities can emerge [....] [and this dialogue] is a political process without end and without a unified collective subject: 'In an overdetermined world conversations are interventions/actions/changes in and of themselves, no matter whether they do or do not also give rise to further planned interventions.'[87] In other words, Graham has found a way to reconcile postmodern feminist theories and to integrate them into a broader definition of the political. This allows her, and us, to retain some value in research which need not always translate itself into political organisations. Instead, this symbiosis allows for those feminist moments that do not translate into mobilising action due to the specific contexts in which they find themselves in. This does not, and should not, interfere in the validity of the performative advantages of the present.

IDENTITY AND MODERNIST FEMINISM

Most of the problematising criticism around Judith Butler's work to date has centred around her seemingly confusing position vis-à-vis the idea of an autonomous agent, or agency itself. In her work *Sacrificial Logics: Feminist Theory and the Critique of Identity*, Alison Weir claims in the first person that,

> though I would agree with the argument that the gendered self is constituted through practices, I see no reason to assume that this means that the idea of an 'abiding gendered

self' is an 'illusion'-unless 'abiding gendered self' is taken to mean 'fixed and predetermined essence.' Butler is assuming that any concept of a continuous self-identity is a deceptive illusion of substance. But a sense of self and a sense of gender which is experienced as meaningful and continuous is not necessarily based on an illusion of substance.[88]

Weir is here quite clearly stating that even if she were to figure her 'self' as a series of fictions, this would not necessarily undermine the validity of experience. Though Weir admits that this may be an obvious implication, she does underscore that 'the point is that it cannot be accommodated within the terms of Butler's theory.'[89] By not accommodating the validity of experience, the performance that each and every gendered self is supposed to be staging is left with no audience. As Weir asks, who is the illusion of gender exposed to if we deny the authority of experience?[90] Also, if Butler is trying to promote some type of "emancipatory politics" then the idea of agency becomes crucial. Within the boundaries of this thesis I feel that it is crucial to have an experiencing subject who understands herself as such, a subject who can take stock of subversive acts (of the body and language) in order to realise a re-enforced sense of agency and construct a path for "emancipatory politics" even if the object is only herself. Weir suggests an alternative to the impasse that Butler offers when she states that

> the alternative is a recognition that subjects, while they do not originate, do *participate* in the ongoing process of the constitution of subjectivity. For of course we are constituted as subjects, but from the time we begin to be constituted, we also participate in our constitution.[91] (emphasis author's own)

Likewise, in her article entitled 'Subject, Psyche and Agency: The Work of Judith Butler' Lois McNay revisits the question of agency within Butler's work as a central problem. Specifically, McNay wants to,

> draw attention to certain limitations with the theory of the performative which loosely revolve around placing what is an overwhelmingly symbolic account of identity formation in the context of the social and political relations that traverse it [...] the concept of agency that underlies Butler's notion of a politics of the performative remains abstract and lacking in social specificity.[92]

McNay points out that even if Butler is trying to invoke a politics, her notion of agency remains rather obscure. McNay thus tries to re-introduce some idea of 'creativity' (akin to Weir's notion of 'participation') which she understands as the individualistic element within a sequence of performances; surely, I want to argue, this can be a marker of agency? She emphasises that 'an understanding of the creative dimensions of action' is necessary if we are to move beyond the 'private sphere' and have a 'transformatory impact on collective values and identity norms.'[93] The argument expands to include the fact that every performance is 'potentially open to change' and so 'not as restrictive as it might initially seem.'[94] By not acknowledging this, is Butler ignoring context yet again and limiting individual potential to initiate change? Finally, McNay claims that

> there is a tendency in Butler's work to confine discussion of the politics of the performative to a series of dualisms - signification versus resignification, norm versus abjection - which are far from adequate in capturing dynamics of social change and how this impacts on identity formation.[95]

In other words, performativity works within a certain context too and needs to be evaluated within this context and its own socio-economic and cultural specificities; also, the individual's psyche cannot remain divorced from these. McNay ends her argument by emphasising that what is missing from Butler's work is a 'collective dimension' that would give a wider scope to her theories and remove them from the confines of 'the private realm of individual action.'[96] However, what I want to argue is that both of these frameworks are necessary for a new feminist politics of the Middle East. It is important to recognise the private realm as significant but also to trace its possible importance in the public sphere. It is then important to close the circuit by incorporating local experience into global knowledge, thus revising, in this case, the idea of performativity to include a strong element of agency based on one's *creative participation* in one's subversive performances.

Finally, in her work *Enlightened Women: Modernist Feminism in a Postmodern Age*, Alison Assiter rejects Butler's notions as politically crippling.[97] Assiter advocates a common humanity where issues of gender no longer matter. Concerns about the loss of political effectiveness were we to release ourselves from the ideas of 'collective preoccupations' is a anxiety she fears has arisen from feminist postmodern ideas. Assiter

advocates some type of universalism and essentialism based on an ongoing dialogue with other cultures in the attempt to continue to locate common factors. It is also an aim of this thesis to try and understand to what extent this is possible.

Butler's work is central to my reading of Arab women's representations as it offers a model for re-working what might otherwise be termed as 'local contexts', such as Umm Kulthum's singing and that might therefore remain unexamined. Though Butler herself is not involved in re-visiting the work of Arab women, her detailed ideas on the performative aspects of gender allow me to see a resistance to gender stereotyping in the conscious performance of the contexts that I examine. This *conscious performance* can then be re-worked to form a sophisticated critique of a Western feminism that fails to acknowledge subversive moments in contexts that are not immediately recognisable as such. The performative, as Bulter understands it, can indeed sometimes go unnoticed and it is our role as critics to identify and promote these unusual though highly significant moments. Where I differ with Butler, as I shall elaborate at various points in later chapters, is that while she argues that the performative moment is only significant in the time and place of its creation, trapped in its position within the unchangeable symbolic, I make the distinction that in the case of Arab women's cultural expression, these performative moments must be reconfigured to form part of a wide-reaching and influential living feminism; one that understands that the conscious performance of gender is *dangerous*, *provocative* and highly risky for those involved. Whether or not these performative moments are understood in terms of their position in the unchangeable structure of the symbolic or not, they remain crucial to their performers and to any scholarship committed to truly engaging with the feminism of diverse cultures.

ENDNOTES

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[1] 'Butler, Judith, 'Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory and Psychoanalytic Discourse' in Nicholson, J. Linda, ed. *Feminism/Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1999). Judith Butler has addressed this issue in most of her works, some of which I do not directly cite but that have been influential in my understanding of her ideas. These are, 'Revisiting Bodies and Pleasure', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 16:2 (1999), 11-20, 'Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of "Postmodernims"' in *Feminists Theorise the Political*, eds. Butler, Judith and Joan. W. Scott (London: Routledge, 1992). 'The Imperialist Subject', *Journal of Urban and Cultural Studies*, 2:1 (1991), 73-78.

[2] Hatem, Mervat, 'Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?', *Middle East Journal*, 48:1 (1994), 661-676 (p. 661). Although Hatem talks of Egypt, I feel this is applicable to other secular Middle Eastern countries such as Lebanon.

[3] Mohan, Rajeswari, 'Loving Palestine: Nationalist Activism and Feminist Agency in Leila Khaled's Subversive Bodily Acts', *Interventions*, 1:1 (1998), 52-80 (p. 79).

[4] Moghissi, Haiden, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of a Post-Modern Analysis* (London: Zed Books, 1999), p. 9.

[5] Mohan, Rajeswari, 'Loving Palestine: Nationalist Activism and Feminist Agency in Leila Khaled's Subversive Bodily Acts', p. 78.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Abu-Lughod, Lila, 'Introduction: Feminist Longings and Postcolonial Conditions' in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East,* ed. by Abu-Lughod, Lila (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 3.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[10] Abu-Lughod, Lila, 'The Marriage of Feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective Repudiation as a Dynamic of Cultural Politics' in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East,* ed. by Abu-Lughod, Lila (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 243.

[11] Badran, Margot and Miriam Cooke, *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (London: Virago Press, 1990).

[12] *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Abu-Lughod, Lila, 'Introduction: Feminist Longings and Postcolonial Conditions', p. 5.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] Abu-Lughod, Lila, 'The Marriage of Feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective Repudiation as a Dynamic of Cultural Politics', p. 243.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 244.

[19] Lughod argues that the single most well known early advocate of women's rights at the turn-of-the-century Egypt was Quasim Amin. Her research though has revealed to what extent he was influenced by the French administration there and how he did not in fact argue for marriage based on 'love' but instead on companionship. For more information on this see Abu-Lughod, Lila, 'The Marriage of Feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective Repudiation as a Dynamic of Cultural Politics', pp. 255-261. Also, Lughod discusses how even the Bedouin tribes, who are looked on as sources of tradition have drastically changed

and some have been very influenced my modernisation. They can no longer be invested with an unchangeable authenticity, *Ibid.*, pp. 255-261.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 263.

[21] Moghissi, Haiden. *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of a Post-Modern Analysis,* p. 54.

[22] *Ibid.,* pp. 59-60. In fact, Moghissi takes this much further when she claims that: 'the newly manufactured image of a strong Muslim woman in active negotiation with a Muslim male elite might produce contradictory consequences. It might ornament gender experience under Islamic fundamentalism and mystify the consequences for non-compliance for women who do not share the beliefs of their Muslim sisters […] this trend gets its theoretical inspiration, particularly, from postmodernist relativism, which for better or worse, has emerged as a fascinating antidote to the Eurocentric totalising metatheories and the universalism of liberal pluralism, Marxism and feminism.', p. 50.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 81

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 125.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 130.

[27] By writers such as Fedwa-Malti Douglas, Leila Ahmed, Margot Bardan and Miriam Cooke amongst others. Leila Ahmed also traces issues of gender back through Islamic history in her important work *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). A more recent and very interesting view on the space that Arab Feminism occupies now is elaborated in Anouar Majid's article 'The Politics of Feminism in Islam', *Signs*, 23:2 (1998), 321-361. This article is accompnied by two responses and a further response from Majid himself . See also, Moghadam, Valentine, ed. *Gender and National Identity: Woman and Politics in Muslim Societies* (London: Zed Books, 1994).

[28] Abu-Lughod, Lila, 'Introduction: Feminist Longings and Postcolonial Conditions', p. 23.

[29] Moghissi, Haiden, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of a Post-Modern Analysis,* p. 6.

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 93.

[33] Abu-Lughod, Lila, 'Introduction: Feminist Longings and Postcolonial Conditions', p. 22.

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] See Hatem, Mervat, 'Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?', for an interesting discussion on this.

[36] Abu-Lughod, Lila, 'Introduction: Feminist Longings and Postcolonial Conditions', p. 23.

[37] Rubin, Gayle interviewed by Judith Butler, 'Sexual Traffic' in *Coming Out of Feminism*, Merck, Mandy, Naomi Segal and Elizabeth Wright, eds. (Oxford: Blackwells Publishers, 1998), p. 64.

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] For example, at the time of this interview, Rubin was researching the gay male leather community in San Francisco.

[41] Naussbaum, Martha, 'The Professor of Parody', *New Republic,* 220:8 (1999), 37-45. I am using the on-line version. All further references will be out of /14.

[42] *Ibid.,* p.2/14.

[43] Rubin, Gayle interviewed by Judith Butler, 'Sexual Traffic', p. 66.

[44] Naussbaum, Martha, 'The Professor of Parody', p. 2/14.

[45] *Ibid.,* p. 3/14.

[46] *Ibid.*

[47] Sage, Lorna, 'Learning New Titles', *Times Literary Supplement*, March 17 2000, p. 26.

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] *Ibid.*

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] Bell, Vicki, 'On Speech, Race and Melancholia: An Interview with Judith Butler', *Theory, Culture and Society,* 16:2 (1999), 163-174.

[52] *Ibid.,* p. 167.

[53] Naussbaum, Martha, 'The Professor of Parody', p. 5/14.

[54] Martha Nussbaum here traces back ideas of constructed gender back to ancient Greek philosophy (Plato) as well as to the ideas of John Stuart Mill, MacKinnon, Dworkin, Nancy Chodrow and Gayle Rubin among others. Her aim here is to distinguish which elements of Butler's work are original and ground-breaking and those which are not.

[55] *Ibid.,* p. 6-7/14. It is also significant here that Jacques Derrida anticipates this idea in his work with Christie V. McDonald, 'Choreographies' in *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance*, Goellner, Ellen and Jacqueline Shea Murphy, eds. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutjers University Press, 1995), pp. 141-156.

[56] *Ibid.*

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] Ibid., p. 8/14.

[59] *Ibid.,* p. 8/14.

[60] *Ibid.,* p. 10/14.

[61] *Ibid.,* p. 11/14.

[62] Disch, Lisa, 'Judith Butler and the Politics of the Performative', *Political Theory,* 27:4 (1999), 545-560. I am citing the on-line version. All references to page numbers from this source shall be out of /11.

[63] *Ibid.,* p. 2/11.

[64] Ibid., p. 5/11.

[65] *Ibid.,* p. 9/11.

[66] Bell, Vicki, 'On Speech, Race and Melancholia: An Interview with Judith Butler', p. 167.

[67] Nicholson, J. Linda, ed. *Feminism/Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 2.

[68] *Ibid.,* p. 4.

[69] *Ibid.,* p.10.

[70] Butler mentions this again in her recent publication *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000). This work also has contributions from Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek. Butler re-asserts that she works against the contention that culture can only emerge with the imposition of sexual difference.

[71] This is a summary of Butler's primary argument in her essay 'Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory and Psychoanalytic Discourse', see footnote 1.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 327.

[73] *Ibid.*

[74] *Ibid.*, p. 325.

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 339. Butler closes this essay with the introduction of what is to become *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), ' [...] it seems crucial to resist the myth of interior origins, understood either as naturalised or culturally fixed. Only then, gender coherence might be understood as the regulatory fiction it is - rather than the common point of our liberation (p.339).'

[76] Butler, Judith, 'Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of "Postmodernism"' in *Feminists Theorise the Political,* Butler, Judith and Joan. W. Scott, eds. (London: Routledge, 1992), p.17.

[77] McDowell, Linda, 'Spatialising Feminism' in *BodySpace: Destabilising Geographies of Gender and Sexuality* ed. Duncan, Nancy (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 32.

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[79] For more on this see Sara Ahmed's view which is discussed in chapter two is this study, Nawal El-Saadawi: Medic and Woman.

[80] McDowell, Linda, 'Spatialising Feminism', p. 36.

[81] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

[82] Graham, Gibson-J.K, 'Reflections on Postmodern Feminist Research' in *BodySpace: Destabilising Geographies of Gender and Sexuality,* Duncan, Nancy, ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 234.

[83] *Ibid.*, p. 236.

[84] *Ibid.*, p. 237.

[85] *Ibid.*

[86] *Ibid.*, p. 241.

[87] *Ibid.*, p. 242.

[88] Weir, Alison, *Sacrificial Logics: Feminist Theory and the Critique of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 123.

[89] *Ibid.*

[90] Weir goes on to offer an interesting explanation of how Butler mis-uses Neitzsche's concept of 'there is no doer behind the deed', p. 124.

[91] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

[92] McNay, Lois, 'Subject, Psyche and Agency: The Work of Judith Butler', *Theory, Culture and Society,* 16:2 (1999), 175-193.

[93] *Ibid.*, p. 176.

[94] *Ibid.*, p. 177.

[95] *Ibid.*, p. 178.

[96] *Ibid.*, p. 189.

[97] Assiter, Alison, *Enlightened Women: Modernist Feminism in a Postmodern Age* (London: Routledge, 1996). There is no specific page number for this, Assiter criticises Butler throughout and her own work is in part a rejection of Butler's theories.

CHAPTER 1

CHARCOT: THE AUTHORITY THAT BROOKED NO ARGUMENT

In this chapter I hope to demonstrate how ideas of fixed gender attributes may come to be questioned and thus reconfigured. In particular, I want to offer an entry point to a discussion on ideas of gender performance. Notions of interpellation, repetition and uncertainty will be explored as they appear crucial to the understanding of the performance of gender as well as offering insight into establishing a subversive gender performance, in other words, the performative.[1] I will examine the phenomena of "hysteria" at the Parisian Salpêtrière clinic at the turn of the twentieth century to prove that gender attributes can be learned and reiterated in order to support the idea that they may indeed be natural, though simultaneously harboring the threat that they may be simulated. Although this may seem essentially paradoxical, it is one of the central arguments introduced by Judith Butler. Through an analysis of the 'theatre of hysterics', as the Salpêtrière became known, I will show that in positing gender attributes as the source of physical and psychological illness, these same gender attributes needed to be performed and performed again in order to prove this link, thereby proving their very un-naturalness. The establishment of medicine as a professional *science* at the turn of the nineteenth century will be briefly discussed and a connection established with how medical knowledge was rapidly legitimized and thereby came to constitute a certain type of authentic knowledge. My aim is to show how the symptoms of medically diagnosed "hysteria" involuntarily provide for a study of how constitutive gender qualities are *constructed* and how the diagnosis of hysteria makes it possible to link "hysterical" manifestations to natural causes or woman's biological make-up outside of medical examination. The particular circumstances of the patients at the Salpêtrière will be examined, as will be the social circumstances of women outside this medical community. Also, the unusually high number of diagnosed "hysterics" shall be scrutinized to reveal a possible agenda in their initial diagnosis. This chapter will focus on how multiple performances of hysterical symptoms were essential to the survival of the female patients in late nineteenth century France. These performances are of particular interest to this thesis because they draw on congealed (always already constituted) notions of gender that try to suggest that physical illness could potentially derive from causes

related to "gender", itself posited as a natural truth. It is this idea of the "natural truth" of gender that shall be explored again in the subsequent chapters.

Charcot and the theatre of hysterics may seem an unlikely choice for a starting point for a thesis on feminism and Arab women. However, I am keen to demonstrate Butler's idea of the performative in action. I found that the theatre of hysterics, as elaborated in this chapter, formed an apt example of 'gender in action.' If, as Bulter argues, the performative underlines all gendered moments, then the analysis of an institution whose survival was based on performances of hysteria, the epitomy of gendered actions, seems highly appropriate. In my discussion of the hysterics under Charcot's supervision, I discuss how certain patients learned to perform what was expected of them; this in turn was diagnosed as symptomatic of their femaleness. Bulter's exciting ideas on performativity enable us to imagine many sites of feminist activity not intimately linked with politically charged feminist moments. The reproduction of feminine expectations for a medical audience, in the form of a hysterical fit produced by a patient, emphasises that this too could be seen as a subversive moment where gender is reproduced to prove that it is a natural occurrence (thereby proving its unnaturalness). The example of Charcot's theatre of hysterics proves the absurdity of his project and offers an instance of how ideas of performativity can lead us to challenging established facts that relate to women, sex and gender. However, this example also performs another challenging act for me in that is also demonstrates the finite uses of Butler's theory when not linked with the lived experience of every day reality. Charcot's hysterics, like Butler's subjects, perform for us an image of non-conformity, yet who do they perform for? We can use their experience as an example of how perfomativity works in the narrow sense yet *they* do not benefit from this knowledge and we cannot even know if they understand their acts as subversive action. Through not engaging with the wider, practical implications of the uses of performativity, Butler remains within the realm of Charcot's hysterics; a theory with little practice.

Hysteria, diagnosed as an illness that came about as a result of excessive "feminine" qualities, relied on the repetition of this excessiveness for its survival. The hysterics at the Salpêtrière were encouraged to emphasize the symptoms of the disease they were told they suffered from. In turn, they were promised, through re-creation or performance, temporary release. This peculiar recitation was used to reinforce the popular belief that certain lapses in a woman's social or psychic life, such as the lack of a husband

or children, could in fact result in physical illness with disastrous symptoms. This physical illness was however one that emphasized the "untamed" sexual nature of women and the damage that this nature could cause if not placed in check. This chapter will trace these symptoms and their enactments to contest any possible claim that these performances could have had a healing effect (although it would *seem* that the performances were encouraged to provide just this). In fact, through close examination of the circumstances in Paris in the last decades of the century, I will suggest that the notion of the "hysteric" was sensationalized to act as a warning against the "femme nouvelle (the new woman)." This "new woman" had also begun her insurgency at around the same time and had begun to challenge expected notions of womanhood. I will argue that the women diagnosed as "hysterics" at the Parisian clinic were manipulated to illustrate the evils that could befall women when they no longer acted as was prescribed; the suggestion being that they would in fact turn into immoral or de-socialized women (this somehow suggests throughout that the norm of woman is abnormality and she therefore needs to be kept in check). What is of particular interest to this examination of the hysterics however, is the spectacular aspect of their existence. Their involvement in a "performance" is stimulating to us for the possibilities that it offers. Willing performances suggest a collaboration to distribute a certain "truth" that seems to mask another "truth"; that of the conscious performance, a repetition of learned acts. This argument will become clear once certain theoretical suggestions have been elucidated. I will show that hysteria becomes a *science* (corpus of knowledge) of woman that tries to *explain* woman; used as a tool, "clamping" the female in her place. However, the category of hysteria ultimately proves to be a site of uncertainty, a monument to the inability to define what exactly woman is; the direct opposite of its discursive intention. Similarly, in the chapters to follow, medicine, music and war emerge as similar sites that attempt to clamp the definition of woman and fail. The theoretical framework of an enabling conscious performative can aid in the circumvention of this *impasse*.

1.1 HYSTERIA

The study of hysteria at the Salpêtrière attempted to consolidate a knowledge of women based on empiricism by asserting that this observation was somehow neutral and free of preconceived notions of gender. Observation, within the confines of legitimate

'medical science' was then revealed as the best possible method for the revelation of 'truth.'[2] Paradoxically, Foucault in *The History of Sexuality: Volume One*, has described the Salpêtrière as an institution that set up all the apparatus for the study of this female sex yet did not follow through with the investigation (as though it feared that it would/could reveal an unthinkable fact or truth). Thus, in Foucault's words:

> Charcot's Salpêtrière was an enormous apparatus for *observation*, with its examinations, interrogations and experiments, but it was also a machinery for *incitement*, with its *public presentations, its theatre of ritual crisis*, carefully staged with the help of ether or amyl nitrate, its interplay of dialogues, palpations, laying on of hands, postures which the doctor elicited or obliterated with a gesture or a word, its hierarchy of personnel who kept watch, organized, provoked, monitored, and reported, and who accumulated an immense pyramid of observations and dossiers.[3] (emphasis my own)

Foucault elaborates on this point and claims that 'in its own deployment of the rules and regulations of sexuality, [the bourgeoisie] was unwilling to acknowledge, for a long time, that other classes had a body and a sex - precisely those classes it was exploiting [...]' and so any conclusions made were conclusions created in the perpetuation of a regulated sexuality unable to acknowledge other 'bodies.'[4] In effect, hysterical women were described as suffering from an excess of 'feminine behaviors'[5] that they could not control. What was expected of them in the recreations of these "hysterical acts" were representations of their symptoms; symptoms that were profoundly erotic in nature (though never described as such) and which reaffirmed their position as women - female, excessive, mad - yet which simultaneously allowed for an expression of sexuality. This expression from within the confines of a regulatory regime is what best exposes the essence of the performative, or, an enabling performance.

1.2 EXCITABLE BUTLER

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, within medical terminology, hysteria itself suffered from the lack of a precise definition. The problem seems to be that as an "illness" it wavered between these two contradictions. One the one hand, it was defined as an affliction that was physiologically legitimate while on the other hand it was

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often understood as an illness that could be easily simulated, or performed, thereby possibly located in the realm of psychology. In fact, as Joan Copjec has noted in her article 'Flauit et Dissipati Sunt: He Blew Away and they were Scattered', the figure of the hysterical woman

> menaced knowledge, confusing categories of real and unreal illness, true perceptions and false images, making the physician a potential victim of trickery and deception and casting doubt on his senses which were the foundation of his knowledge.[6]

Copjec's statement interestingly raises complicated particulars associated with the illness. The capacity of the hysterics to be 'menacing' and have the potential to 'confuse' the 'real and unreal' already problematises the possibility and legitimacy of calling hysteria an illness. Essentially, this uncertainty could render the physician 'a potential victim of trickery and deception.' Copjec's words evoke a sense of theatricality and make-believe, and suggest that this space between the real and the unreal together with the hysterics' ability to confuse and maybe confound, is precisely the locus for a potentially powerful subversive performative moment if we allow ourselves to read it as such. This threatening moment questions the diagnoses that makes up the 'foundation of [medical] knowledge' and has the potential to subvert. This particular slant proves to be useful in that it emphasises that 'hysteria then, is a disease of the imagination, of the production of images cut off from the natural.'[7] However, hysteria only came to be accepted as a disease of the imagination at the turn of the century with Freudian psychoanalysis. At the Salpêtrière clinic, Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot still worked to prove that hysteria was a pathological disease and to this end he 'kept a close watch over patients, going so far as to have them spy on one another',[8] so fearful was he that the patients might learn to simulate the symptoms and trick him, thereby questioning *his* knowledge of *them*.

Fearing this uncertainty, Charcot constructed a pathological diagnosis that would position him as one who knew women. Here, Judith Butler's ideas on how our perception of gender is constituted are important as they shed light on the possible subversive nature of these hysterical performances, posited as natural. In her work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler's aim is to de-centre an obvious phallogocentric and compulsory heterosexuality that has a stabilising influence on the way

that we understand gender. She sets out to do this *not* by trying to find a real woman behind the constructed one (and it is arguably impossible for us to seek the real women behind the hysterical performances), but to disclose by what means such a construction comes about and to question the supposed *origins* of femininity. Butler's task is not to conceive of a common identity that all women can share but to reveal the constructedness of the dream of a common identity based on fixed gender attributes. To counter this conception, Butler invokes the need for a 'set of parodic practices based in a performative theory of gender acts that disrupt the categories of the body, sex, gender and sexuality and occasion their subversive resignification and proliferation beyond the binary frame.'[9] I want to argue that the performance of the hysteric is one such parodic practice because the physician can never be certain of the authenticity of the hysterical fit. This suggests that the confirmation and documentation of gender as a result of observation around certain fixed acts is not in fact a marker of a stable and recognisable gender at all. Rather, all that gender performances prove is that they are a learned act, memorised and repeated. They do not necessarily signify that there is a particular essence beyond their performance. By parodying the belief that there is such a marker as a natural gender, performers define themselves as taking part in a *parody* but not as essential men or women.[10] My contention is that Charcot's hysterics were involved in this type of performance. The study of their performances is an entry-point to the detailed investigation of other performative acts discussed later in the thesis.

In her later work *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, Butler re-works her definition of performance and states that 'it is no longer a singular or deliberate "act", but, rather, the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names.'[11] In other words, it is not an essential, conscious "us" that acts, but rather, that we are enabled through repeated acts which become part of our identity that we primarily define as our gender. Butler's notion of a compulsory heterosexual matrix that produces a binary gender frame is one that can only be questioned and provoked through parodic practice that can symbolically destroy this inhibiting matrix. As the following arguments will show, the hysterics were utilized to represent the ills or punishments of non-conformity. Their own parodic solutions and the uncertainties that their performances produced for the doctor reveal a fluidity of gender possibilities; the impossibility of stable,

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definable gender attributes with which to define and categorize women. In fact, hysteria was 'the wastebasket in which everything [ended] up that [was] non-classifiable.'[12] In this way, most unexplained and psychological ailments that could not be defined scientifically by medicine's newfound power were categorized as part of a 'hysteria.'[13] This, in turn, reduced the need to research and elaborate on female difference. Hysteria, it could be argued, has functioned 'over the last two centuries as an expression of *the inscription of gender relations within medical discourse.*'[14] (italics my own) In other words, the diagnosis of hysteria reflected a specific kind of gender relation. What did not conform to established notions of femininity was relocated as a physical disability that could result in pathological illness. In other words, Dr. Charcot's *hysterics* may be viewed as an invented challenge to the growing medical profession at the time, a challenge that coincided with other issues concerning racial purity, female normality and behavior, as well as relations between class and sexual behavior. Moreover, in their essay 'Destinies of Hysteria', Roy Porter and G. S. Rousseau have acknowledged that

> the label *hysteric* became a key encodement of difference and danger, not just in respect
> to nubile girls or frustrated widows, but in the larger evaluation of cultural, national, and
> racial characteristics at a time when nationalism was on the ascendancy.[15]

I will contextualise the above statements to reach a more qualified understanding of the necessity for the high number of diagnoses of hysterical patients in the last two decades of nineteenth century Paris. This will emphasize the importance of re-interpreting the actions of the hysterics themselves and of evaluating the significance of their performances and the performances to follow as well as locating Butler's theories within their actions.

1.3 'FEMME NOUVELLE': DOMESTIC ART AND THE NEED FOR HYSTERICS

The emergence and growth of a professional medical science towards the end of the nineteenth century was a significant factor in the diagnosis of hysteria. Establishing the "expert", as I will show, was a necessary occurrence, on which medical science relied. The expert and his area of knowledge came to function as authentic reference points. In short, as Joanna de Groot has noted in her essay ' "Sex" and "Race": The Construction of Language and Image in the Nineteenth Century',

the founding of learned societies, journals, and academic institutions for medicine, anthropology, geography, and linguistic studies brought the study of human characteristics, differences, or cultures firmly into the study of science, rationality, and professional expertise. As will be shown, this is by no means the only or even the most powerful source of images of 'sex' or 'race', but it certainly constituted *one* of the most authoritative and influential ways of grounding the 'Otherness' of femininity or ethnic identity in 'real' knowledge wielded by prestigious professionals (doctors, academics, 'experts').[16]

Ways of 'grounding the ' "Otherness" of femininity' in ' "real" knowledge' gave the medical profession real power and authority over the meaning of this otherness. Also, de Groot continues,

medical 'science' was invoked to reconstruct concepts of female identity around women's biological cycles and reproductive functions, 'proving' their inadequacy and categorizing any who would not accept biology as destiny as 'diseased' or 'abnormal.' This scientific addition to conventional wisdom about women converged with middle-class concern to distinguish the female/domestic sphere from the male/public sphere, and to argue that separation of these spheres was essential to the maintenance of virtue, progress and stability.[17]

In short, de Groot argues that certain *structures* arose in *response* to the categories required to *justify* and *understand* 'Otherness.' Specifically in France, the rise of the "Femme Nouvelle" or proto-feminist was viewed as a serious threat to notions of 'virtue, progress and stability.' Their ideas for female emancipation such as more opportunities for work and university education brought these "new women" into the foreground of culture. In effect, their existence provided the motive behind the re-evaluation of the domestic arts by those who opposed their movement. As Debora Silverman has suggested in her article 'The "New Woman," Feminism, and the Decorative Arts in Fin-de-Siècle France',

French Art Nouveau originated as a broadly based official initiative for design reform, whose institutional home in the 1890s was called the Central Union of the Decorative Arts. The Central Union brought together artists, republican politicians, and some *neuropsychiatrists* in a common effort to discover a distinctively French modern style [...] a prominent part of [its] program in the 1890s was the definition of the interior

space as distinctively feminine and the promotion of women as the carriers and creators of the modern craft style [...] this concentration on woman as the queen and artist of the interior *emerged in the 1890s as a response* to the challenge of the *'femme nouvelle,'* or 'new woman,' who was perceived as threatening to subvert women's roles as decorative objects and decorative artists.[18] (first and second line of italics my own)

The "femmes nouvelles" had succeeded in winning over certain privileges such as women's right to initiate divorce proceedings, enter careers and academia and so on.[19] Therefore, creative domesticity and 'domestic arts', it seems (examined below) were simultaneously given greater importance in order to crush the demands (and limited success) of this "femme nouvelle." The domestic arts movement had a nationalist overtone as well, fuelled by problems such as the declining birth rate in France. As Silverman points out,

the decline of the birthrate rigidified the response to infractions of the sexual division of labor, however moderate, and transformed the protection of the traditional model of the family into an imperative of national security and military strength. In this highly charged context, even the slightest tamperings with female identity and female activity were experienced as threats to the entire structure.[20]

To counter this threat, the domestic arts were in fact elevated to an importance they had never before enjoyed. The public gave weight to 'women as the creators of private spaces' and 'sought to redirect women's new energies [from] the threat of the unattractive, careerist *amazone* or *hommesse.*'[21] (italics authors own) Ironically, by 1889, Mrs. Charcot and her daughter found themselves busy making handmade trunks, leather covers for books, trimmed lamps, terracotta figures and draped fabrics in support of this movement.[22] Concurrently, the first International Congress for Women's Rights and Institutions took place at the 1889 World Exposition in Paris and while the Central Union of Decorative Arts tried to suggest that it was promoting 'cross-class female solidarity' it ignored the conditions under which poorer women produced these handicrafts.[23] As Silverman has noted, 'medical and philosophical sources' were often 'invoked' to 'demonstrate the unsuitability of the female temperament to public and professional activity.'[24] Fresh professional experts were brought in to verify these sources and the silencing of the "femme nouvelle"; these, as well as the stress on (French) nationalism, appear to have had

as their aim the 'buttressing' of the problem of female political emancipation without seeming too outwardly aggressive.[25] The expected end result of these efforts was that a 'familial feminism' would thrive, one whose 'claims were for women rights and artistic roles within the framework of national obligation.'[26] In support of the fact that the insurgency of hysteria may have been connected to the problem of the "femme nouvelles", Rhona Justice Malloy in her essay 'Charcot and the Theatre of Hysteria' has suggested that,

> from 1863 to 1893 the Salpêtrière Asylum was the centre of an institutional subculture, a kind of independent hospital culture mirroring in miniature the wider world of Paris. While the Salpêtrière's first professor of clinical diseases of the nervous system, Jean-Martin Charcot, worked to identify and analyze the phases of hysterical attack, the Eiffel tower was constructed, Pasteur conducted his landmark experiments, Zola developed his theories on naturalism in art, the Impressionists closed the last of eight expositions in Paris, and Cezanne [sic] developed spatial patterns that would pave the way to modern art. Charcot's work at the Salpêtrière represented a medical avant-garde, a new and aggressive modernity.
>
> The acceptance of a bourgeois value system of patriarchal authority and sexual asceticism in Paris on the brink of modernity was coincident with and perhaps related to the appearance of hysteria.[27]

Malloy emphasises the fact that there may have arose the need to retain a certain achieved sense of grandeur for the Parisian community. This was effectively achieved by producing a degenerate opposite. By describing Charcot's practice as an example of 'aggressive modernity', Malloy intimates that his medicine was contrived and may have served to embody a threat, the threat of non-conformity. Malloy uses interesting statistics to make her point clearer: 'hysterics' shot up from one (in 1841-42) to twenty percent (in 1882-83)[28] and most of the admitted patients came from the lower working classes. Unlike Freud's middle class patients, the women Charcot experimented on were 'laundresses, seamstresses, flower-sellers - [women] who lived outside the framework of a bourgeois value system.'[29] I want to argue that hysteria was identified as a possible consequence of women seeking emancipation (an emancipation that would undermine this Parisian male grandeur). The physical symptoms of hysteria functioned to centre the body in a medical

discourse on women. Consequently, hysteria was explained away as feminine *because* it was bodily and therefore, somehow inevitable.

1.4   CHARCOT: THE NAPOLEON OF NEUROSES

In her work *Why Althusser Killed his Wife: Essays on Discourse and Violence*, Geraldine Finn builds a case for the categorical use of science in the interests of power. Fundamentally, she argues, if science signifies a supremacy over nature and patriarchy a supremacy over women then woman is in danger of becoming both 'other' and 'nature.'[30] This scientific knowledge is menacing as it is 'made possible by the economic and political oppression of others.'[31] As Lewis Thomas has pointed out, medicine, before its appropriation by the category of science was

> an unrelievedly deplorable story [...] It is astounding that the profession survived so long, and got away with so much with so little outcry [...] for the first time in history, science was reaching into the practical, everyday life, building the prestige of the scientist as a benefactor and an authority to whom to turn for advice.[32]

Medicine, empowered by its inclusion into the family of science, was now able to reach 'into the practical, everyday life' and inspired a feeling of power for the 'the scientist [who was] encouraged and disciplined to regard the world as the object of his omniscient spectator gaze and not as the medium of his existence.'[33] Medicine, along with evolutionary theory, became an indispensable and 'powerful diagnostic tool.'[34] Consequently, to return to 1870 France, 'science and technology increasingly established themselves as major forces in the shaping of nations.'[35] More importantly, as I have mentioned above, medicine had gradually come into the hands of the middle class. As the major academic institutions began to accept the study of medicine as a science, so medicine grew to have more prestige. Backed by significant institutions, medical practice was now free to make assumptions and explain away mis-diagnoses as inevitable due to the newness of the profession itself (Charcot is known to have retracted his theories of hysteria before his death). Paradoxically, although medicine moved from its position as a theoretical fanciful art to a precise technique and power,[36] it initially blurred these boundaries.   Specific to this context, art and artefacts were indispensable tools for Charcot, who used them to consolidate his diagnosis in historical certainty.[37] Artistic

scenes of exorcisms and religious delirium were used to prove that hysteria was in fact a disease with firm roots in history, rather than a body of elaborate artistic representations. Charcot also imposed certain costumes and poses in photographic sessions, such as Lady Macbeth-type attire and poses of the Virgin Mary, for artistic effect. Opinions concerning biological supremacy, fuelled by Charles Darwin's ideas, informed remarks such as 'nature has made women more like children in order that they may better understand and care for children.'[38] Havelock Ellis, in his work *Man and Woman*, had also made a specific remark concerning hysteria. He defined it as 'the loss of the inhibitory influence exercised on the reproductive and sexual instincts of women by the higher mental and moral functions.'[39] Obviously, there was a great deal of uncertainty over what to make of women's sexuality and what attributes to promote using this newly created medical power. However, it remains clear that the inability of certain women to restrain their sexual instincts was somehow connected to their inability to make moral decisions (the Virgin Mary pose was used to emphasise the last and peaceful stage of the hysteric fit, a return to morality and social sanity; it is interesting that the representations of Lady Macbeth and the Virgin Mary provide the essential stereotypes that foreground expected gender attributes). This provided the mis-en-scène for what proved to be a theatrical investigation into the essence of womanhood, the Salpêtrière hysterics clinic. Medical professionalism[40] was allowed to explain and decipher, to have power and the means to that power, to transform women into something definable and controllable, thereby annulling their individuality and possibility for sexual expression. Medicine seemed as well as 'history, anatomy, destiny and evolution to clamp women in their place.'[41] Hysteria emerged as the symptom of emancipation.

1.5 SYMPTOMS

Exploring a performative exegesis concerning the existence and repetitive nature of the hysterical symptom is pivotal in understanding how this *fancy* has survived even beyond its legal termination and how we may use its construction to understand other forms constituted as *feminine* aspects of *identity* (all problematic terms) that have come to play a role in the subordination of women, as well as in their various instances of emancipation. In *reading* Charcot's hysterics through more recent works on hysteria and theories of gender performance I hope to uncover how some of these actions *foreground* and *subvert* certain now-contested conclusions on gender and its supposed 'oppositionist'

status to sexuality.[42] It would appear that Charcot enforced the idea of fixed gender attributes in order to argue that certain physiological symptoms were inevitable, thereby collapsing the above distinction. The four stages in the hysterical attack that he outlined all contain highly erotic and sexual imagery (see Appendix A). This approach seems to erase the link between woman's understanding of her gender and woman's understanding of her sexuality. The two blend and woman is sex, or, in other words, the hysterics represent the naked drive, sexuality. Hysteria was commonly perceived as a combination of 'extravagant mood shifts, fits of crying and threats of suicide'[43] and specific causes of hysterical symptoms were attributed to marital turmoil, unrequited love, religious ecstasy, superstitious fear, or death of a family member, among other potential causes as intimated above.[44] The religious, marital or supernatural reasons for the onset of hysterical symptoms were all reasons that were essentially associated with women (hysteria in men, which Charcot did investigate, was attributed to a specific trauma or incident that resulted in symptoms such as depression or temporary withdrawal from society; Charcot emphasised that men became "hysterical" due to their inability to contribute to their social responsibilities and that hysteria in men did not distance the patient from his *natural* moral inclinations).[45] However, although Charcot claimed not to differentiate between upper and lower class patients, men and women, as I have already noted, most of his in-house clientele came from the lower working classes and most of the photographs are of the women. It has been suggested by Mark S. Micale in his essay 'Charcot and the Idea of Hysteria in the Male', that labelling (following on from Darwin's ideas of taxonomy) was a key feature of Charcot's system of diagnoses. Micale suggests that the same symptoms that resulted in 'hysteria' for the working class manifested themselves as 'hystero-neurasthenia or neurasthenia' in private upper class patients.[46] In short, Charcot did not research his patient's family history, marital relations, etcetera (as Freud was later to do)[47] rather, he assumed the symptoms were a natural occurrence in the absence of certain qualities or qualifications that made for a moral, social woman (thereby sidesteping issues of the individual's understanding of morality). Using the 'medium of photography, Charcot and his students recorded erotic misbehaviour of their female hysterical patients in disturbing detail [...] emotions, such as, fear, ecstasy, passion, surprise, pleasure, and religious enthusiasm'[48] were the aspects of the attacks that received extensive documentation and were repeated time and time again in the *Iconographie* (a collection of

three volumes of photographs, only of women patients, see Appendix A for an example). These attacks constituted what Charcot later termed the four part hysterical attack (that interestingly no woman is ever known to have completed). A hysterical fit was expected to consist of the following:

> 1) tonic rigidity;
> 2) 'grand movements', also called '*clownisme*' because of the circus-like acrobatics produced;
> 3) '*attitudes passionelles*' or vivid physical representations of one or more emotional states, such as terror, hatred, love; the patient endowed with an acrobat's agility in the second period, now displays the talent of a mime or dramatic actress;
> 4) a final delirium marked by sobs, tears and laughter, heralding a return to the real world.[49]

Charcot's delineation of the ideal hysterical attack somehow assumed that the patient could re-enact her symptoms under certain circumstances. What I mean by this is that is was assumed that the symptoms existed prior to their performance and simply needed the correct circumstances for them to manifest themselves again. What I want to argue is that these symptoms only came into existence at the time of their performance, making it impossible to label the sufferers as hysterical outside of the performance.

This interpretation is supported by the further particularity of Dr. Charcot's theatrical set-ups used to display his patients.[50] As Malloy claims, 'the "iconography" of hysteria as defined by Charcot, with all its evocation of the circus and theatre, seems to have been so widely publicised at the end of the century, in both pictorial and verbal form, as to constitute for that historical moment a cultural prescription of "how to act when insane".'[51] In fact, the photographing of patients and Charcot's own 'linking of hysteria with photographs' may have resulted in many of the women imagining themselves as one with the clinical pictures.[52] Their identity became so determined by the camera that they performed according to the doctor's expectations. The best 'performers' were rewarded with more photographs taken of them and they became the 'stars' of the Salpêtrière.[53] Likewise, 'hysterical gestures did find their way onto the Paris stage and Sarah Bernhardt is known to have mimicked Charcot's patients in her performances [...].'[54] The elaborate performances that Charcot choreographed took place every Tuesday and Friday from

1887-1889. To these flocked other doctors and artists to see Charcot's hysterics produce a fit or react under hypnosis.[55] It becomes difficult to understand the exact mechanisms at play here when we consider that the 'hysterics' copied other artworks or actresses and were in turn muses for actresses on the stage. It appears that the pathological causes of their illness is grounded in a gender that however is in turn in need of constant repetition and reaffirmation from other sites of cultural productions such as the theatre. Within the construction of this illness we begin to see holes in the diagnoses. An illness that requires a referent outside of itself surely cannot be pathological, or even arise from something "natural" or "within." Instead, these hysterical performances lay bare the fact that gender difference, nowhere more highly marked then in an affliction marked out for women, was and is something that needed to be constantly re-affirmed, re-performed. I will move now to examine this possibility.

I want to emphasise here that the necessary repetition of the hysterics' physical symptoms is a monument to their unnaturalness - the exact opposite of what they were expected to prove. Symptoms of hysteria, as I have mentioned above, were symptoms that were studied and performed in public at the Salpêtrière throughout Charcot's career there. This need for repetition (other than the lure of spectatorship) suggests to me that, somehow, hysterical symptoms were for show. The possibility that these women may have indeed suffered some psychological damage was disregarded in favour of their role as entertainers. Whether or not Charcot knew but ignored psychological causes of the specific physiological problems does not diminish the exhibitionist role that these women took on, coupled with his position as master of ceremonies. The question here remains that if the hysterics' existence was the result of a constructed need, and if their symptoms were up for public display that tried to cement the natural and untameable configurations of womanhood without succeeding (and I suppose they were unsuccessful because of the need for their repetition) then what then can these women represent to us? As Frances Wilson has claimed, 'the figure and voice of the hysteric play a protesting role.'[56] The hysteric then can be interpreted as embodying the question of gender and its associations with sexuality. As Sigrid Schade has argued, 'the female body is represented as the body in which lack becomes evident. It is the doctor's or artist's role to perform and seemingly to command the crisis of gender difference.'[57] To take something away from the

'hysterics', that is, their femininity, under the guise of a pathological illness, is then to endow the doctor with the power to restore it, thus rendering femininity something that can be removed and added. However, again, it would seem that the performance of hysteria does not return the patients to any accepted version of normality: though the performance may bring the symptoms to the forefront, it can never cure (this action embodies the difficulty of rendering a performance subversive in the absence of material change, a problem throughout Butler's theories). The pointlessness of the crisis then (outside of entertainment) has no healing purpose. To an extent, we need therefore to re-visit the performance in order to give it a healing constituent, otherwise the crisis remains vacant of meaning and significance; an emblem of defeat, a lack.

1.6 **NORMATIVE REGIMES AND OUTSIDES**

It is necessary to revisit Butler's formulations at this point. In the historical moment outlined above, the performance itself must hold some significance. As Lyotard has claimed in his essay entitled 'Speech Snapshots', Charcot's hysterics 'speak with their bodies' and are 'saying something, replying to some question' that we have to decipher and their dreams are 'bar[ed] superbly on the stage of their visible flesh', however they 'are not even actresses caught live at the high-point of their performance.'[58] Lyotard continues briefly to suggest that the photographing of these supposedly hysterical women does not deliver what it promises to, namely, 'meaning […] and syntax.'[59] What is this question that they are trying to reply to and what are they trying to say? I want to suggest that the hysterics' performances play back the unnatural 'crisis of gender difference' that is required of them, but *never in exactly the prescribed way*.[60] Their inability to perform the hysterical fit as prescribed above questions its existence ontologically. The role of the hysterics seems to be to perform something "other" than the prescribed norm. As Judith Butler has noted, 'sexual difference also operates in the formulation, the staging, of what will occupy the site of inscriptional space, that is, as what must remain outside these oppositional positions as their supporting condition.'[61] It is therefore precisely what must remain outside, in this case the hysterics (in the following chapters we will see this matter resurfacing) that have to perform their "outsideness." However, this performance compels us to investigate what in fact they may be saying, what they may be replying to. It is important to follow Butler's request that 'we resist the theoretical gesture of pathos in

which exclusions are simply affirmed as sad necessities of signification.'[62] Butler goes on to suggest a way of addressing or using these 'outsides.' She writes that:

> The task is to refigure this necessary 'outside' as a future horizon, one in which the violence of exclusion is perpetually in the process of being overcome. But of equal importance is the preservation of the outside, the site where discourse meets its limits, where the opacity of what is not included in a given regime of truth acts as a disruptive site of linguistic impropriety and unrepresentability, illuminating the violent and contingent boundaries of that normative regime precisely through the inability of that regime to represent that which might pose a fundamental threat to its continuity.[63]

In a sense, the 'normative regime' appears in each of the cases tackled in this thesis. Charcot's compulsory type of heterosexuality is the normative regime in this particular instance, a regime that the hysterics' performances simultaneously affirm as well as subvert since they seem to represent a pure sexuality that is discarded from this normative regime. The 'outside' is the 'theatre of hysterics' that Charcot orchestrates and the hysterics stand in for an outside threat; they personify it. The hysterics themselves though need to be 'refigure[d]', by us, as a 'future horizon' of resignification. I will be using this frame of reference again. To conclude, Butler cannot overstate how important it is to leave the boundaries of representability open and not assume that we can limit meaning. The possibilities that I assign to the performers of hysteria are only my suggested possibilities at this given moment; the same issue arises in the chapters to follow.

1.7 CALL ME HYSTERICAL: INTERPELLATION

With reference to the agency of Charcot's hysterics, I will show how generic attributes of the *feminine*, thereby of compulsory heterosexuality, are constituted and then shattered placing into doubt this *naturalness* of gender. What is *produced* as empirical truth (in Charcot's voluminous photo albums and records) is a performance that parodies the very thing it is supposed to represent. As Joan Copjec has stated, 'the theory of hysteria uncovered the fact that the stigmatic loci of hysterics were not primary, but were conferred on any part of the body by sexual fantasies which displaced the object of the

instinct by the representation of the drive.'[64] In this way, by becoming undesirable to others and scattering the symptoms (cloaked in pathological symptoms), the hysterics became objects that represented the drive (of sexuality) in its naked form. Copjec also notes that, in the photographing of hysterics,

> we also find a concentration on a privileging of the individual in these photographs [...] which is also ironic, as the intention of the photographs is to mark out the identifiable, the repeatable characteristics of hysteria, which would entail, one also presumes, the effacing of the individuality of the hysteric. As these photographs of hysterics are at odds, then, on at least these two points, with the theory of hysteria, how can we say that they support the theory?[65]

Copjec's question is valid as it brings to the fore one of the most intriguing problems with the theory. It seems peculiar that although Charcot supposedly should have been looking for ways in which to ground his theory in identifiably definite acts displayed amongst various patients, he nevertheless remains interested in individual artistic rendering.[66] Copjec's statement points to the fact that the representation of hysterics as individuals is at odds with what the experiments are trying to prove, that is, that hysteria should be identifiable because it invokes similar symptoms in female patients. What appears to be in question here is the theory of interpellation, modified by Judith Butler's use of Althusser, where in fact being called a 'hysteric', necessarily calls up certain aspects associated only with that term but differently for each subject. As Carol Mavor notes in 'Odor di Femina: Though You May not See Her, You Can Certainly Smell Her', 'these dermagraphed bodies became signed signs of the doctor's own creative visualisations'[67] called into being through theatrical staging and photography. If interpellation 'initiates the individual into the subjected status of the subject' as Butler argues, then this 'law [can] compel fear at the same time that it offers recognition at an expense.'[68] However, in the case of the hysterical performance, the hysteric would seem to 'exceed and confound what appears to be the disciplining intention motivating the law.'[69] The hysterics 'exceed' and 'confound' Charcot in so far as he cannot know to what extent their crisis is real (that is, to what extent they are individuals or to what extent they are trying to conform as discussed above), yet his act of calling them hysterical does render them so at the moment of interpellation. However, as Butler asserts in her work *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*,

interpellation is an address that regularly misses its mark, it requires the recognition of
an authority at the same time that it confers identity through successfully compelling that
recognition. Identity is a function of that circuit, but does not preexist it. The mark
interpellation makes is not descriptive, but inaugurative. It seeks to introduce a reality
rather than report on an existing one; it accomplishes this introduction through a citation
of existing convention. Interpellation is an act of speech whose 'content' is neither true
nor false: it does not have description as its primary task. Its purpose is to indicate and
establish a subject in subjection, to produce its social contours in space and time. Its
reiterative operation has the effect of sedimenting its 'positionality' over time.[70]

Calling the supposed "hysteric" an "hysteric" does not then 'describe' her
existence, but rather 'inaugurates' her performance as one. Interpellation however, though
it has the power to call a subject into being, can paradoxically also 'lose[s] its status as a
simple performative, an act of discourse with the power to create that to which it refers,
and creates more than it ever meant to, signifying in excess of any intended referent.'[71] In
other words, though the hysterics at the time of their performance seek to formalise the
supposed certainty of their position as supra-feminine, at the moment that I describe them
and re-signify them, their actions mean more than they ever meant to; they 'exce[ed] [any]
intended referent' and they end up signifying something different (it is again important that
I position myself as author of their text without which this performative moment would be
impossible to theorise; in a sense, it is the very obvious authorial position in the chapters
that follow that reconfigure the idea of agency). This, finally, is what supplies the
opportunity for 'consequential disobedience.'[72] Ultimately, the unknown possible
reactions to interpellation, which cannot produce a similar effect at each instigation,
necessarily require a repetition that cannot quite ever be the same. Each time the hysterics
are called to perform their sexuality (the naked drives, as reflected in the movements of the
four - part attack) it is expected that they will perform the same symptoms. However, each
interpellative moment allows for a different performance which varies from the previous
one (as I have already stated, no woman is known to have ever completed the four-part
attack). The necessity for repetition signifies that the crisis does not exist unless it is
visible. This visibility allows for the hysteric to mock her symptoms merely by responding
to the call. The recognition that the label 'hysteric' must initiate a certain reaction
demonstrates that there is no meaning of 'hysteric' outside of the performance of it. The

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hysteric does not exist as such when she is not in the middle of a crisis (in the same way that femininity does not exist somewhere naturally as such). Herein lies the irony: *when she is in the crisis she performs what is expected, thus mocking the very fact that she is suffering pathological symptoms generated by her inability to conceal her feminine attributes.* We can therefore view these repetitions as constructive if we agree that 'repetitions of hegemonic power which fail to repeat loyally [...] open possibilities for resignifying the terms of violation against their violating aims.'[73] Butler is adamant that this is the way forward for resignificantion, in order that we become able to see beyond a simple 'subjectivation' of the subject (that is, to see beyond the 'victimisation' of the subject). Her aim is to impart power to the subject that undergoes this process. To use her terms:

> There is no subject prior to its constructions, and neither is the subject determined by those constructions; it is always the nexus, the non-space of cultural collision, in which the demand to resignify or repeat the very terms which constitute the 'we' cannot be summarily refused, but neither can they be followed in strict obedience. It is the space of this ambivalence which opens up the possibility of a reworking of the very terms by which subjectivation proceeds - and fails to proceed.[74]

1.8 PERFORMANCES: AUGUSTINE, ROSALIE AND JUSTINE

In her work *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France* Debora Silverman interestingly notes that Charcot was 'especially attentive to the artistic rendering of abnormal states - satanic possessions and exorcisms, religious ecstasy and the healing of the sick.'[75] As mentioned above, by connecting the hysterical actions with scenes of spirit possession, Charcot mythologised and historicised the assumed innate madness of woman and drew on history to ground his points. In fact, 'Charcot demonstrated the direct visual resemblance between the physical forms and gestures of hysterical patients - kneeling, screaming and twisting their bodies into a 'rainbow' shape, or 'arc-en-cercle' - and the repertoire of images of 'possessed' religious states from the annals of the art historical past. The long train of artistic expression culminated in the visual clinicians at the Salpêtrière.'[76] Consequently, Charcot retained a plethora of women who, according to Joan Copjec 'responded well to hypnotic suggestion [...] and were used by hospitals, exchanged from one to the other throughout France for medical and legal experimentation.'[77] Three of the

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most famous patients known at the Salpêtrière were Augustine, Justine and Rosalie. Of these it is Justine's hysterical history[78] that was described by Charcot as an 'Odyssey'[79] and it is while treating Justine that Charcot made some of the most fascinating statements that reveal the innately tenuous nature of studying hysteria. Concerned that Justine might trick him into believing she was ill, Charcot emphasised his concern at the possibility of being fooled and had the 'patient [...] discretely watched day and night: she was never seen to be carrying out a deception.'[80] Later, two medical colleagues of Charcot's were brought in to verify that Justine was not involved in clever simulation. Justine's authenticity was of paramount importance because Charcot had by this time 'launched his work on hysteria with this patient' in mind.[81] Charcot argued for the existence of hysteria in this patient on the basis that she suffered from an organic inability to produce urine. Charcot's diagnosis was that Justine somehow controlled this motion (if not she most certainly would have died). Justine also conveniently displayed 'an area of hypersensitivity over the region of the ovary.'[82] For all his interest in Justine's hysterical symptoms, and 'in contrast to the meticulous attention with which [Justine's] body was displayed and photographed, examined, monitored, restrained and treated with various remedies, Charcot showed little interest in her life history and its possible bearings on her illness.'[83] This attitude emphasises the direction that Charcot was heading towards in his medical investigation, concentrating on specific incidences that coincided with an evolving theory. Justine did recover and Charcot presented her at a final seminar and claimed that she had suffered an emotional/spiritual experience that had healed her. There is no evidence of this.

Rosalie Leroux was another patient of Charcot's who suffered intense epileptic-like seizures. Charcot utilised her attacks extensively to show the difference between an epileptic fit and a hystero-epileptic fit. Again it was commented that had Rosalie been experiencing real epileptic fits she would most certainly have died (there is also evidence that the hysterics may have learnt how to perform their fits by observing epileptics).[84] Instead, Rosalie is described as a '*démoniac*, someone who is *possessed*.'[85] Again, Charcot only marginally recognised the existence of a traumatic past. Rosalie did eventually recover and remained as a servant at the hospital. Both Rosalie and Justine served to further the quest for new hysterias. Charcot's refusal to investigate their life histories made them objects of clinical observation and he made no attempt to personalise

their illnesses. Varying slightly from the above examples, another patient, Augustine, ran away in 1880. Young Augustine had been an 'apt pupil of the atelier.'[86] Her duty was to re-enact her experience of rape that she had undergone at thirteen at the hands of her employer, apparently also the lover of her mother. She had also been described as the 'most reliable patient [...] producing the most complete routines.'[87] However, using Elaine Showalter's descriptions of Augustine and her 'acts' in her work *The Female Malady*[88], I would like to point out several observations that seem to pre-constitute the female hysteric. It seems, as we shall see, that the repetitive nature of the performed acts of Augustine lead her to suffer from what Showalter explains as actual pathological symptoms that were not present before her *treatment* or reiterated acts. As a consequence of undergoing repeated hypnosis (a favourite method of Charcot), she became very talented when confronted with a camera and could 'perform on cue.'[89] Her poses have been likened to scenes from the silent movies as well as poses from paintings of pure and angelic figures of women.[90] The idea of simulation based on observation did not go unnoticed:

> [...] respected British authorities on diseases of the nervous system like Russell Reynolds and Hack Tuke, both friendly colleagues of Charcot and favorably disposed to his work, pointed out pitfalls in the experiments with hysterical patients. They raised the issue of the results being distorted by 'expectant attention,' a process by which patients, although not consciously aware of simulating, somehow anticipated responses expected of them by experimenters and presented symptoms or *performed* accordingly.[91]
> (emphasis my own)

Augustine's pathological symptoms, after many repeated hysterical fits, included a claim that she could only see in black and white and experienced strong urges to perform violent acts (such as tear off her clothing). By this time, Charcot was involved in the assembly of the now well-known *Iconographie*; a collection of photographs taken of the patients while enacting/experiencing fits. Charcot himself stated that since we only know hysteria through its manifestations, we could only then study the visual symptoms.[92] However, what remains striking about the discourse surrounding Charcot's study of hysteria, and of particular interest to this thesis, is that although he did not document sexual or genital reasons as a direct source of hysteria, the

sexual component of hysteria [could be seen, indeed] in the media of photographs and descriptive prose [that] recorded the erotic misbehaviour of their female hysterical patients in loving and lurid detail [in fact] the best known visual representations of Salpêtrian hysteria are pervaded with eroticism.[93] (see Appendix A)

Charcot wanted to 'neutralize the diagnosis sexually [so as to] de-sensationalize it and all-importantly, to bring it within the orbit of sober positivist science' as opposed to the strong psycho-sexual etiology that was soon to follow with Freudian psychoanalysis.[94] However, as reflected in the photographic collection, as well as in the gaps of the theorising on male hysteria, it would seem that Charcot could not disengage from the fanciful linking of hysteria to artistic representation that to him marked the tie of femininity to symptoms of hysteria. As Carol Mavor has noted:

the reality of the photograph was used not only to index the hysteria of the patient, but also to give the patient a model of how to represent itself (all the clinicians were male and most of the photographed appear to be women). The women of the Salpêtrière were encouraged to see themselves as pure image - as artwork carved out by a Frankensteinian Pygmalion, housed not in an artist's studio, but in an asylum [...] the power of the doctor's gaze, masculinist, objectifying and monological, is preternaturally real in the Salpêtrière photographs. The pictures are a horrific exaggeration of the nudes painted, sculpted and photographed throughout the history of art.[95]

While Mavor's comments are valid and convincing, she does shy away from giving the women designated as hysterics any enabling attributes. After all, it is the same Augustine who performs the attacks for Charcot's Tuesday sessions that finally breaks away and escapes the destructive cycle. Both of Augustine's actions are performances of *survival* (in both circumstances).

Evelyn Ender's work, *Sexing the Mind: Nineteenth Century Fictions of Hysteria* argues that hysteria is a

discourse situated at the intersection of body and mind but turned inward, toward some unspoken, unrepresentable desire and knowledge [it comes about from] woman's exclusion from the knowledge of sex [and] sustains a whole edifice of exclusion which prohibits women's curiosity in other domains.[96]

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Ender argues that this position always forces the *feminine* to repeat her gender, to reinstate it because hysteria is a questioning of this gender.[97] Though Ender speaks primarily of fictional figures that present some symptoms of hysteria (female characters in Henry James's *The Bostonians* for example) her comment does highlight the idea of women's exclusion from 'sexual knowledge.' The hysterics are divorced from an understanding of their problems that may be a result of rape, abuse, etcetera. By placing their hysterical manifestations at the site of their gendered self, responsibility returns to them. Augustine and her inmates' bodies *are* what Butler terms de-humanized, constructed *materially*, so as to make room for the *human*. When performing a fit, the hysteric abjected the hysteria *out* of herself and returned briefly to Charcot's world.[98] The fourth stage in Charcot's delineation of the stages in a hysterical fit is: a final delirium marked by sobs, tears and laughter, heralding a return to the real world.[99] This step leads to several inevitable consequences. Firstly, after expelling all the undesirable symptoms (but desirable *to the clinician* because without them abjection and successful exorcism would be impossible) patients are 'heralded' no doubt by Charcot himself into the (his) 'real' world. Secondly, these patients have now re-joined the real/Charcot until the next performance, only *after* which they can join him again. The performance is indispensable, repetition becomes instinctive and thus reiteration is unavoidable in order to prove the symptom. Again, *the notion of healing is absent* (I shall return to this in the second chapter). However, although Charcot commanded a hysteria (a *fictitious* involvement in language as we have a command-response situation) the patient's 'cries and contractions' were ignored, and thereby disposed of *out* of language, left with only a body for expression and what we have now come to term as 'Kristeva's semiotics', are ignored.[100] 'You see how hysterics shout [...] much ado about nothing' Charcot once remarked.[101] The utterances that do not belong to the realm of the symbolic are overthrown and negated, noted only in so far as they 'herald[ed] a return to the real world'; they are not given significance as ambivalent signifiers but remain gibberish, 'much ado about nothing.'[102] Among Charcot's designated stages, the third phase of *attitudes passionelles,* was the most intense psychologically - a long and breathless performance during which patients rehearsed in words and actions painful emotional scenes from their pasts. In the Salpêtrian literature on female hysteria, this aspect of the attack received extensive documentation: fear,

ecstasy, surprise, pleasure and religious enthusiasm, for example, were depicted time and again in the *Iconographie Photographique*.[103]

1.9 EXCESSIVE REPRESENTATION

An objection to this excessive interest in documenting feminine behavior is formulated in Butler's argument against Simone de Beauvoir for whom women are designated as the Other. Butler instead is in agreement with Luce Irigaray who 'argues that both the subject and the Other are masculine mainstays of a closed phallogocentric signifying economy that achieves its totalizing goal through the exclusion of the feminine altogether.'[104] Woman then is either an 'Other' whose significance has yet to be understood, or an 'Other' who can never be understood because the phallogocentrism of an imposed gender discourse on the seemingly natural distinctions of sex does not allow for any understanding beyond what is seemingly already 'there,' so, in Irigaray's terms, both the self and the other are the masculine because the 'feminine' is outside representation.[105] If she cannot be allowed to be, she needs to be represented and so femininty keeps acting out its constructed normality *precisely* because it is *not* its normality. Butler takes Irigaray as a point of departure because de Beauvoir's dialectic takes for granted a woman's identity that exists as a real though not yet found one, which is something that Butler, cannot give credence to. Therefore, if the 'feminine' *cannot* be constructed *but* in phallogocentric language (since we are always already involved in this language, be it oppressive or not), then it cannot participate in a pure dialectic because it cannot argue from any outside perspective, even one in which it is implied (the other). Following on from Lacan's distinction between the masculine that can 'have' the Phallus and the feminine that can 'be' the Phallus, Butler argues that women can never *'be'* because they are the relation of difference.[106] Although we can suspend judgement as whether to agree or disagree with this statement, what follows is that whether women are allowed to be or not, they are represented, and excessively so. Whereas the male subject stands in for 'the disembodied universality' and the feminine 'disavowed corporeality', this corporeality needs a spectacular and visible existence.[107] De Beauvoir, according to Butler, underestimates the power of this phallogocentrism and falls into the dialectic once again, failing to see its purpose *for* the masculine who has set it up. Of course, as Butler argues, all these disavowed corporeal elements are then automatically configured as the real and

natural elements of womanhood. This image of womanhood then constitutes the 'matrix of intelligibility', that then establishes a heterosexual politics from which and out of which things are identified and measured.[108] By giving over the body to women then, it seems unavoidable that *sex* comes to take the attribute of *person* (since this definition is attached to the body). Following this logic, 'only men are persons and there is no gender but the feminine.'[109] Thus, it is left to woman to perform this gender so as to make it seem natural. Consequently, a 'naturalized heterosexuality' is seemingly produced, one that requires the idea of gender for its 'binary relation' where the masculine is 'differentiated' from the feminine and this is 'accomplished through the (imposed) practices of heterosexual desire.'[110] It appears that within differentiation there is consolidation of 'sex, gender and desire.'[111] Butler's defines gender (where the aim is to expose for constructed what passes as natural) as,

> the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender.[112]

Our task here has been to uncover and 'deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender' and understand this thing that Butler calls the 'policing of gender' through understanding the circumstances under which the hysterics perform their hysteria. If Butler's aim is to break down what it is about the construction of gender that has led us to qualify gender as identity, then Charcot's aim, in contrast, belongs to the long line of 'forces' that seek to consolidate gender with identity. Butler however, finds it impossible to argue for a pure body before the performance, but can we not argue for a pure body *during* the performance? It is at this stage that Butler's contention that the ' "success" of the performative is always and only provisional'[113] presents itself as a limiting factor and in turn, this limiting factor is brought to life in the hysterical performances of the female patients. This brings us back to the significance of the ideas discussed previously in the introduction; ideas of creativity and participation which allow for a significant performance. A new reading of a performance (because of its place in time) cancels out a

prior performance, and necessitates another performance. In this sense, there can be no original that we can locate and emulate because the original in so-called *nature* is a cultural product that works to conceal its natural power.[114] To conceal this performativity of hysterics, whether consciously or unconsciously, Charcot took refuge in techniques that he claimed to be outside his control; repeating his theatre of hysterics and introducing the medium of photography that would 'cement' his 'facts.'[115] However real these scenarios may have seemed, mechanical and physical exposure relied on repetition and documentation as performance. As Sigrid Schade has noted in his article 'Charcot and the Spectacle of the Hysterical Body',

> in contrast to the women who acted out their mimic talents in handicrafts, the hysterical women expressed theirs in and with their own bodies. For both groups, a different social location was provided. Nevertheless, the hysterical women also participated in the production of images by placing their own bodies picturesquely at the disposal of the male viewers and the voyeuristic apparatuses connoted by medical science. In the Salpêtrière, it might be argued, these women found undivided attention and an ideal stage for their theatrical talents.[116]

In fact, in the famous painting entitled 'Une Leçon de Clinique a la Salpêtrière' by Andre Brouillet (see Fig 1.) the hysteric under observation in the foreground has just fainted and her body is at the disposal of the male viewers. In the far upper left corner of the work there is a painting of a woman enacting an hysterical attack.[117] This painting seems to be directly facing the woman carrying out the hysterical performance. The proximity of the two suggests an incessant anxiety of the possibility as well as of the reality of simulation.[118] Subordination would seem to be the common force behind gender performative experience; there are only viewers and doctors in the painting and the only other woman is an assistant. An interesting question for us at this stage is, how can woman produce a truth from a performance, since her essence would seem to remain something ideal. In a recent interview, Judith Butler claims that she was persuaded by Drucilla Cornell's 'use of the feminine as a category that does not describe something that already exists but actually inaugurates a certain kind of future within language and with intelligibility, inaugurating a future of intelligibility that is not fully known now.'[119] Charcot's hysterics ridicule the notion of the feminine yet repeat the acts that necessitate its existence. Although they are marked as the inhuman that allow the sanctioned humans
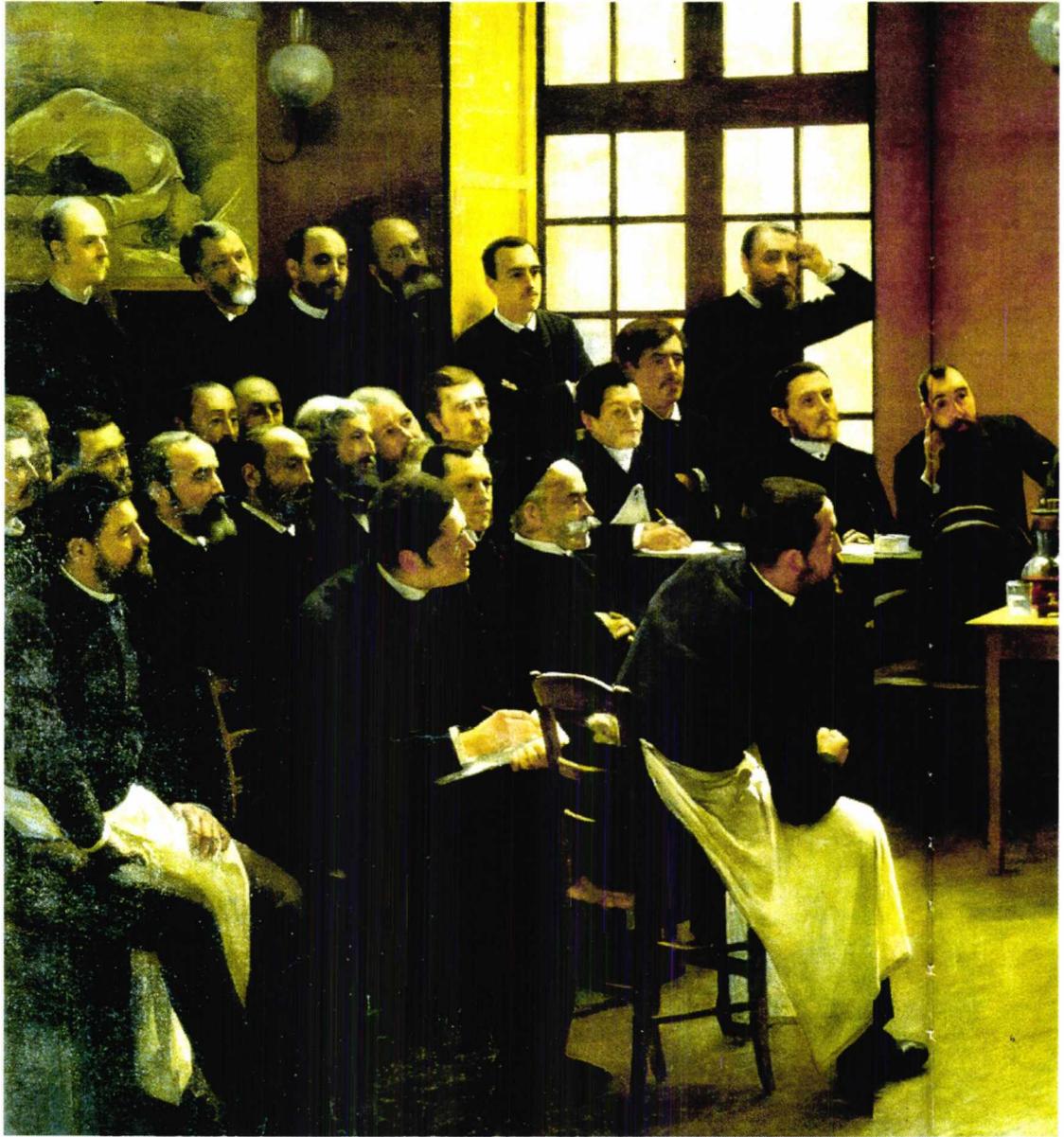
Fig 1 *Une Leçon de Clinique à la Salpêtrière*, Brouillet, André, 1887.

58 13
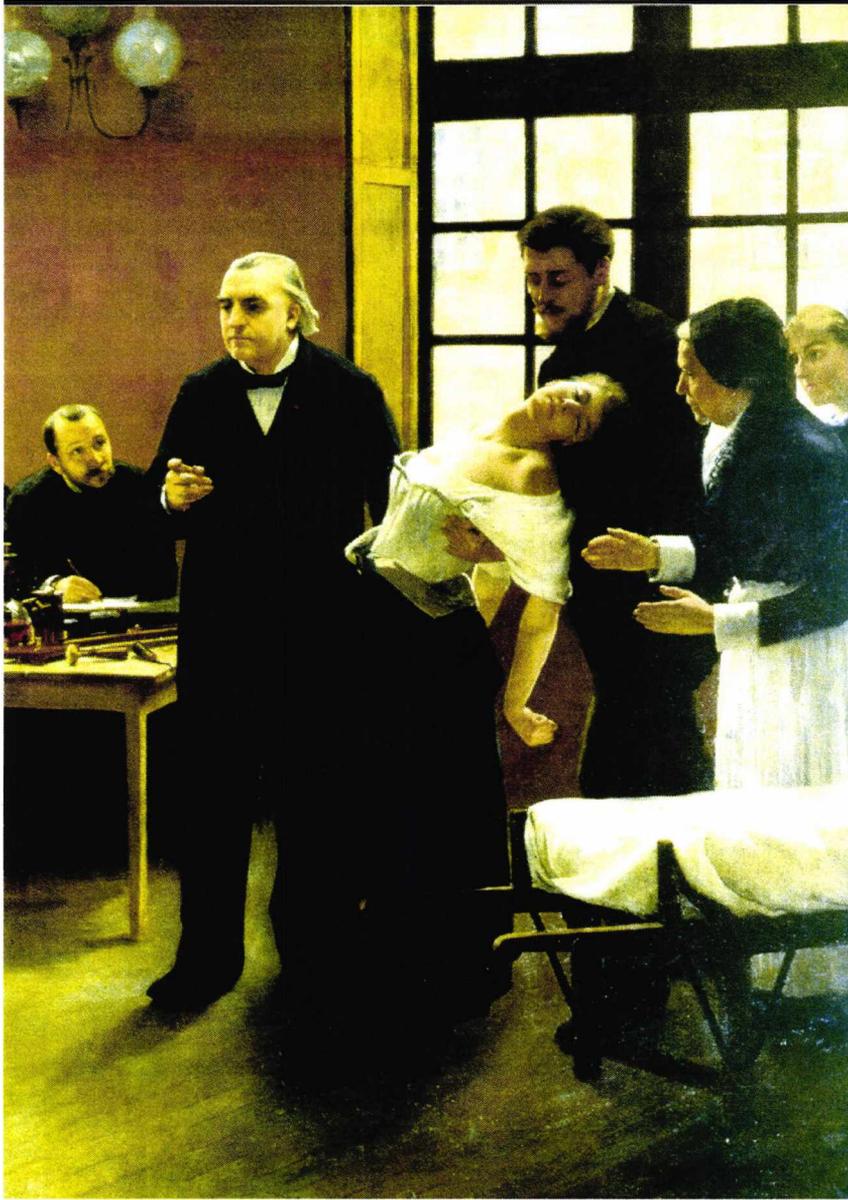
to exist, they represent pure symptoms, or drives, that allow them to be viewed as objects rather than individuals. Their very confinement questions the category in the name of which they are confined. How can one be confined for being too feminine? The hysterics emerge as emblems to the inaccessibility of or inability ultimately to define woman in her totality. As Drucilla Cornell states:

> the place of 'Woman,' which I used to use more, has always carried within it this attempt to try to find some universalizability in certain situations between women so as to form the basis of solidarity. I would no longer try to find this thing called 'Woman,' even if it is this missing thing called 'Woman,' that would give women a kind of unique access to the feminine.[120]

To an extent, the category of woman is what harms the hysterics and enables their stigmatization. In this light, we can interpret Charcot's 'theatre of hysterics' as a site of exchange of information on women, thereby cementing a discourse on hysterics. As we have already noted, Charcot's 'theatre of hysterics' generated a large audience and a great deal of attention for himself. The amount of women diagnosed as hysterics was unequaled by any other mental asylum in France. Charcot provided what must have then seemed the impossible, a live re-enactment of a hysterical woman, (if necessary, through hypnosis), a prototypal cinema. He created visual images that lodged themselves in the memory of his associates and admirers/pupils. It is interesting that Freud, in an obituary of Charcot, wrote that 'he had the nature of an artist - he was, as he himself had said, a 'visuel', a man who sees.'[121] Although it has often been argued that Charcot did not devote time to compiling a theory of hysteria, that somehow it was already there for him to discover, it seems to me that the senseless documentation of what was essentially a hyper-performance functions to refute this claim. Furthermore, Charcot has been described as suffering a 'hysteria of the gaze;' displaced onto the performers/other.[122] To the spectators at the Salpêtrière and Charcot, these women were meaningful so long as they functioned as an extension of male fantasy operating at the whim of the masculine gaze desiring to see a woman out of control. In applying his methods and in then proving them using photographs, Charcot hoped to freeze images (as regulatory discourses freeze or congeal gender determinants), images that seemed to exist with no histories to contradict/question them. Within the photographs external factors were irrepresentable, be they voluntary or involuntary. Through staging/photographing these performances, Charcot staged an

imaginary mastery over life and death, (taking on simultaneously the mastery and authority of the artist as well as doctor) a staging that belongs to a structure of gender-specific organized perception; victory and authority. In fact, as Sigrid Schade has aptly noted:

> the example of Charcot demonstrates that an iconographic sequence is initially constituted by the particular historical interest of the person who determines the sequence. It makes sense only in the context of the interest, which is, on the other hand, itself a constitutive moment of that which is designated cultural or social memory. In the course of a staging of (the master's) power, a 'truth' of hysterical behaviour patterns is produced in the framework of a medical setting. The meaning of this 'truth' consists solely in its spectacularity and in the demonstration of the mastery of the person who provides something to see, and on which depends his state of privilege (wealth, social recognition, being able to follow his own voyeuristic impulses undisturbed in institutionally legitimized forms).[123]

Ultimately, Charcot's hysterics appear simultaneously de-sexed and over-sexed. They encapsulate, in their performance, a male's voyeuristic desires which when acted out *seem* to come from *within* the female body (thereby natural or organic). An unintelligible woman is *made* intelligible through the doctor who enables her performance. Charcot's truths were induced by making it *seem* as though the women *could* be a productive force in their own cure if they participated as told (paradoxically the women are figured as abnormal though in my understanding they are normal; this exemplifies Butler's notion of future possible sites of resignification yet it problematises the present for the hysterics themselves - this remains a problem in Butler's theory as I have mentioned before, see p. 56). In this particular context, the doctor was able to come up with some cure/truth if the female relinquished power over her body and was cooperative (in giving the psychiatrist what he wanted to see and furthermore, to show). As suggested above, patients would be confronted with images that represented some of Charcot's preferred themes, such as exorcism scenes from well-known paintings.[124] If action failed to materialize, Charcot induced fits through electro-shock, loud noises, pressure to the ovaries (which Foucault also mentions in his *History of Sexuality: Volume One*) and the use of ether and hypnosis. Methods that included tying women down or placing their heads in a brace to control fits were also popular and the brace was also an ideal piece of equipment for successful photography. Other techniques included appropriating stills from popular films that then

had the effect of making these women's actions recongnizable. As Butler points out, you cannot always recognize those that you expel from the 'human'; those bodies do not always matter. These bodies are demarcated out of the discourse of gender and sexuality because they do not fit neatly into the heterosexual (and as Foucault would argue, class) matrix. When Foucault speaks of the initial historical 'hysterization' of women's bodies and describes them as 'saturated' with sexuality awaiting integration into the sphere of medical practice, it is clear that these women are expelled and then bought into a dominant sexual discourse so that they can be observed.[125] The *knowledge* that Ender feels women are *lacking* is a *knowledge* she claims they have to repeat as lacking. One can argue that the knowledge the hysterics gain is that their performance is just that, a theatrical set of actions that are presented (by the authority in power) as natural (by extension, this is the knowledge that we gain from Butler's extensive theorising). If 'words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core (so something that is beyond culture in a sense), this is an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive sexuality.'[126] Gender then, if seen as a fabrication that works towards the constitution of an identity, turns out to be imitation of an imitation without an origin (because this origin is fantastically constructed). Butler's comment, that 'laughter emerges in the realization that all along the original was derived' echoes the fourth stage of Charcot's hysterical model.[127] The hysterics laugh because they know that what had been presented as a truth was all along a performance. I am not suggesting that when the hysteric acknowledges that she is performing, that this necessarily means that she herself has an essence, but rather, that she knows, unconsciously or consciously, that the essence expected is not inherently there awaiting exposure. Again, as Butler argues, the correct performance of gender can become a clever strategy of survival, one that is always aware of the punitive power of the regulatory norm. Distinct gender is what humanizes individuals and in our case, what humanizes other women who are in turn caught up in their own performance. As Butler suggests, we live in a culture that punishes those who fail to perform their gender qualities as prescribed by the discourse of sexuality yet we strive to understand how other performances can exceed and possibly redefine this discourse. Inevitably, there seems to emerge a double logic in Butler's work and in the performance of the hysterics, something that I seek to revise in the subsequent chapters. In the absence of a visible

creative participator (one that I can only imagine), the hysterics appear locked in a double bind: they simultaneously appear to consolidate a norm - a supposed truth of woman, whilst appearing to signify abnormality. Performance can be seen as enabling yet destructive in the absence of authorship and in the absence of that which claims itself to be different.

Ultimately, if the idea of a true identity is a fiction, then the performance has no end and must be repeated in order for the subject to exist. There is not one state that a gendered subject can reach where he/she can stabilize because there are no such comprehensive states. Hence, in a sense, Charcot's 'theatre of hysterics' continued to be repeated until his death. By that time, more advanced scientific discoveries had been cemented (such as the importance of the microbe/germ) that suggested illnesses could have an origin outside of the body. However, this notion of 'regulatory fictions' is one that harks back to the fiction of Charcot's 'theatre of hysterics' and is one that I explore in the following chapters.

1.10 CONCLUSION

Finally, in her work *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, Butler importantly asks us to re-consider what we mean by gender construction to *include* the 'unthinkable and unlivable,' other domains which do not 'matter' in the same way; the others that we systematically refute.[128] She asks, 'is there a way to link the materiality of the body to the performativity of gender?'[129] In other words, what attributes occasion a certain body to matter and what ushers it to perform a change? If power works through the production of an outside or an exterior, it seems always necessary to *create and recreate* that exterior.[130] To what extent can we try to incorporate that exterior without usurping its independence, its significant otherness from which we can learn? This 'imaginary domain' of hysteria and these 'parodic practices' of hysterics for example, occasion a re-thinking of prescribed illness. We can use this model to examine further learning possibilities.[131]

I want here to discuss briefly the problem of the transcultural notion of patriarchy in order to evaluate how this event in history can inform further performances. Butler tackles this problem through asserting that, if we expel the notion of a transcultural law of

the Father, there *always anyway* emerges a law which will '[appear] as a historical inevitability.'[132] In effect, the difference is *how* the law constructs discourses; the question then, in relation to the remainder of the thesis, is not whether there *is* a *universal* law, but rather, *what* does that effect of the law end up reinforcing? Butler's argument leaves open, for my purposes, the discussion of other cultural possibilities and instances of gender disillusion and consequent subversion (in particular for a cultural feminism).[133] In fact, a recent art installation entitled *Hysteria, 2000* stands monument to the continuing problems of defining the feminine through revisiting hysteria. Beth B, an artist involved in this project 'scrutinises images and treatments "that have influenced contemporary attitudes to women and their bodies", and analyses "the psychological long-term impact that medicine, the media, and general oppressive images and attitudes have on women".'[134] Beth B's work,[135]

> comments on hysteria as a mirror image of our culture, challenging accepted views of truth and falsehood, reality and delusion, with an attentiveness to social and psychic history as projected through seemingly 'sane' medical institutions as well as social morays.[136]

Also, other contexts have benefited from the use of the category of hysteria in order to define, for example, the exotic other. This description of the belly-dancer 'Little Egypt' from the 1893 (incidentally, the year of Charcot's death) exhibition in Chicago that attracted more people than the much celebrated telescope, bears close resemblance to the fourth stage of the hysterical attack, *'la grande hysterie'*:[137]

> From knee to neck she was convulsive. Every muscle became eloquent of primitive emotion. Standing suddenly erect, with a deft movement she revealed her nude right leg from knee almost to waist. A strut to the right, a long stride back, and the 'abdominal' dance was resumed [...] Streaked and sweaty, her face took on the aspect of *epilepsy*. She bit her lips, rolled her eyes, pulled fiercely at great handfuls of her black, curly hair. Indescribable noises and loud suggestions mingled in the hot breath of the audience. Men in the audience rose with shouts. A woman - one of six present - hissed. Laughter became uproarious. And then Millie de Leon *gave a little cry* that was more a yelp, and ceased.[138] (emphasis my own)

The policing of gender is the concern of the next three sections. This chapter has set up the framework within which I shall be discussing re-configurations of gender. Complex enabling moments that constitute a subject as participant of that moment will be the focus. Charcot's hysterics are icons of performativity that illustrate the impossibility of containing any definition of woman. Although they are subject to the politics of interpellation, submitting to the voice of authority, this interpellation reveals itself as the site of possible subversion. Within each response to the call of hysteria it is possible to image a different reaction, a repetition that is not always the same, a repetition that causes uncertainty. This chapter has presented the view that gender and sexuality cannot be understood as fixed or natural elements and are only constructed as such when faced with an authority seeking to establish fixed loci of intelligibility. I have argued that the hysterics use the bare tools of their bodies from which to re-configure and confuse the supposed obviousness of their gender and they turn a mere performance, repetition of stylized hysterical symptoms, into a performative moment where their gender certainty becomes unpredictable. The existence of the clinic itself however highlights the impossibility of the performative achieving any lasting status; that is, destroying the disabling institution. This again points to the central problem in the usefulness of the idea of performative moments when divorced from a knowing and participating subject. The fact that the hysterics did not always escape their performances is reminiscient of the idea of repetitive acts that are ultimately deadly. The critique of Butler has been centered around her ideas of repetition compulsion that does not break out of a dominant discourse. In the next three chapters I will move from this discussion of voiceless women to women in the Arab world who, through their polemics and fictional writing, as well as music, have questioned and negotiated with the 'policing of gender' in intriguing and creative ways. In a sense, they have all managed to work from *within their constraints* and from *within the circumstances that define them* (their interpellation) to argue against what constrains and defines them. In this way they are similar to the hysterics as they do not remove themselves from the situations out of which they pitch their debates. This idea of authorship has the potential to alter the direction of the performative drastically. Though the strict idea of the performative has been illustrated in the example of Charcot's hysterics, differing possibilities do emerge in creative performances and writing. This chapter has represented the somewhat claustrophobic type of performance so abhored by

Martha Nussbaum and yet so liberating for Lisa Disch (see Introduction) that Butler seems to invoke. However, the following chapters expand on the accomplishments of the Salpêtrière hysterics whose actions we can only speak for yet whose performances of gender that they are defined by remain influential and central to our re-working of the idea of "performance." The hysterics ultimately reconfigure expectations related to their gender irrespective of success or failure. The 'normative regime' that they attempt to confound is understood anew through their work, its restrictions revealed and questioned. Although in many cases the political use of these performances will come into question, and this brings us back to Butler's critics' view (see introduction, in particular Nussbaum, Assiter, McNay and Weir), individual performances and their success in terms of personal empowerment become prominent and impossible to ignore. The hope is that these individual cases can come to form a real discourse of opposition.

ENDNOTES

[1] It is helpful here to assume that the 'performative' is in a sense a subversive act.

[2] Porter, Roy and G.S. Rousseau, 'The Destinies of Hysteria,' in *Hysteria Beyond Freud,* eds. Gilman, Sander [et al.] (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 38.

[3] Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality* (London:Penguin, 1978), pp. 55-56.

[4] *Ibid.,* p. 124.

[5] Micale, Mark S, 'Charcot and the Idea of Hysteria in the Male', *Medical History*, 34 (1994), 363-411 (p. 406).

[6] Copjec, Joan, 'Flauit et Dissipati Sunt: He Blew away and they were Scattered', *October*, 18 (1981), 20-40, (p. 23).

[7] *Ibid.,* p. 30.

[8] Goetz, Christopher G., Michel Bonduelle and Toby Gelfand eds. *Charcot: Constructing Neurology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 179.

[9] Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. xx.

[10] As opposed to 'pastiche' which may not have had an aim at its center. This is confusing here though because the parody does not really have an aim; since it takes place in an enclosed environment. I want to see this as 'parody' though because it informs the idea of performative gender.

[11] Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.2.

[12] Libbrecht, Katrien, *Hysterical Psychosis* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1995), p. 38.

[13] *Ibid.,* p. xi. The rise of medicine as an empirical science (professionalism) will be discussed further on. A useful work on this is Finn, Geraldine *Why Althusser killed his Wife: Essays on Discourse and Violence* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International Inc., 1996).

[14] Showalter, Elaine, in *Hysteria Beyond Freud,* p. 39.

[15] Porter, Roy and G.S. Rousseau, 'The Destinies of Hysteria,' in *Hysteria Beyond Freud,* pp. vii - xxiv.

[16] Groot, Joanna de, ' "Sex" and "Race": The Construction of Language and Image in the Nineteenth Century' in *Sexuality and Subordination - Interdisciplinary Studies of Gender in the Nineteenth Century,* eds. Mendus, Susan and Jane Rendall (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 95.

[17] *Ibid.,* p. 93.

[18] Silverman, Debora, 'The "New Woman," Feminism, and the Decorative Arts in Fin-de-Siècle France' in *Eroticism and the Body Politic,* Hunt, Lynn, ed. (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 148.

[19] *Ibid.,* p. 149.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] *Ibid.,* p. 152. These two labels suggest that emancipated women are either too masculine or somehow savage!

[22] Schade, Sigrid, 'Charcot and the Spectacle of the Hysterical Body. The "Pathos Formula" as an Aesthetic Staging of Psychiatric Discourse - A Blind Spot in the Reception of Warburg', *Art History*, 18:4 (1995), pp. 499 - 517. (p. 506).

[23] Silverman, Debora, 'The "New Woman," Feminism, and the Decorative Arts in Fin-de-Siècle France,' p. 155. See also Silverman's footnote number 28 for a discussion of these differing circumstances.

[24] Silverman, Debora, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 70.

[25] *Ibid.* 1892 saw the official acknowledgement of neurology as a speciality in its own right, only a little after the professionalisation of medicine in general. 'Disorders' of the 'nervous system' were linked to disorders in the 'urban metropolis'; it would seem that neurasthenia, especially in Europe, was a 'general condition of modernity.' By using a political and cultural space such as the 1900 exhibition, France qualified woman as a significant symbol. Instead of the Eiffel tower of 1889 that had served as the entrance to the fair, the 1900 Paris exhibition presented 'la Parisienne.' This was fundamentally a 'tower to woman' or a great structure topped with the figure of a woman wearing the red, white and blue of France. Woman as producer of art and art product remained a dominant theme throughout the exhibition. However, this epitome of domestic art loomed over the outcast women of Paris. As fin-de-siècle Paris promoted familial feminism and brought down the femme nouvelle, medical science produced more and more 'hysterics' to prove the ills that change could bring.

[26] Silverman, Debora, 'The "New Woman," Feminism, and the Decorative Arts in Fin-de-Siècle France', p. 153.

[27] Malloy, Rhona Justice, 'Charcot and the Theatre of Hysteria', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 28:4 (1995), 133-139 (p. 133) .

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] *Ibid.,* p. 133. Malloy cites Jan Goldstein's important work *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[30] Finn, Geraldine, *Why Althusser Killed his Wife: Essays on Discourse and Violence* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International Inc. ,1996), pp. 6-10.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[32] Silver, Brian. L., *The Ascent of Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 126.

[33] Finn, Geraldine, *Why Althusser Killed his Wife: Essays on Discourse and Violence,* p. 23.

[34] Silver, Brian. L., *The Ascent of Science*, p. 125.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

[36] See Kemp, Martin and Marina Wallace, *Spectacular Bodies: The Art and Science of the Human Body from Leonardo to Now* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) for a historical account of this change. I am taking it as a fact for the purposes of my argument.

[37] See Mavor and Copjec on how art was used to prove that hysteria was an actual physiological continuity rather than an imposed diagnosis.

[38] Silver, Brian. L., *The Ascent of Science,* p. 131.

[39] Cited in Dijkstra, Bram, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 244.

[40] 'With the rise of medical professionalism in nineteenth-century France, and the identification and treatment of hysteria in Charcot's practice as a target of medical intervention, medicine became a major cultural index by which the moving body's meanings were measured' in McCarren, Felicia, 'The "Symtomatic Act" Circa 1900: Hysteria, Hypnosis, Electricity, Dance', *Critical Inquiry,* 21 (1995), 749-774, (p. 751).

[41] Porter, Roy and G.S. Rousseau, 'The Destinies of Hysteria', p. 38.

[42] Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble,* p. 5.

[43] Micale, Mark S, 'Charcot and the Idea of Hysteria in the Male', p. 406.

[44] *Ibid.*

[45] For more on this see Micale, Mark S, 'Charcot and the Idea of Hysteria in the Male', *Medical History,* 34 (1994), 363-411. Charcot, it seems from this article, wavered between de-feminising hysteria for his male patients and feminising his male hysterical patients. What is also intriguing is the complicated system of teminologies (see main text).

[46] It has been suggested that ME and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome are modern manifestations of neurasthenia. It is debatable whether either of these are successors of hysteria. For more on this see p. 177, *Spectacular Bodies*, information listed above. Also, a recent work deals with modern day interpretations of hysteria.

[47] See Freud, Sigmund and Joseph Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, trans. James and Alix Strachey, Stratchey, James, Alix Stachey and Angela Richards, eds. (London: Penguin, 1991).

[48] Malloy, Rhona-Justice, 'Charcot's Theatre of Hysterics', p. 134.

[49] *Ibid.*

[50] For example, Malloy writes that 'Charcot labored over his Friday lectures as though they were theatrical productions. Often incorporating quotes from Molière, Racine, and Shakespeare, Charcot carefully constructed and memorized a text, that always ended in a precise and simple explanation. Charcot's demonstrations became so popular that a new amphitheater capable of holding an audience of 500 was built. Footlights and even a spotlight from the back of the auditorium illuminated the stage and intensified the drama. Charcot employed diagrams, drawings, even pertinent art and sculpture as stage props and accessories. To complete the mis-en-scène, Charcot costumed his patients.' These lessons were slightly different to the Tuesday lessons that claimed to be more impromptu.' *Ibid.*, p. 135.

[51] *Ibid.*, Malloy cites again certain information from Jan Goldstein's work *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (see endnote 29 for publication information).

[52] *Ibid.*

[53] Mavor, Carol, '*Odor Di Femina*: Though You May Not See Her, You Can Certainly Smell Her,' *Cultural Studies,* 12:1 (1998), 51-81, (p. 56).

[54] Malloy, Rhona-Justice, 'Charcot's Theatre of Hysterics', p. 134.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 135.

[56] Wilson, Frances, reviews *Passions of the Voice: Hysteria, Narrative and the Figure of the Speaking Woman, 1850-1915* by Claire Kahane and *Sexing the Mind: Nineteenth-Century Fictions of Hysteria* by Evelyn Enders, *Modern Literary Review,* 92:4 (1997), 955-957.

[57] Schade, Sigrid, 'Charcot and the Spectacle of the Hysterical Body. The "Pathos Formula" as an aesthetic staging of psychiatric discourse - a blind spot in the reception of Warburg', p. 511.

[58] Lyotard, Jean-Francis, 'Speech Snapshots' in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), pp. 129-135, (130-133).

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 133.

[60] I have borrowed this term; 'crisis of gender difference' from Sigrid Schade's essay cited at endnote 22.

[61] Butler, Judith, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 52.

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 53.

[63] *Ibid.*

[64] Copjec, Joan, 'Flauit et Dissipati Sunt: He Blew Away and They Were Scattered', p. 39.

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

[66] Charcot is known to have replied to a similar accusation from a group of students by stating that 'Theory is fine, but it doesn't stop things from existing.' Cited in Copjec, Joan, *Ibid.*, p. 27.

[67] Mavor, Carol, '*Odor Di Femina*: Though You May Not See Her, You Can Certainly Smell Her', p. 58.

[68] Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter*, p. 121.

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 122.

[70] Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech*, p. 34-35.

[71] Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter,* p. 122

[72] *Ibid.*

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 124.

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] Silverman, Debora, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, p. 96.

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

[77] Copjec, Joan, 'Flauit et Dissipati Sunt: He Blew Away and They Were Scattered', p. 24

[78] This history included urinal retention, called hysterical ischuria. See *Charcot: Constructing Neurology,*. p. 188. Dave Cummings has pointed out to me recently that in the Marquis de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*, Justine is the one who urinates on her lovers. I have not had the opportunity to try and link this with Charcot's patient Justine.

[79] *Ibid.*, p. 188.

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 189.

[81] *Ibid.*

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 190.

[83] There is in fact much evidence to suggest that Justine's illness was related to a history of abuse. Charcot glosses over this. For more on this see *Charcot: Constructing Neurology.* pp.190-192 (for publication information see endnote 8).

[84] *Ibid.*, p. 193.

[85] *Ibid.*, p. 193, emphasis in the original.

[86] Showalter, Elaine, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago Press, 1985), p. 152.

[87] Schade, Sigrid, 'Charcot and the Spectacle of the Hysterical Body. The "Pathos Formula" as an aesthetic staging of psychiatric discourse - a blind spot in the reception of Warburg', p. 510.

[88] As I have discussed earlier, the male hysteric seems to have concurrently been defined otherwise/occasionally feminized.

[89] Showalter, Elaine, *The Female Malady*, p. 154.

[90] *Ibid.*, and Schade, Sigrid, 'Charcot and the Spectacle of the Hysterical Body', p. 510.

[91] Goetz, G. Christopher, Michel Bonduelle and Toby Gelfand eds. *Charcot: Constructing Neurology,* p. 200. Also, William Gowers, in 1880 'noted the influence of "national temperament" and age on hysteria; the ailment, he asserted was "more marked in the French than in the English, and in children more than adults".' Gowers, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 200.

[92] Micale, Mark S, 'Charcot and the Idea of Hysteria in the Male,' p. 394

[93] *Ibid.*, p. 392.

[94] *Ibid.*

[95] Mavor, Carol, '*Odor Di Femina*: Though You May Not See Her, You Can Certainly Smell Her', pp. 56, 62.

[96] Ender, Evelyne, *Sexing the Mind: Nineteenth Century Fictions of Hysteria* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 20.

[97] *Ibid.*, p. 21

[98] I am reminded of here of Homi Bhaba's essay 'On Mimicry' and the paradox of the native trying to be other but never quite succeeding because he is not the other / almost but not quite (almost but not white) is the paradox he must live; what needs to disappear here is the desire to not be white, because he can never quite make it anyway. See Bhabha, Homi, 'On Mimicry' in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). This is re-worked in the phrase 'not sane, not same' by Carol Mavor in the above mentioned article.

[99] Malloy, Rhona-Justice, 'Charcot's Theatre of Hysterics', p. 134.

[100] Lyotard, Jean-Francois, 'Speech Snapshots', p.130.

[101] Showalter, Elaine, *The Female Malady*, p. 154.

[102] This term is another example of Charcot's continuous reference to literature (or a strange translation!).

[103] However, with Charcot's male patients, the range of emotions expressed in this third stage was noticeably narrower, and it tended decidedly toward the darker, depressive end of the spectrum. See Micale, Mark S, 'Charcot and the Idea of Hysteria in the Male', p. 407 .

[104] Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble*, p. 9.

[105] *Ibid.,* pp. 8-13.

[106] *Ibid.*

[107] *Ibid.,* p.11

[108] *Ibid.*

[109] *Ibid.*, pp. 16-19.

[110] *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

[111] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

[112] *Ibid.*, p.33.

[113] Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech: The Politcs of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997). p. 51.

[114] Using Foucauldian logic.

[115] Malloy, Rhona-Justice, 'Charcot's Theatre of Hysterics', p. 137, Charcot here responds to a suspicion that there are more hysterics in his hospital that in any other hospital in France: 'What a marvel this would be if I could, in fact, fabricate illnesses according to my whims or fantasies. But in fact all I am is a photographer. I describe what I see.'

[116] Schade, Sigrid, 'Charcot and the Spectacle of the Hysterical Body', p. 508.

[117] For an interesting analysis of the painting specifically and the history of hysteria in general see Borossa, Julia, *Hysteria* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 2001), pp. 20-21.

[118] Kemp, Martin and Marina Wallace, *Spectacular Bodies:The Art and Science of the Human Body from Leonardo to Now*, pp. 178-179.

[119] Cheah, Pheng and Elizabeth Grosz, 'The Future of Sexual Difference: An Interview with Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell', *Diacritics* 29:1 (1998), 19-42, (p. 21).

[120] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

[121] Malloy, Rhona-Justice, 'Charcot's Theatre of Hysterics', p. 137.

[122] Lyotard's comment in full here is that 'Photography reveals this because it is a hysteria of the gaze just as much as a means of control' in Lyotard, Jean-Francois, 'Speech Snapshots', p. 134.

[123] Schade, Sigrid, 'Charcot and the Spectacle of the Hysterical Body', p. 512.

[124] Szasz, S. Thomas, *The Myth of Mental Illness* (New York: Harper, 1974), p. 29.

[125] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

[126] Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble*, p. 136.

[127] *Ibid.*, p. 139.

[128] See Meijer, Irene Costera and Baukje Prins, 'How Bodies Come to Matter', *Signs*, 23:2 (1998), 275-286, for a particularly challenging interview where Butler is asked how she then comes to talk of bodies that matter, thus positioning herself again as someone who decides on this complex issue. Her response is that she can only continue to do so all the while hoping that speaking of bodies that should matter can only open up the way for the representation of other bodies that should matter as well rather than again privileging one body over another.

[129] Butler, Judith *Bodies That Matter*, p. 1.

[130] Žižek's contention (the rock of the real, cited in Butler) is that imaginary investments will always lead to disappointments, e.g. investment in the idea of a women or freedom (and so woman is constantly re-invested in the hope of a final perfect copy).

[131] See Daly, Nicholas, 'Incorporated Bodies: *Dracula* and the Rise of Professionalism', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language,* 39:2 (1997), 181-203. In an effort to cement the consolidation of opinions on sex and empire, in his article '*Dracula* and the Rise of Professionalism', Nicholas Daly reconsiders, through Stoker's novel, that although commentators of *Dracula* have sought to promote a (British) nation filled with anxiety and fear (this anxiety and fear maximised and represented as the vampire out to suck the blood/life and infect future generations) the British empire was actually thriving and Britain itself was 'undergoing expansion' that in turn needed a new class of 'experts' to deal with administrative demands. He claims that 'the monstrous anachronisms of *She*, *Dracula* and *Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde* consequently seem to mirror a whole set of anxieties: the collapse of empire, the degeneration of the race in the light of evolutionary theory, and the rise of the *New Woman*, to name but a few (my italics). In fact, this 'spectre of decline [is] put to work during periods of development.' Daly argues that no matter how anxious culture claimed to be, imperial expansion was substantial, adding some '750,000 sq. miles in Asia and the South Pacific and another 4,400,000 square miles in Africa between 1870-1900.' Tighter interior politics in England, in areas such as government intrusion into what where once only domains of the family (that is, control over nutrition and education) only enforce the notion that although anxiety of deterioration could not help but be there, it was being dealt with or 'buttressed' too. Daly sees *Dracula* as a 'performative' text because it can foresee a future, a future of the 'expansion of a culture of experts' and Dracula as providing a myth for this culture. Mina is seen as bonding men emotionally, the centre around which the 'little band of men' is constructed. It is significant that the men are all doctors and lawyers (in fact, Van Helsing is a doctor *and* lawyer). 'Medicine, (and to a lesser extent law) was the profession that offered the dominant model for the new groups of experts to aspire to: high social status, the ideal of public service, self-regulation, and the idea of expertise based on a developing scientific field were all highly attractive.' With the legitimization of neurology in France, there is no doubt the various aspects of medicine were also on their way to becoming professions.

As Daly argues, there was everything to be gained if this seemingly growing anxiety was put to use. Professionalism seemed to appear just in time to pause feminism and by association, anti-colonialism.

Also, see Finn, Geraldine *Why Althusser Killed his Wife: Essays on Discourse and Violence* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International Inc., 1996). Finn further argues that it is imperialism/colonialism and slavery that allowed for the rise of capitalism and the industrial revolution. She goes on to posit postmodernism as man's relation to nationalism, calling it a - a crisis in the European Patriarch. She argues that postmodernism has (to a degree) 'been shaped and formed in response to, or even in reaction against feminism', the postmodern discourse of the body seeks to remove even this authority from feminism and yet again the woman subject disappears in postmodernism. It seems that post-modern man now presumes to occupy all the discursive positions at precisely the moment that other voices have begun to emerge and talk back – as women and as post-colonial subjects. Man or the 'European Patriarch' moves in to claim the speaking voice for himself and as his own.

[132] Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble,* p. 36.

[133] There is a discourse that explains a differentlaw that governs many Middle Eastern Societies. This is the brother-sister relationship that seems to override the father's influence on the daughter and/or mother. I have

explored this elsewhere in an unpublished paper. This idea is also explored in Douglas-Malti, Fedwa, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). Also, see Joseph, Suad, 'Brother/sister Relationships: Connectivity, Love and Power in the Reproduction of Patriarchy in Lebanon', *American Ethnologist,* 21:1 (1994), 50-73.

[134] Kemp, Martin and Marina Wallace, *Spectacular Bodies:The Art and Science of the Human Body from Leonardo to Now,* pp. 182-183.

[135] Please see the above work for more detail, pp. 176-183.

[136] *Ibid.,* p. 183.

[137] See page 44 of this chapter for a description of the four-part attack. Also, there is more information on this in Appendix A.

[138] This is a description of Millie de Leon's dance from a European onlooker in Buonaventura, Wendy. *Serpent of the Nile: Women and Dance in the Arab World* (London, Saqi Books, 1989), p. 123. Also, for more images of oriental women from a colonialist perspective, see Graham, Brown-Sarah, *Images of Women* (London: Quartet, 1988), Lewis, Reina, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996), Kabbani, Rana, *Europe's Myths of the Orient* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), Shohat, Ella and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994) and Alloula, Malek, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

CHAPTER 2
NAWAL EL SAADAWI: MEDIC AND WOMAN

In her essay *'Odor di Femina:* Though You May Not See Her, You Can Certainly Smell Her' Carol Mavor reveals how 'both the photographs of mentally ill women made under the direction of Freud's teacher Jean-Martin Charcot, and the use of the visualist rhetoric in the writing of Charcot and Freud were regarded as proof of an always already diagnosed and conceptualised vision of sexual difference.'[1] This chapter aims to explore how sexual difference can be disassociated from its 'always already' diagnosis through a critique of medicine, for the possibility of a re-diagnosis. In order to attempt this re-diagnosis I will concentrate on the work of Dr. Nawal El Saadawi, prominent Egyptian doctor, social critic and more significantly, fiction writer. Medical knowledge that seeks to freeze sexual difference will be revealed as the knowledge that relies on the learnt and re-iterated, thereby *performative* laws, inherent in its own discourse. Moving from a performance of the body I hope to show how a performative text, one that acknowledges its constraints yet tries to move beyond them, manipulates the discourses that inform 'an always already diagnosed and conceptualised vision of sexual difference.'

In her work *Men, Women and God(s): Nawal El Saadawi and Arab Feminist Poetics,* Fedwa Malti-Douglas argues that Saadawi gains authority through her double role as physician and writer and legitimately contests 'natural gender inequality.'[2] Though a physician herself, Saadawi 'denudes medicine and science of part of their magical technological power.'[3] Malti-Douglas argues that in fact, medicine becomes 'a repository of [negative] social power' for Saadawi.[4] Medicine retains its role as an active instrument of exclusion, an exclusion that Saadawi experiences and documents acutely. I want to argue that Saadawi's texts actually reveal an uncertainty vis-à-vis the dual and simultaneous potential of medicine: that of healing and that of destroying. Again, through writing, Saadawi posits fiction as the possibility of re-telling the experience of a destructive medicine.

This chapter will outline the concerns of Saadawi as physician and writer and present her polemics and fiction as a potential response to Charcot's creative medicine,

complementing the effort of the hysterics. I will briefly present Saadawi's move from medicine to polemics to fiction, and reveal fiction as the only site where the polar qualities of the "pharmakon" (the Greek word for remedy and poison), and its application in medicine, are successfully contested.[5] I will go on to use Saadawi's fiction to demonstrate the performativity of the literary text, a text that comes to understand itself in opposition to medicine for the writer/physician. Furthermore, Saadawi's polemics will be situated within a broader dialogue that addresses contemporary intercultural feminist concerns, and a discussion of her fiction will complement and support her particular views. I hope to show that the main issue invoked in Saadawi's early fiction is the dual/polar attributes/performances of medicine; that of healing and destroying. Through the understanding of this, proved by action in the text as well as through the writing itself, an awareness of complex gender concerns arises. In particular, Saadawi may be shown to share certain preoccupations with Western feminism.[6] A brief exploration of Saadawi's polemics will set out her concerns as activist, physician and woman.[7]

2.1 SAADAWI'S WAR: FROM MEDICINE TO POLITICS TO FICTION

Nawal El Saadawi has written, in a new collection of essays, that: 'I realised that writing was a stronger weapon than medicine in the fight against poverty and ignorance.'[8] Writing as a weapon comes to figure strongly in the work of Saadawi after she confronts the capacity of medicine to be inhumane. Though medicine is primarily understood as a healing tool, Saadawi's social conscience does not allow her to disassociate the link between 'poverty and ignorance' and institutionalised medicine. Acknowledging the limited powers of medicine when pitted against the powers of an unequal social system entices Saadawi into a re-evaluation of her profession, an issue that she documents heavily in her polemics and ultimately, her fictional writing.[9] Though the concept of the "pharmakon", and its application, medicine, has been theorised extensively, I will nevertheless enter into a brief discussion of this notion to enrich further an exploration of Saadawi's concerns.

If medicine is 'remedy and poison at the same time [*à la fois*]'[10] then we need to explore the effects of a word that encompasses such diverse meanings and what this means in terms of defining medicine. If "pharmakon"[11] can mean two things, this could give rise

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to the inevitable necessity of choosing between the two available meanings in order to arrive at an understanding of what we mean by medicine. Yoav Rinon comments that 'consequently, any intention to choose between the different signifieds' will undermine the word under discussion.[12] In short, the double meaning of the word pharmakon exposes itself as having no fixed meaning but a meaning that can be manipulated. Rinon, summarising the argument put forward by Derrida in 'Plato's Pharmacy', writes that: 'the pharmakon brings death and enables immortality at the same time; it is poison-medicine and not poison or medicine.'[13] As such, he/she who applies or directs pharmakon is god-like. If pharmakon essentially is comprised of creative and destructive powers then the practice of medicine entails the responsibility of administering these two potential forces. What Rinon argues is that the practice of medicine or the use of 'pharmakon in general' is also very similar to 'writing in general,'[14] and it is this argument that can be used effectively in conjunction with Saadawi's role as both writer and physician. Rinon explains that the pharmakon and writing both have the capacity to destroy and create. The dual possibility of one word (writing/pharmakon) incorporating two opposites opens up the necessity of having to understand the opposites in order to understand the whole. I will argue that through writing fiction, it is possible that Saadawi moves from a process of intense pathos and faith in the institution of medicine as a healing apparatus, to realising the poisonous potential of medicine as a regulatory discourse. Saadawi's characters each reach this conclusion yet resolve the healing/poisonous paradox that is medicine (or not) in a unique manner. As Hans-Georg Gadamer has theorised in his essay 'Apologia for the Art of Healing',

> One can indeed say that the physicians 'produce' health by means of their art, but this is not a very precise way of speaking. For what is produced in this way is not a work, an *ergon,* something quite new that comes into being and confirms the original skill. Rather, it involves the restoration of the health of the sick person, and whether this is actually the result of medical knowledge and ability cannot be directly observed from the restored state of health itself.[15]

How each persona in the text deals with their relation to the 'sick person' and how they feel their gender is implied in this relation is an issue that I shall tackle in a close reading of the texts. Saadawi however, as an author, also posits *writing* as a different type of feminine healing (the healing capabilities of the text are revealed). Writing, for Saadawi,

as expressed in her polemics, can heal because it is a type of 'work' that can approach issues medicine cannot. Intriguingly, Gadamer clarifies a peculiarity associated with medicine; he claims that,

> among all the sciences concerned with nature the science of medicine is the one which can never be understood entirely as technology [as producing something artificial], precisely because it invariably experiences its own abilities and skills simply as a restoration of what belongs to nature.[16]

Writing, in a sense, will function as a healing tool for Saadawi, 'restor[ing]' to women what 'belongs' to them. This healing tool is however one that is viewed as creative for her, but destructive for the other whom she will expose. Thus, interestingly, writing retains the dual qualities of the pharmakon, creating and destroying. Furthermore, Saadawi uses the act of writing to re-evaluate medicine and its dual capabilities as well. Saadawi's creative writing ultimately allows her to accept that medicine can have an artistic dimension when not embroiled in determining a gender matrix for her to obey. This shall be exposed through an examination of the texts.

I want to view Saadawi's polemics as an attempt to work through the dual possibilities of medicine discursively. One way of doing this is by positioning herself, or her fictional characters, as the illness to be cured, yet an illness that is pre-diagnosed *by* the *means* of healing, medicine. It seems that Saadawi explores and experiences this double bind through her fiction. I will argue that Saadawi's entry into this discourse sets her up as critic and participator at the scene of Charcot's theatrics, reconstructing a counter narrative to that of women who re-perform their prescribed gender and to the men who re-script this gender. The ideas of construction and ownership become crucial as the physicians in the novel come to understand that they cannot and do not own their medicine, in the same way that they themselves do not want to be owned and defined by it (or by any regulatory discourse or capitalising economy). As Gadamer writes:

> The work of physicians [...] does not remain theirs in any way [...] the relationship between the doing and the deed, the making and the made, the effort and the success is here of a fundamentally different, more enigmatic and elusive character.[17]

Saadawi writes about medicine and about its healing and poisonous capabilities and emerges as a woman who can see the paradox because she understands herself simultaneously as the wound and the healer.[18] It is this realisation that enables Saadawi to question the larger claims of medicine and medical knowledge to 'act as proof of sexual difference.'[19] If medicine is a discriminatory discursive norm as well a site for the *practice* of this norm then we need to examine how it is understood as establishing a norm that has to be re-evaluated by none other than those discriminated against. This is a difficult task as one has to admit that actions are not always a result of free will but that in fact one is subjugated and a subject. Judith Butler has written, in connection with this difficulty that,

> one need only consider how [racial or] gendered slurs live and thrive in and as the flesh of the addressee, and how these slurs accumulate over time, dissimulating their history, taking on the semblance of the natural, configuring and restricting the *doxa* that counts as 'reality.' In such bodily productions resides the sedimented history of the performative, the ways in which sedimented usage comes to compose, without determining, the cultural sense of the body, and how the body comes to disorient the cultural sense in the moment of expropriating the discursive means of its own production. The appropriation of such norms to oppose their historically sedimented effect constitutes the insurrectionary moment of that history, the moment that founds the future through a break with the past.[20]

Saadawi herself admits:

> as once [I had] made the link between curative and preventive medicine, then moved to make the link between preventive medicine and social conditions, I now started to make the link between the social, the economic, the political and the cultural in society.[21]

These links mark the realisation of a destructive quality of pharmakon-as-poison in the practice of medicine, the break with the sedimented past. Once these connections have been made, Saadawi embarks upon a reproduction of the poison that she finds in the 'social, economic, political and cultural' through her fiction. Saadawi makes the final move in identifying women as a wound in the following statement:

> [there was] a special emphasis on women, which I had carried with me from my life as a
> girl, and which kept developing all the time, nourished by the difficulties I faced as a
> woman and by more general discrimination against the female sex, in all areas, including
> that of health, and by a growing consciousness. But gradually artistic writing [novels and
> short stories] was beginning to occupy a central position in my career.[22]

Saadawi associates the experience of being a body that is discriminated against with the development of herself as a writer. This move inevitably leads Saadawi into a discourse firmly rooted in identity politics. As she perceptively pinpoints: 'are "identity politics" [an] exclusive tool of the powerful against the peoples who are being postcolonialised?'[23] Saadawi however, questions notions of *identity* and wonders whether it is in fact a forced imposition. In her parallel role of activist she concentrates on the political and economic foundations that make international feminist discourses problematic yet desirable without an explicit focus on identity politics (I will return to this later). Saadawi cannot conceive of a non-political woman yet theorises the possibility of a space where cultural imperialism does not prevail and imagines a postmodernism that can accommodate an ethics of individualism, fearing as she does that 'postmodernism itself is a form of cultural fundamentalism.'[24] Saadawi persistently asks whether there is any room for real intercultural thinking and writing (a problem that I refer to in my introduction) and has heavily criticised academics who speak for the "other." In criticising an unnamed *dissident* post-colonial philosopher (who also speaks for oppressed women), she claims that:

> s/he has a love - hate relationship with poor oppressed women and men who are struggling
> to live. S/he worships them, calls them the 'subaltern', glorifies their authentic identity or
> culture, but at the same time looks down on them, considers them as docile or struggling
> bodies unable to produce philosophy, or as local activists but not global thinkers. S/he
> abolishes subaltern philosophies and replaces them on the global intellectual scene; s/he
> becomes the philosopher of the subaltern who knows more about them than they know
> about themselves.[25]

What is being questioned here is the possibility that although the subaltern is ostensibly the site of truth, it is Western philosophy and theory that is given the privilege to decide this. Saadawi, though she does not mention this, seems to be attacking Spivak's philosophy; particularly 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Saadawi argues here that although

Spivak can see how the subaltern is excluded or marginalised, she nonetheless operates within the structures and discourses responsible for this. Although for Spivak this may be a matter of inevitable complicity, for Saadawi it is not.[26] In her essay 'Intimate Touches: Proximity and Distance in International Feminist Dialogues', Sara Ahmed argues that in fact, 'Western feminism involves a refusal to become intimate; *it judges from afar by reading "the other" as a sign of the universal.'*[27] Likewise, in her essay entitled 'The Bitter Lot of Women', Saadawi argues that the non-sensationalising (essentialising) of Eastern (Southern as she alternatively terms it) feminist issues would mark them out for more serious discussion/discourse and welcomes this moment as a potentially enforcing and successful one. However, what stance would be considered as non-essentialising? What does Saadawi mean when she argues for a non-sensationalising politics? I would suggest that in fact it is this sign of the *universal* itself that needs to be re-evaluated and its boundaries and limitations as an ideology clearly termed. As Judith Butler has confirmed,

> the universal can only be articulated in response to a challenge from (its own) outside. As we call for the regulation of injurious speech on the basis of 'universally' accepted presuppositions, do we reiterate practices of exclusion and abjection? What constitutes the community that might qualify as a legitimate community that debates and agrees upon this universality?[28]

Although Butler here speaks of a universality in terms of what constitutes acceptable and non-injurious speech, the above perception can be further used to enforce the impossibility of a universal feminism that is regulated by imperatives of political correctness that may come from the West or East (for example, from Islamic feminism).[29] Instead, we need to view, as Sara Ahmed has aptly stated in her review of Mohanty and Alexander's edited work, *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies and Democratic Futures*, how local struggles, which are affected by transnational processes, become themselves elements of a struggle which is transnational?[30] In fact, what I seek to highlight here is how Saadawi's texts perform pedagogically to teach us the concerns of Eastern/Southern women. We need to avoid 'claims to the universal oppression of women' because, according to Therese Saliba these claims,

> face two potential dangers. First, they may reinforce simplistic formulas of global sisterhood, which, in their narrow focus on gender oppression, erase socio-economic and
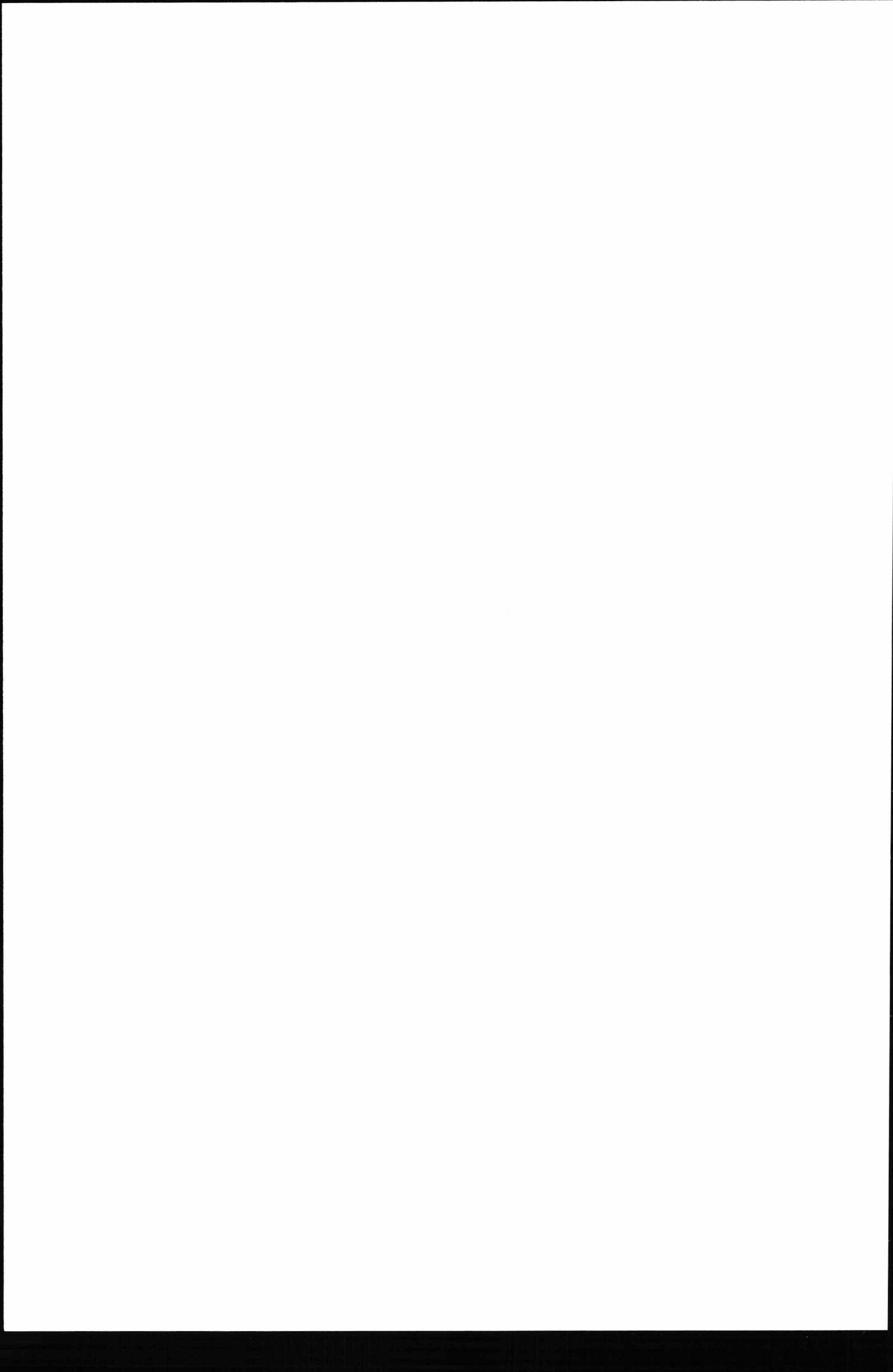
political factors in the lives of third world women. Second, these claims are often interpreted as universally Arab or universally African, rather than as transcending cultural borders. In a Western context, the focus on gender oppression, as Chandra Mohanty writes, reinforces the notion that the third world is less evolved, particularly in its treatment of women.[31]

I will attempt to save this improbability of a universal feminism and supplant it with what Ahmed has called 'secret' meetings with women from other worlds (the notion of meetings here embraces the act of reading and translating other women's works). Through this, one hopes, we can hypothesise as to the *possibilities* of meaning and use this towards an expansion of feminist understanding.

In particular, as physician, Saadawi is torn over the division between the branches of knowledge (science and art) that can inform her. I will examine her fiction as a practice to bridge this division by writing the medical creatively as opposed to scientifically, by returning to healing as an "art." By writing the pharmakon-as-poison, Saadawi struggles to recapture it as a pharmakon-as-healing and so produce a healed woman as well as a love for the medicine that has wounded but *retains* the potential to heal. The first step in this direction is identifying at which point Saadawi employs fiction writing to develop finally her polemical claims. In an interview in 1992 Saadawi affirmed that,

> the effect of fiction on me is deeper than the effect of studies. When I write a study, I am illuminated by the research, but when I write a novel, I know myself better. The same is true for readers. When you read a novel, you become another person. You have a totally new light, and you have a new conception of fighting and courage, of weakness and cowardice. You understand many things about yourself; how weak you are and how strong you can be.[32]

In a sense, while Saadawi's non-fiction was necessary to ensure her political recognition, her fiction celebrates what the polemic cannot always guarantee, a possible cross-understanding and experience in the uncertainty of the knowledge of other women, albeit fictional creations (where what is said to be impossible is maintained as a possibility). However, Saadawi's polemical ideas do set up, as I have explained above, her preoccupation as doctor and writer, writing medicine and creative existence. Interestingly

in the work *Hysteria, Hypnosis and Healing: The Work of J.M. Charcot*, A.R.G. Owen documents that,

> the word *medicine* itself results from primitive practice, being named after Medea the mother of witchcraft; that is to say, magic and the remains of primeval and proscribed religions. She was also the mistress of *pharmacon*, or drugs, including not merely herbs and simples of empirically proven efficacy, but also magical potions whose power was supposed to derive not only from inherent properties but from the rites of preparation and the *spells laid upon them*.[33] (my emphasis)

This suggests, to me, that spells or words (or Rhetoric, as Plato/Gadamer have likened medicine to) are a component in the healing process. Writing then, the production of words, comes to figure as *a medicine* that has the capacity to heal, as well as giving form to a healing medicine.

Furthermore, in Saadawi's polemical works we witness the birth of medical symbolism (which continues in the early novels studied here). In her aggressive writings that question gender-based inequalities, she uses the cant of the operating theatre in an attempt to freeze and display the violence acted out on Arab women. In revenge/response, the language remains rebellious, violent and ripping. Saadawi recognises the panic that will emerge at the site of the dominant discourse when faced with the threats of minorities (like herself) who are not afraid of 'words written by a pen sharp as a scalpel that cuts through tissue to expose the throbbing nerves and arteries embedded deep in a body', a body that is yearning for an 'expression that it fears to experience.'[34] Saadawi realises that attaching sex to medicine inevitably condemns it to become forever joined to a politics that cannot by extension ever be separated from the economics of patriarchy and the effects of neo-colonialism (by this I mean the influence of a western-style medicine). Saadawi cries out against circumcision, imposed Western trends, sexual aggressions against young women and children, Muslim men who create an impossible world, the hymen as the preserver of honour and finally, the inhumane contradictions that rule the life of every Arab woman.[35] Saadawi argues in an essay entitled 'Obstructionism and Contradiction', that it is ultimately empowering to keep women infantile while at the same time making them regret their bodies and this is yet another restriction that has been imposed on young women.[36] The greatest contradiction, Saadawi writes, lies in forbidding young women to

learn about sex and yet incessantly preparing them for marriage. As Saadawi loves to remind us, 'love and yearning are a constant theme in Arab songs and films and leave a deep impression on the mental and emotional make-up of a girl.'[37] The most disturbing facts remain that

> the social forces that oppose true equality for women still have recourse to moral and religious values. And yet everyday these very values are violated on the screens of cinemas and television sets, and on the posters of commercial advertisements, the pages of political and social studies and through floods of pornographic literature and a never ending stream of songs and radio broadcasts. And yet here again the men who represent these social forces remain silent, and sometimes even participate openly or indirectly in propagating ideas which are the negation of the principles they profess.[38]

(I intend to revisit some of these contentions but as enabling circumstances of survival rather than foreclosing ones). Again, part of these 'social forces' is the 'medical profession, [which] like any other profession in society, is governed by the political, social and moral values which predominate, and like other professions is one of the institutions which is utilised more often than not to protect these values and perpetuate them.'[39] In addition to this, in a chapter entitled 'Distorted Notions about Femininity, Beauty and Love', Saadawi points out that the governing result of the restrictions placed on the sexual lives of girls is that it can end in perceptions of sex and love that are obsessive and unhealthy.[40] 'Action', she says, 'is an essential element of love. Romantic love or - Houb Ozri - is fundamentally a sick emotion, since it is deprived of the quality of action'[41] and that

> Arabic art and literature have played, and continue to play, a crucial role in emphasising attitudes and concepts like these regarding beauty in women. A never ending stream of songs, poems and novels sing the praises of the girl with the flowing hair, long eyelashes and an appealing fullness of the lips and breasts [...]. Many an Arab girl or woman ends up with some form or other of psychological disorder because of the severe contradictions to which she is exposed. Arab songs and literature unceasingly swamp her senses with associations and feelings related to love. Yet if she responds to the call of love, then punishment and reprobation is swift and merciless.[42]

Saadawi finds that all the institutions of power are prohibitive, including indigenous literatures and popular cultures and that none other than her own profession is as guilty as the rest.

Nawal El Saadawi, as I hope to show through a close reading of her fiction, struggles for a marriage of science and art, a marriage that will eventually 'humanise medicine' and hopefully in turn re-fashion gender attributes and expectations.[43] Medicine is set up as a system to be scrutinised for what it purports to offer. Though Saadawi remains concerned in her polemics with the people who contract illnesses as a result of poverty, hunger and oppression her early fiction specifically deals with the way women view themselves as the illness/wound that needs to be healed. This move places Saadawi at the cross-roads of the technical and philosophical, a healer of the body, as well as of the mind and ideas. Ultimately, woman is produced as a wound and through wounding. Thus, there is arguably no original state of wholeness and well being that is 'woman' (apart from maybe early infancy).[44] Writing therefore, may act to repair the wounding of woman. Saadawi repeats in her writing the traumas (wounds) - writing thus as poison - but in doing so does not humiliate and traumatise in turn, reinforcing the patriarchal devaluation of women. Instead, she treats her women characters with sympathy, compassion and understanding. Thus, she restores their dignity and value without in any way denying their suffering. However, this restoration (unlike the restoration of health in medicine) could be said to be a means of giving to the women what they have never had accorded to them *as women*. So, therefore, Saadawi *creates* a human dignity - what ought to be the original state for all - for women. Rather than masculinising women (an accusation targeted at Saadawi by critics that I shall soon address), she offers a way of humanising women *as women*.

2.2 SAADAWI'S AVOWALS

How discursive medicine contributes to notions of gender will be located and how the characters oppose these confines will be defined as performative moments in Nawal El Saadawi's works of fiction. What is experienced as linguistic injury and uncertainty follows from a misguided medical knowledge that seeks to control its *techne* (art or method). Performative moments will be identified as those where the understanding of

medicine as pharmakon-poison is acknowledged as the moment where gender as performance becomes a true possibility. In other words, the identification of the empty promises of the institution of medicine triggers the urgency to question the discursive and material limits that it imposes on its subjects, exposing both medicine and its faithful subjects as constructs within that specific field of understanding. As Judith Butler has aptly commented in her work *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*,

> the name one is called both subordinates and enables, producing a scene of agency from ambivalence, a set of effects that exceed the animating intentions of the call [...] the word that wounds becomes an instrument of resistance in the redeployment that destroys that prior territory of its operation. Such a redeployment means speaking words without prior authorisation and putting into risk the security of linguistic life, the sense of one's place in language, that one's words do as one says.[45]

It is also significant that prior to Fedwa Malti-Douglas' work on Nawal El Saadawi, *Men, Women and God(s): Nawal El Saadawi and Arab Feminist Poetics*, the only other commentary or full length study of her contribution to feminism and literature is entitled *Woman Against Her Sex* written by Georges Tarabishi. This figure looms as Saadawi's very own Charcot, who, in the introduction to his work, stresses that what he criticises

> in this particular woman's [Saadawi's] vision of the world [is that it is] not a product of her inner self, nor the outcome of her rebellion against her coloniser, but on the contrary, the result of her having identified with her coloniser and internalised man's hostile ideology.[46]

This accusation is both groundless and 'hostile' itself, and will ultimately enforce the arguments set forth by Saadawi herself on male authority and its consequent restrictions. Tarabishi is important as he embodies a response or reception of Saadawi's work that has been re-iterated locally and globally.[47] Though Saadawi does not distinguish an Arab feminism as such, one that can reply as a body to such groundless accusations, she does aspire to the image of a liberated (in her reworking of the concept of "liberated") Arab woman that can respond to Tarabishi's claims. The issues in the three works of fiction that I shall be looking at deal inherently with the problematic of gender questioning that Western gender theorists face today. As we ask more and more questions and probe further into the categories and possibilities that make us the gender we are, there is a need to seek

these questions in the fictions of the "other" to locate a possible (though not universal) trans-national affirmation of the certainty of certain concepts underlying gender constructions. Though it is the fear of Western influence that seemingly informs the basis of Tarabishi's denunciation, it is in fact Saadawi's fiction that pre-speaks ideas theorised by Western feminists, and it is this that I hope to show although I use Western theories to invoke them (this presents its own pitfalls as I try not to establish a hierarchy of ideas but a horizontal examination of ideas). Tarabishi assumes that Saadawi writes from a Western/Freudian model to expose male domination, yet Tarabishi himself uses the coarsest of psychoanalytic understanding to expose Saadawi's pitfalls.[48] An example of this criticism is that Tarabishi analyses Saadawi's work in terms of penis envy, which is essentially to reinscribe the very privileging of the masculine that Saadawi herself criticises (I shall be dealing further with Georges Tarabishi). Though the fiction, to me, enables a potential theory, Tarabishi assumes it to be a fiction modelled on a particular type of ideological influence and thereby unable to perform pedagogically, or indeed perform at all. This not only diminishes the value of the insightful work of a great thinker but again undermines the scope, value and necessity of a feminine experience, one that questions and questions again. What may terrorise writers who theorise along the same lines as Tarabishi are Saadawi's fictional characters that clearly point to the extent to which woman performs a learned rubric of gender and *becomes aware of it*, women who reterritorialize the sphere of ideology and forward thinking. My aim here is to locate this performative and mark it as a moment of liberation where we circumvent (though not always subvert) the dominant discourse and by doing so better understand it.[49] What is not tackled by Arab Feminism is exposed in fictional narrative. In a sense, what we lack by way of a theory of Arab women's writing is expressed in fictional narrative, as though the Arab woman is still too involved in the issues and has yet to step back and theorise on certain points such as gender play.[50] However, as we shall discover, Saadawi and her fictional characters become aware of and make the steps that Judith Butler clarifies in the following passage:

> If the performative must compel collective recognition in order to work, must it compel only those kinds of recognition that are *already* institutionalised, or can it also compel a critical perspective on existing institutions? What is the performative power of claiming an entitlement to those terms – 'justice', 'democracy' - that have been articulated to exclude the ones who now claim that entitlement? What is the performative power of

calling for freedom or the end to racism precisely when the one or the 'we' who calls has been radically *dis*enfranchised from making such a call, when the "we" who makes the call reterritorializes the term from its operation within dominant discourse precisely in order to counter the effects of that group's marginalization? Or, equally important, what is the performative power of appropriating the very terms by which one has been abused in order to deplete the term of its degradation or to derive an affirmation from that degradation, rallying under the sign of 'queer' or revaluing affirmatively the category of 'black' or of 'women'?

The question here is whether the improper use of the performative can succeed in producing the effect of authority where there is no recourse to a prior authorisation; indeed, whether the misappropriation or expropriation of the performative might not be the very occasion for the exposure of prevailing forms of authority and the exclusions by which they proceed.[51]

In effect, we will seek the moments of 'misappropriation or expropriation of the performative' in order to 'expos[e] [the] prevailing forms of authority and the exclusions by which they proceed' or, in other words, the moments where sexual difference is recognised as poison and where the power structure cracks at the seams from the weight of this recognition.

2.3 THE FEMALE DOCTOR AND SEXUAL AWARENESS

The merging of the female doctor with the female writer does not, I feel, necessarily give *authority* to the text, as Malti-Douglas has suggested. Saadawi questions the pharmakon-poison too intimately for this and she uses and re-uses the metaphor of medicine too often to make her point. Rather, I do think that her use of the medical brings a material and crude perspective to a fixed set of ideological preoccupations concerning the body; a materiality that otherwise might remain unquestioned. Although Malti-Douglas has claimed that the body emerges as the great equaliser in Saadawian fiction, it is in fact, as we shall see in the works, the dead body that is viewed as the great equaliser in the first instance.[52] Of the physician in the narrative, Malti-Douglas says (referring to the work *Firdaus: Woman at Point Zero*) that

it is only because the female physician is able to overcome her obsession with medicine as power that she is equally able to transcend her focus on the male-female power struggle and come to terms with both her femininity and medicine. This last is now seen as both science and art.[53]

Though this is a convincing statement, I would like to add the finer distinction; that the female physician sees through the pseudo-power of an authority that undermines her whether or not she has an obsession that needs to be overcome. To claim an obsession is to claim a time before the obsession (in this instance, a moment of gender-less awareness of self, a moment where one did not question gender). Saadawi's characters however, view the structures they seek in the institution of medicine as structures (of power) that they acknowledge to be part of the patriarchy; medicine then becomes a forum for exploring whether or not this power can become accessible to them, as women, *as well*. Medicine may be a power in its abstract and material form, that of healing and destroying, but a power that surely we need to learn how to utilise as an art. As Gramsci has claimed, 'more important in perpetuating the patriarchal system, however, is to get its primary victims - that is, women - to accept it as a legitimate state of human relations.'[54] It is the questioning of the legitimacy of science and medicine that works against this supposed 'legitimate state of human relations.' As Luce Irigaray has suggested, if woman is science's unknown, then her use of science will always be limited since she is the science's ultimate question: indeed, what a precarious position this leaves woman in, unable to reach a limitless science because she is its limit.[55] It is this limit that we, together with Saadawi, shall try to overcome.

In the early fiction that will be discussed here, Saadawi's three heroines are plagued by a familiar crisis of women who begin to question discriminatory behaviour based on gender. In *Two Women in One*, Bahiah is a young girl forced into medical school to please her family. Through the faculty of medicine she discovers the prejudices and paradoxes created and upheld in the name of patriarchal domination and damnation. Our unnamed heroine in *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* studies medicine feverishly, mistakenly believing that it is the tool that will make her equal to men. Lastly, *Firdaus: Woman at Point Zero*, is the story of a psychiatrist desperate to see an imprisoned prostitute awaiting her death sentence. All three women battle with the meaning of "womanhood" that has

been informed through their medical training, the only discourse on sex that remains readily available for them. All experience the horrors of a society that demands that women curtail their desire and forces them to lead an existence entrenched in discourses of obstruction and contradiction.

In the three texts, the women, in their rebellion, learn to use speech to understand their physicality and what it is that makes them diverse; they learn to question and shock. The moment of the performative speech act is rich in its unpredictability because when the women question they are in that same instant questioning the rule of silence.[56] In fact, the moment is scandalous because the bodily action of speech is not predictable in any mechanical way. The characters find themselves involved in complex linguistic dilemmas where speech acts as well as bodily acts are viewed in terms of their restrictions.[57] The relationship between speech and the body is one of tension. The regulations of speech are questioned in order to understand their impact on the body, or what Butler has termed 'injurious speech.'[58] In turn, the implication of the re-organisation of speech to the re-evaluation of the body is understood and valued. Speech may be bodily, yet the body exceeds the speech it occasions, and speech remains irreducible to the bodily means of its enunciations. The fact that Saadawi's characters question their speech, gender and profession points to a multiple exploration of performative moments as well as moments where certain aspects of gender actions are conceived of as performances (textual versus personal performance). I hope to elucidate these ideas in the forthcoming textual discussions. In short, at what point do the characters in the Saadawian texts question a sexual identity that is based on an incomplete medical knowledge? Also, at what juncture before medical training do they ask questions related to gender that remain unanswered, unfulfilled, leading as it were, *perforce*, to an investigation of gender matters through the discourse of medicine (a profession that promises an explanation)? What makes the characters seek, repudiate and finally overcome the monolithic glory of science/medicine, and to what end and at what expense?

2.4 SAADAWI - PHYSICIAN

Saadawi's works of fiction, in particular those examined here, are texts that use the pseudo-authority of medicine when it ceases to perceive itself as an "art of healing" but

understands itself as imposing a discourse that makes and breaks presumptions about the female body and consequently the traumas visited upon it. If, as gender theorists have concluded, gender and sex are essentially *not* the same thing but have been conveniently *collapsed* into the same thing to serve a/the dominant discourse, to what extent is a critical perspective on medicine and science necessary to display what can make the collapse successful?[59]

Though Saadawi's fiction cleverly offers a view into the body through medicine that would initially seem liberating, the emergence of an understanding of the body as sexual in the text questions the claims of a medicine that does not allow a pleasure of the body. As one of Saadawi's heroine's repeats: I tried to 'reach the pleasure but it was not there.'[60] The body then, now perceived to lack yet simultaneously desire, is brought to the foreground and begins to 'exceed the speech' and possibly even the text. Medical knowledge of the body is perceived first as enlightening, yet subsequently constricting (healing yet poisonous) and this self-same movement is the textual experience of Saadawi as author and the non-fictional experience of Saadawi as woman; to heal through the text and to re-understand medicine as healing.

In the Saadawian text the body, through its arduous affirmation of female desire, attempts to replace the body viewed hysterically. The scope of the text extends to the reader and the text ultimately acts as an alternative medicine that can heal *linguistic* injuries through their *re-articulation and performance*, in the hope, I feel, that they need not be re-articulated ever again.[61] The question that remains throughout is, how are the words that wound re-directed, and re-imagined, for if we are physically injured by words (bad medicine), or touched by the text (good medicine), we need to identify these moments and try to understand their power, their art. How does medical talk, in woman's fiction, among other kinds of talk, waver between the clinical and the erotic, the economic and the emotional? Malti-Douglas argues that Saadawi 'develops [a] sexual politics of medicine' by using it as a 'vehicle for women to regain their lost power' and by 'making it the focus of her own call for the integration of traditionally male and female qualities.'[62] Women want to understand the power of medicine in order to mould a *new* medicine, a caring and curing medicine. Saadawi struggles with her desire to be an artist in her writing and in her

role as physician. She fights to be human *and* physician, a struggle comparable to those of her fictive protagonists. The success of Saadawi is that she succeeds in admitting a certain humanity/humility into the order and practice of medicine and thereby of women within the medical profession understood as women *and* physicians.

The elevation of writing to a cure is an issue that Saadawi informs us has always had a deeply rooted resistance in the dominant culture. In a sense, all literature has suffered at the hands of empirical and scientific writing:

> this attitude toward literature can be explained as one result of the scientific revolution in the seventeenth century and the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, which gave birth to various versions of positivism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One of the characteristic elements of these developments is the elevation of science and 'scientific thinking': science has become *the authority*. According to the positivist spirit, literature does not fulfil the requirements set out by 'emperor science'; it is amusing, entertaining, and beautiful, but does not add to our 'knowledge.'[63]

In fact, Saadawi's 'writings reflect a rebellion against a biology considered destiny [...] medicine, science and the physician are placed in a dialectical relationship with the feminist problematic of gender and power.'[64] Medicine, science and the physician are re-thought and returned to their original pre-discursive pre-hegemonising role. Medicine re-understands its role as restorer, an art that cannot see what it produces, for, to use Gadamer's words again,

> there always corresponds a certain doubt about the existence or the efficacy of such healing skills. *Tyche* and *techne*, fate and art, stand in a particular tense and antagonistic relationship here.[65]

Tension and antagonism indeed figure deeply in the Saadawian text.

2.5 SAADAWI AND TARABISHI: ECHO AND NARCISSUS

One of the frequent accusations that Saadawi has dealt with throughout her writing career is that her work is autobiographical. This poses certain problems and ignites certain necessary discourses. She states that,

this is one of the problems facing woman writers. I have published a large number of stories about the lives of women, whether from the countryside or the city, and for every story there has been a critic who holds that the heroine is the authoress herself disguised in another persona.[66]

Elizabeth Grosz has also written, on an idea for a book, that,

originally, I had planned to write on *female sexuality* [...] and particularly on female orgasm [...] I abandoned this idea, partly because it seemed to me to be a project involving great disloyalty [...]. I realised that at the very most, what I write could be read largely as autobiography, as the 'true confessions' of my experience and have little more than anecdotal value.[67]

Both Saadawi and Grosz battle with the fact that as authors they have to allow for the experience to be that of the reader as well as that of the author, and thereby fear structural elements of their texts that would make it seem too much one or the other. Also, Tarabishi concludes, in writing on Saadawi's novels, that 'it is only to be expected that any positive action on the part of [the] heroines will be taken as a function of masculinity, aggression and violence or as a woman's rejection of her own femininity or nature.'[68] Tarabishi accuses Saadawi of 'replac[ing] divine law by Freudian law', thereby placing divine law on a par with medicine and nature.[69] These points constitute a summary of the critique that Tarabishi applies to the complex works of Saadawi: it is autobiographical, it is aggressive, it is not original. In turn, as suggested beforehand, Tarabishi uses Freudian concepts to interpret her work while comically referring to her work as a "giving in" to Freudian law. Saadawi, in her response at the end of Tarabishi's work *Woman Against Her Sex,* does argue for a more reasonable analysis where the social and political situation surrounding the production of certain literary figures needs to be taken into account as well as more recent feminist psychoanalysis or more language based arguments, for which she cites Lacan. Nawal El Saadawi does not however elaborate on this point (unwilling to create what she calls an artificial and constructed background for her creativity) and again opts to allow the texts to speak for themselves, or, to be interpreted (I will also attempt this to a lesser extent). The accusation that the work is autobiographical creates a space where the writer and the work conveniently converge and facilitate the work of the critic, thereby

enabling an essentialising review, yet again. By enforcing a particular reading of Saadawi's works Tarabishi entirely misses a possible empowerment and interprets aggression towards a certain type of "masculinity" in the works as aggression towards men rather than a challenge to masculinised institutions that harm both men and women. Tarabishi also misses the creative aspect of fiction and with it the fact that,

> It is perhaps no accident that the female physician becomes, in El Saadawi's early fiction,
> a literary mediator, a narrator who empowers other characters to speak.[70]

In Nawal El Saadawi's reply, she is most poignant when stating that Tarabishi is terrified of the prostitute in *Firdaus: Woman at Point Zero*, the prostitute who finally kills her pimp. Saadawi says; 'So what angers Tarabishi about this just reaction? It is because the perpetrator is a female and femininity stipulates that the female should smile sweetly into the face of her killer and coloniser?'[71] It is again suggestive and significant for our purpose that Saadawi is a female physician. She will have this added knowledge of the physicality of words, Butler's 'words that wound', wound the body as well as the psyche; for, to reiterate Ahmed, we are touched by words physically as well as mentally.[72] Saadawi can use this knowledge to further her feminist agenda (polemics) but she can also use it to understand women's experience so that it becomes a tool in the furthering of her own knowledge (reproduced as fiction). The performative aspects of Saadawi's texts as well as her preoccupation with the bodies within it serve to highlight a discussion on gender that is absent from the discourse of medicine where the body discursively exists, but not in terms of a sexuality.

Saadawi's reply to the work *Woman Against her Sex* is short and biting. Written in 1987, Saadawi clearly defines her problems with the published critical essays and convincingly defends her position and aims as author. Her first criticism is that the author, in making connections between her protagonists and herself, has enforced an autobiographical reading that she in no way intended. She claims that Tarabishi has

> adopted a Freudian analysis of sick, neurotic women in order to prove that my heroines
> are all, without exception, suffering from castration complex, phallic envy, the Oedipus
> complex, or any of the other psychological complexes likely to be suffered by a woman

who rejects her femininity. We are led to believe that, since Nawal El Saadawi is the author of these novels, it follows quite naturally that she shares her heroines' neuroses.[73]

Saadawi also finds it necessary to make a distinction between the methods that this male critic is using in relation to her precisely because he is male: 'I fully believe that had the novels been written by a man, Tarabishi would not have found the same need to identify the author with his heroes.'[74] She goes on to provide some details of her personal life to counter Tarabishi's arguments. Later, I should like to demonstrate, through a reading of her works, how this remains unnecessary since the obligation/aims of the author is not to sell a "truth." Saadawi remains the woman who traditionally has no authority yet who assumes to speak with authority to Tarabishi who remains the unconvinced male who wishes to be *smiled* upon *sweetly*. Saadawi however, strikes back *through her texts*, as she assumes the physician's role, the feminist/political role, and finally, the writer's role. She remains critically motivated to respond to this critical work because it comes after Tarabishi has 'read and translated a number of books by Freud.'[75] Saadawi, in her response, voices a reluctance to accept psychoanalytic readings of literary works when she claims: 'I have [one] reservation about the type of literary criticism which confuses art and psychology, and attempts to analyse literary characters in the light of certain theoretical concepts that properly belong in the realm of psychology. In my opinion, such analyses do not fall within the sphere of literary criticism.'[76] It emerges of course, later, that Saadawi is adverse to the *way* that Tarabishi has used psychoanalysis. Saadawi has often been accused of being too Westernised, and has always sought to disclaim this accusation.[77] In light of this, she claims that '[her] intention here [in this article] is to articulate the fundamental differences between [her] own viewpoint and that of Tarabishi [via Freud] regarding the concepts of the female and femininity, and those of love, sexuality and the psychology of women.'[78] Since this chapter focuses on the appellations of the feminine and performative speech acts (and written acts) that take on an authority that was not meant for them, it is important to keep this notion in mind. This will serve to argue how the performative has to act repeatedly if it seeks to permeate an already established authority that would invariably seek to subordinate a new voice before it has been fully articulated, before it has asked questions about freedom and justice. In her essay 'The Echo of Trauma and the Trauma of Echo', Judith Greenberg argues that the re-telling of traumatic events does not function within the cultural boundaries of normal time. 'Translating the trauma into language or

narration demands a negotiation of "indirect telling", or [...] a reliance upon echos.'[79] Retelling forces the 'returning words to be heard anew', or in our case, the repetitions do not allow us to forget. In other words, Saadawi will not stop talking merely because Tarabishi cannot listen, the paradox herein of course is that it is to Tarabishi that she needs to continue to repeat. In fact it is repetition and the idea of repetition (and we shall see these repetitive tropes in the text) that have become a tool for feminism. In opposition, Butler finds it difficult to locate a performative action that might have as its starting point the aim to repeat *but* with a distinct purpose. She writes that:

> No one has ever worked through an injury without repeating it; its repetition is both the
> continuation of the trauma and that which marks a self-distance within the very structure
> of trauma, its constitutive possibility of being otherwise. There is no possibility of *not*
> repeating. The only question that remains is: How will that repetition occur, at what site,
> juridical or nonjuridical, and with what pain and promise?[80]

The ability to be heard threatens to remain connected to the ability to repeat, an act that enforces the necessity of the repetition itself. Alongside this I would briefly like to consider the idea of woman's voice as echo, seemingly understood as such by Tarabishi, who understands a woman's voice as a voice with no initiative that echoes absorbed ideas.[81] Echo's punishment in the myth, as we understand it, is that she can only repeat.[82] By extension, this suggests that woman is not capable of original speech and so reiterates. In the Saadawian fiction however, repetitions of ideas within the texts (rather than reiterated concepts that Tarabishi argues for) seem to be moments of empowerment. In short, though woman seemingly can only occupy man's speech, she moves, through an insistent and repetitive performance, to empower the moment and turn it into an enabling performative one (a new discourse perhaps) where she comes to grips with her own repetitive qualities.

Though Saadawi is aware of developments in the area of psychoanalysis she is still reluctant to tell us exactly what it is that she has acquired from these theories, or if indeed they mean anything to her. In a sense, her method of keeping quiet over Western issues is to refer to them as little as possible. She cites briefly the well-known fact that Jacques Lacan had extended Freud's theories by bringing in the added element of

language/linguistics and their role in the development of sexuality. Language, it seems, and the way it is used and by whom is a preoccupation that Saadawi is aware of and seems to cite Lacan here in particular to point out that Tarabishi cannot understand her fully as his critical direction is too narrow. If he cannot see beyond his own subjective position, how can he comment on her feminist work? Also, ironically, his opposition to an extent is necessary for her work to be effective. Saadawi complains of the fact that

> Tarabishi maintains that women have no need to fight. Instead they should win the war by annulling it. This is an elegant turn of phrase, but he has omitted to tell us how women can possibly annul a war [a war of the sexes] when they still have no political, military or social power, whether collectively or individually. Without this power, how can a woman stop the war or annul it?[83]

Saadawi avoids (though she stresses the importance of knowing and re-working through one's history) subscribing to a long history of male philosophy and psychology which presupposes a superiority of the male mind, and counters this by re-thinking the inferiority of the body by women intellectuals. She signals a need once again to re-think the body through the mind, through philosophy. In contrast, through feminist re-readings, she tries not to repudiate the body but to hail it once more and restore it to a manageable entity. The Arab woman, and specifically the Arab feminist, requires a new respectful understanding of the body as well as the mind. Evidently, Saadawi understands this duality and tries to come to terms with it in her literature. As she herself proclaims, 'if the heroine of *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* hates sex or sexual relations with men who see her just as a sex object, this is not because she hates sex as such and lives without sex organs, struggling against a castration complex. It is rather that she prefers living without sexual satisfaction than to be enslaved by a man in order to achieve it.'[84] What are the probabilities of achieving sexual satisfaction if the feeling of enslavement is ever present and if the feeling of subjugation informs the subject? Saadawi concludes that 'it is surely unjust to judge a revolutionary hero or heroine as psychologically sick or neurotic merely because we have not studied the social and political conditions which forged such characters and which forced them to take the path of struggle and rebellion.'[85] In light of this anger and struggle, a sympathy and attempt to capture or be touched by the work becomes our limiting factor. In the absence of a universal theoretical and political

feminism that can cope with the polemics of a misunderstood activist, I propose a search into the narrative fiction of, in this instance, Arab "feminist" Nawal El Saadawi. In her works of fiction, too, I feel, certain complex ideas will become immediately accessible.

2.6 THREE EARLY NOVELS

I shall examine the works in specific categories in order to locate and legitimise significant performative moments in the texts; moments that highlight the influence of medicine and its foreclosing effects on the understanding of gender. Saadawi records that Tarabishi, in his reading of *Two Women in One,* remains 'astonished that the heroine [Bahiah] feels no pride when her breasts make an appearance, compensating her for the lack of a penis! She is supposed to feel "proud" of acquiring these lumps of flesh rather than the other lost piece. This is the 'narcissistic compensation' which any normal girl would feel, according to the gospel of Freud and Tarabishi.'[86] Saadawi continues:

> But the question is not that of substituting one lump of flesh for another. It is, rather, the
> political, social, moral and religious significance of this piece of flesh. Does the girl enjoy
> the same rights as the person who possesses the male organ when she actually acquires her
> own new lumps of flesh, the breasts? 'No!' On the contrary, her social rights and
> freedoms are reduced the moment she sprouts breasts and enters adolescence and puberty.
> She enjoys more freedom as a child than as an adolescent. Similarly, she has more rights
> as a young girl than when she is a wife or mother.[87]

Saadawi's objective, as far as the early novels are concerned, is to investigate these political, social and moral bodies that endow 'significance' to what she designates as 'this piece of flesh.' Saadawi makes evident to what extent these *interpretations* of the body, in its progression toward maturity, contribute to a restriction on 'social rights and freedoms.' The consequence of having breasts is only the first step in a series of restrictive bodily functions in terms of the possibilities of citizenship.[88]

2.6.1 *WHAT SCIENCE TEACHES US*

This section will concentrate on the social bodies that define a young girl's world in terms of her sexuality and gender as well as the sources available to her to understand these

terms and finally to question them. In *Two Women in One* (1975) Bahiah's disgust for her breasts begs the question: what has given her reason to feel such animosity towards her own body? A dissection class early on in the novel offers her the space to pose the question that informs her hatred of female composites; 'what does it mean to be a girl?'

> When Dr. Alawi heard the question, he dipped his metal forceps into the open stomach of the dead woman whose body lay before him and took out her womb: a small; pear-sized triangle of flesh soft on the surface and wrinkled within [...] 'As for man, here he is.' With the tips of his forceps, he held up the penis. She saw a wrinkled piece of black skin like old excrement.[89]

This response categorises woman and man for Bahiah. One response gives male organs a reproductive *and* erotic function while the other response allows female organs a reproductive site only. Sex is excluded as woman's parts are reduced to a womb in this first instance. Ultimately, the doctor (who practises a Westernised medicine) does not answer the ideological query hidden under the material question yet Bahiah senses that she has been denied some*thing.* In fact,

> the ritual function of these doctors in Western society is consolidated by their exclusive control of authoritative knowledge - highly specialised scientific knowledge - in spite of its conceptual emptiness/inability to explain.[90]

Bahiah is caught between being somewhat aware that she is discursively restricted by her body and yet ignorant of the capacity of this body, unable therefore, as yet, to shatter the impasse. Saadawi uses the confused intellect of a medical student to comment on the misconceptions that arise from ignorance and a restrictive sexual discourse. Although Bahiah works with the body she still finds it difficult to interpret the signs of "sexual tension" that surround her, though she feels she can identify *something,*[91]

> When an elbow edged sneakily into a girl student's breast, her lips would part almost imperceptibly. With an inaudible suppressed whisper the girl would say 'Ah....' and place her bulging satchel protectively over her chest.[92]

The satchel, bulging with anatomy books, ironically covers a breast, emblem of honour and purity. Sexual tensions soon find release in the narrator's voice, pre-empting a realisation on behalf of the protagonist,

> Each male student would unconsciously take a bite of his satchel and chew it. When he realised that is was only leather he would flush and try to hide the holes all over his bag with the palms of his hand. In the tram he could not stand it any more. He would find himself inadvertently pressed against some woman's breast. At midnight he would close his anatomy books and go to bed, but the body would refuse to sleep, for the stimulant would have congealed like the tip of a boil needing only the slightest touch to burst.[93]

Saadawi finds it impossible to distance the medical scene of instruction from the bodily/material reality. Sexual desire is understood as a sore (since it is not pedagogically situated at the site of pleasure) and sexuality becomes a disease incurable by the anatomy books that cannot effectively act as substitute. Sexuality is bequeathed hysterical importance which the readily available discourse, the medical, does not address directly, and simultaneously, through ignoring and neglecting to incorporate psychological alternatives, leaves the protagonist with little room for complex reasoning.[94] Saadawi however, sets up this one dimensional medical discourse only to later infuse it with sexual possibility. Pharmakon-as-poison is identified and contaminates the text. With Saadawi's use of animal/medical terms, the text almost transforms into a medical discourse itself, allowing for a chameleon effect where the lens of the physician views differently to the eye of the reader. The conflation of these two results in a text which tries to reduce medical knowledge whilst performing it. Thus, the girls at the medical school

> walked like reptiles, legs together, and if their thighs happened to separate briefly, they would quickly snap together again. The girls pressed their legs together as if something valuable might fall if they separated. They held their leather satchels bulging with anatomy books against their chests, hiding something valuable from the male students' gaze and sharp elbows.[95]

Again, women perform the medical discourse of *materiality* that is however used to make assumptions on gender and gender limitations. The girls use the anatomy books, containing exposures of the body, to cover up their bodies, whose exposure they fear. Though the two bodies are, figuratively speaking, the same, the cultural conceptions and

social structures that inform the medical students mark a distinction between the body that is medically exposed and the body that will culturally constitute itself as exposed or naked. In the act of covering their breasts with anatomy books, this self-same restriction re-enacts itself. Overwhelmed with the hypocrisy at the institution of medicine that leads to such suppressive and subjugated behaviour, Bahiah unconsciously questions the rigidity of a social system that does not recognise sexuality as its necessary component.

In *Firdaus: Woman at Point Zero* (1975), a psychiatrist, desperate to hear the story of a convicted prostitute who will not appeal her death sentence, is refused by the prostitute herself. Confused, the unnamed psychiatrist is further intrigued when the prison warder[96] claims that 'Murderer or not, she's an innocent woman and does not deserve to be hanged.'[97] The psychiatrist senses that this prostitute who has killed a man single-handedly has some deeper knowledge that has escaped her and when she is initially refused a meeting she mourns as though she had been denied a meeting with a lover. The notion that there is something to be learnt that may escape her is one that provokes fear and frustration. She is quick to claim that 'subjective feelings such as those that had taken hold of me were not worthy of a researcher in science [...] whatever the circumstances, a doctor was surely to be preferred to a woman condemned to death for murder.'[98] Obviously unconvinced by her own judgement, she rejoices when Firdaus finally changes her mind. In the desperate expectancy to hear Firdaus' words, the psychologist views the prison warden's talking mouth as a cavity that brings a 'gasping voice', not unlike one she had 'heard in [her] dreams [...] her 'mouth had grown bigger, and so had her lips, which kept opening and closing with a mechanical movement, like a swing door.'[99] In her excitement to experience Firdaus, the doctor finds herself unable to distinguish words, only her strong emotions find articulation, leaving her 'out of breath',[100]

> I was full of a wonderful feeling, proud, elated, happy [...]it was a feeling I had known only once before, many years ago. I was on my way to meet the first man I loved for the first time.[101]

Seconds away from the encounter, she tries once more to 'return to [her] normal state, to the realisation that [she] was a researcher in science, a psychiatrist [...]' but when face to face with Firdaus, finds it impossible.[102] The discourse and doctrines of science (here

medicine) seem to crumble in the face of experience and Firdaus takes on the qualities of a beloved object.

In *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* (first published in 1957), our heroine's (significantly nameless) first experience of a man's naked body is an encounter with a cadaver. Though just bones and skin, she finds a certain justice when, naked and helpless, man falls 'from his throne' and ends up on a 'dissecting table next to a woman', the only place where woman appears as potentially equal to man:[103]

> Science proved to me that women were like men and men like animals. A woman had a heart, a nervous system and a brain exactly like a man's [...] I was delighted by this new world which placed men, women and the animals side by side, and by science which seemed a mighty, just and omniscient god; so I placed my trust in it and embraced its teachings.[104]

In the absence of an-other discourse, the protagonist continues to embrace science as the great equaliser. Saadawi's novel traces the gradual realisation that science is not an independent institution operating in the name of some absolute truth. It can, and does function as any other hierarchical institution. A mis-reading of corpses as potential sites of gender equality results in the inevitable aggrandising of medicine that, in its study of the body-without-pleasure, falsely promises an unsexed research of bodily functions. For the protagonist though, the god that is science, however, degenerates rapidly into a 'merciless god.' When asked to examine a man who is reluctant to undresses, the protagonist senses the shame of the man in question. Impatient, the professor in charge slaps the patient into submission.

> The god of science knows no mercy and no shame. How harsh he was! How much I suffered in my worship of him! The body of a person lost all living respect and dignity and became exactly like a dead body under my gaze and my searching fingers, and disintegrated in my mind into a jumble of organs and dismembered limbs.[105]

The shock that accompanies the realisation that medicine retains, and to a degree, sustains a discourse of sex makes it obligatory for the doctor to eradicate these realisations before she can practise her art. Medicine produces the body as a specific discourse. Yet, the

realisation that medicine plays this double game, asking us to ignore sexual discourse in favour of body parts, results in its de-thronement. Medicine reveals its weaknesses and simultaneously loses its authority over sexual discourse.

2.6.2 *EATING.*

The understanding of certain behavioural impulses that are repeated become prevalent in the texts as they suggest an understanding of performative acts (in a later chapter I shall discuss the way that an understanding of the drives, or instincts, as charted by Freud, informs an understanding of compulsive sexual behaviour). These impulses are illustrated by Saadawi in her treatment of laughing and especially eating. In *Two Women in One*, the young doctor discovers a deep joy when she can finally laugh 'out loud' and remembers being told not to do so by her mother who argued that 'girl[s] shouldn't laugh loud enough for people to hear.'[106] As argued in Cixous' 'The Laugh of the Medusa', laughter is an obvious and esoteric physical emotion, expressing what a woman should not be.[107] The desire to laugh and to eat overwhelm the protagonist of *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* at the moment when she can do both:

> I forgot my mother's instructions about how a girl should eat, and the medical profession's warning about butter and cream, and stuffed my mouth with food. I drank cold water from an earthenware jug, making a loud noise and spilling water all down my clothes. I ate till my hunger was satisfied and drank till my thirst was quenched.[108]

Food here further signifies the restricted lives of women and, overwhelmingly, an economy over which they have no control. In *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, the protagonist abhors the 'hateful, constricted world of women with its permanent reek of garlic and onions [...] in [her] mind the smell of the kitchen was linked with the smell of a husband and [she] hated the word husband just as [she] hated the smell of the food [they] cooked.'[109]

In *Fridaus: Woman at Point Zero,* the psychiatrist listens to Firdaus tell of how she was forced into an unwanted marriage. Her husband's authority is symbolised by the pus that oozes from his open lip sore that she has to endure. She suffers his relentless spying on her eating habits, the quality and quantity consumed. Food, (as we saw) in *Memoirs of*

a Woman Doctor and *Two Women in One*, is negatively associated with marriage. Woman provides/is a commodity and is in turn provided for. Being overseen as she eats results in the impossibility of enjoying food and becomes inextricably linked with the site of marriage. Like the wife, food has to be controlled, and waste is not acceptable. As Firdaus says of her cruel husband: 'He kept looking at my plate while I ate, and if I left anything over he picked it up, put it in his mouth and after swallowing, quickly told me off for my wastefulness.'[110] It is only when Firdaus turns to prostitution and earns her own money that she is able to enjoy the food that finally belongs to her (as well as the partial freedom that comes with economic independence). Overwhelmed in this instance, Firdaus sits by a street side café and orders food for herself which she can enjoy. To obtain pleasure from food, unrestricted, is a pleasure as yet unequalled. Money can and does change her life and the experience of having it fills her with a 'feeling of wonder' and she is bemused by the fact that the ten-pound note could feel as 'illicit and forbidden as the thrill of sacrilegious pleasure.'[111] Firdaus thinks beyond the immediate physical relief that food provides. She expands the social and cultural meaning of food and claims that it is a delight like that of 'sacrilegious pleasure', like something forbidden that can finally be a source of pleasure. Food is synonymous with the men in the novels and their controlling power over woman as consumer. As Lyn Innes has noted in her essay 'Conspicuous Consumption: Corruption and the Body Politic in the Writing of Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo',

> the recurring analogy between eating, temptation, desire and corruption, of necessity implies the inevitability of corruption, since man must eat, food must be digested, and finally evacuated. Nowhere is there pleasure in eating: food can never be an end in itself, but is always a mere necessity for the poor, and a sign of status for the wealthy.[112]

In addition to this, Saadawi reminds us that as well as the poor, women must take their relationship to food as indicative of their status, of their enforced dependency. There is no pleasure in eating for any of the women in the early Saadawian fiction except when it is released from its connotation as a male activity, until it no longer tastes of male domination and the medical profession does little to dilute this overwhelming implication. In *Two Women in One*, Bahiah remembers her mother stuffing her with sweets: she would sp[it] them out when her mother turned around.'[113] Consequently, it seems, food is de-

valued when valued by the other who tries to force it or take it away, and only valued when equated with pleasure. The idea of authority and force, inevitably it seems, permeates the activity of eating. As Elzbeth Probyn has reaffirmed in her article 'Beyond Food/Sex: Eating and an Aesthetics of Existence', that *although* the act of eating is a physical event, 'food is a hugely powerful system of values, regulations and beliefs; in short a system of representation that hides its nature in appeals to immediacy and non-mediation.'[114] Therefore, though it seems to be an individual and biologically *necessary* act, eating and food may also function within the matrices of power and social values. Bahiah's mother may understand the offering of food as an act of love and sharing yet Bahiah cannot understand it *but* as an act of violence. Here again, the associations with being a female are connected to consumption and how this relates to feelings of marginality and discrimination on the basis of an as yet not understood discriminating factor, that of gender. As the protagonist of *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* tells us,

> my brother took a bigger piece of meat than me, gobbled it up and drank his soup noisily and my mother never said a word. But I was different: I was a girl. I had to watch every movement that I made, hide my longing for the food, eat slowly and drink my soup without a sound [...] because I was a girl. I wept over my femininity even before I knew what it was. The moment I opened my eyes on life, a state of enmity already existed between me and my nature.[115]

The phrase 'I wept over my femininity before I knew what it was' begs the examination of the power of this 'femininity' to precede linguistic understanding. Even before she is able to acquire self-knowledge, she is faced with the impossible task of understanding herself as 'feminine', something she knows nothing of.

2.6.3 *MATERNAL RE-UNION: A VACANT FANTASY*

All three protagonists significantly dream of a re-union with their mother, a re-union that is both impossible and improbable yet which permeates ideological moments in the lives of the women and collides argumentatively with the "body-as-singular" view of medicine. The mother figures in *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* and *Two Women in One* do not function as alternative sources of sexual knowledge to that derived from medicine. In fact, to a certain degree they re-enforce the attributes that their daughters feel medicine can

resolve. When Bahiah confides in her mother over something a little unusual, her mother 'laugh[s] that feminine laugh so typical of those times - holding back and letting go at the same time, producing a kind of staccato braying.'[116] This inability to laugh hurts Bahiah who feels that the mother she yearns to connect with is the mother who cannot laugh and who cannot understand her. Bahiah claims that she 'somehow knew instinctively that her mother's body was the only thing that understood her', yet her mother is powerless and cannot even derive pleasure from laughter without metamorphosing into an animal.[117]

Does the site of the mother's body become the impossible site of protection then?[118] Does this understanding of the impossibility of re-union emphasise the body single and thus the body alone in the face of an all encompassing yet different power? What the protagonist calls an 'eternal separation' is perhaps also a nostalgia for a possibility that is never actualised, a possibility that can only ever be a dream anyway? Yet the dream persists and blocks the enforced separateness that is the legacy of medicine as a technocratic enterprise 'based on principles of separation and mechanicity' as opposed to a holistic approach or philosophy of the whole rather than the parts.[119] Since we have no memory of this initial bond, it is always a relation at the site of the imaginary, a blissful haven that we can imagine holds all the answers and satisfaction, possibly replaceable in its tangibility by the search for romantic love with another woman/man (or a search for the maternal in man/woman).[120] Bahiah hopes for a unity she cannot have or ever attain, for disunity precludes the possibility of the understanding of its loss; Bahiah can never "weld", at least with the mother.[121] In fact, upon deciphering a certain tenderness in her mother's voice, our protagonist is ever more convinced that her mother, in speaking to her, '[defines] her body, demarcating its boundaries with the outside world' which only 'reaffirm[s] her independent existence and separate private being.'[122] Her mother's voice, in other words, has a material impact on her that she cannot ignore. Consequently, what Bahiah is beginning to understand about sexuality and about words and the body reminds us of the impossibility of the truth of the doctor's utterances at the dissecting table. Her entire physical existence is beset by the lack of closeness and openness that she seeks with this body that she has lost. Being fed takes on great importance as Bahiah interprets this as her mother's avoidance of real issues; 'her mother had never understood what Bahiah wanted. She used to stuff her with food. When she wasn't looking, Bahiah would spit the

food out.'[123]   As Bahiah becomes more intellectually and emotionally demanding her mother concentrates on providing sustenance for a physical existence only. In this case food acts as a medicine and resembles this institution whose aim is to keep the body, in its *most* material sense, *alive*. Irrespectively, Bahiah continues to experience and imagine her mother through key moments in the texts where, unexpectedly, the maternal image looms. Caught in a demonstration for the freedom of Egypt, Bahiah joins the crowd. This moment has the potential to be a significant moment in her life, a moment that Bahiah seeks. She rushes to acquire what she assumes she has so far lacked. This demonstration promises a unity it cannot fulfil, and which in fact conceals an underlying political discourse that seeks to mobilise women in nationalist and anti-colonialist situations.[124] However, Bahiah does not yet view it as such,

> So great was the chorus that at first she could not make out the words of the slogan. Then the word 'Egypt' rang out. Not the 'Egypt' she was used to hearing from her father, mother, teacher, or fellow students, but 'Egypt' in that strong mighty voice that filled the world and shook the earth and the skies. A shiver passed through her body and her hair stood on end. She felt a soft, warm motion under her eyelids like tears, and childhood images flashed before her eyes, rippling and dissolving as if under water: her mother's warm breast and the smell of milk as she lay in her arms.[125]

It is important that the image of the nation is immediately followed by the image of the mother's breast. Where and to whom does Bahiah belong? Does the conflation of the two moments irreversibly destroy the possibility of a unity with either? If the two moments slip into each other so easily does this denote the inherent unsteadiness of them as signifiers? Like the "pharmakon", the nation and the maternal offer conflicting promises they cannot deliver. Essentially, the material ties to both remain imaginary yet destructive in Bahiah's case. As she struggles with meaning and direction, Bahiah grasps for whatever seems to offer these. Though not medicine (already rejected), the maternal and the nation are both equally impossible wish fulfilments (although they erode the monolithic force of medicine as poison). 'With one heart and a single set of features' the people cry out that 'Egypt shall be free!'[126]   And yet, Bahiah imagines her mother at the moment that she dreams of the nation. Although this would seem a patriarchal triumph - to understand the national as the maternal is to invest emotion in it and doubly enforce allegiance to it - none of these artifices inform Bahiah's sexuality and she remains unsatisfied.

Similarly, Firdaus as a young girl in *Firdaus: Woman at Point Zero* wonders if she can still recognise her mother:

> My mother was no longer there, but instead there was another woman who hit me on my hand and took the mug away from me. My father told me she was my mother. In fact, she looked exactly like my mother, the same long garments, the same face and the same way of moving. But when I used to look into her eyes I could feel she was not my mother. They were not the eyes that held me up each time I was on the point of falling.[127]

Firdaus' mother is either a broken woman, unable to recognise her own child, or has died and been replaced. The psychiatrist understands (through Firdaus' story) that women have indeed become interchangeable, no longer recognised for anything but their biological femininity and its associations (for what they can provide). The mother, significantly, can be any woman and all women in the sense that they cannot fulfil the needs of the child. Broken and incapable of offering anything to their children, the older women in Saadawi's works escape the role of nurturer. They emerge as inescapably seeped in a restricting tradition that promotes husband seeking as the only means of obtaining self-worth. In a remarkable scene, Bahiah's grandmother stares at her sprouting breasts and thinks that this is now the right time for her to 'put on [her] cream dress and go and say hello to [her] father's guests in the sitting-room.'[128] Bahiah wonders 'why the cream dress? It was new and I hated it. It had a strange gather at the front *which made my breasts look larger.*'[129] (emphasis my own) Bahiah only seems to have a semi-knowledge of what it is that she is being asked to exhibit. She refuses to wear the dress and thinks she can win approval through her intelligence. As her father sings her academic praises, the friends throw 'inquiring glances [...] all over [her] body before coming to rest on [her] chest.'[130] Disappointed and shocked by the lack of interest in her intellectual abilities, Bahiah imagines the moment of her conception as an 'involuntary' act played out 'in a random moment of pleasure.'[131] Sex becomes understood as a random and 'involuntary act.' Bahiah transforms the reaction of the men to her and her reaction to them to create a template of how sexual relations must function. Her disgust at the men's reaction forms the basis of a distaste for sex and she repositions herself against all other women that 'believe in worthless trivia.'[132] In contrast, Bahiah repeatedly dreams of her mother, a

figure who can offer an alternative where her study of medicine and her social relationships have not:

> She wanted to curl up like a foetus. Her body shook with a strange violent yearning for security. She longed to curl up in her mother's womb, to feel security, silence, with no sound or movement. Her mother's big arms embraced her with amazing strength, pulling her body towards her once more. With all her might she tried to make their bodies one, but in vain. The eternal separation took place in a fleeting moment never to return.[133]

The safety of the silent womb, disturbed only perhaps by the echoes of the foetus, is as desirable as it is impossible. This dream differs vastly from that image offered in the dissecting room. This image of the womb is one re-appropriated, more emotive and thereby acceptable and desirable as a positive motif. Woman is not reducible to the womb but woman can appropriate the womb in order to accommodate certain needs, even if in an imaginary haven.

2.6.4 *RE-DIRECTING THE DESIRE*

Sameness and repetition are stifling emotions to all three protagonists. Bahiah's (in *Two Women in One*) as yet unfocused desires overwhelm her though she tries to fill the gap (with friends, lessons) yet finds she always wants something 'new […] all the time', something else.[134] In *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, an immature erotic encounter between the protagonist and her cousin is 'transformed into a wild fury.'[135] After he kisses her, she hits him on the face in defiance. A sense of despair and helplessness follows, coupled with a comprehension that though she has no sexual knowledge, she desires it and negates it simultaneously, naming it a 'stubborn ghost' that she will defy.[136] Her body, which lacks something that she cannot identify, brings with it a type of shame; the shame of not knowing exactly what it is she desires. This shame frequently overrides the desire for knowledge because the fear of shame associated with the lack of knowledge is too much to bear. Eventually, the simplest answer is to negate the existence of this 'stubborn ghost.'

Again, it is the study of medicine, or so the protagonist thinks in *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, that will explain and take away the shame:

> medicine was a terrifying thing. It inspired respect, even veneration, in my mother and
> brother and father. I would become a doctor then, study medicine, wear shiny steel-
> rimmed spectacles [...] I'd make my mother tremble with fright and look at me reverently;
> I'd make my brother terrified and my father beg me for help. I'd prove to nature that I
> could overcome the disadvantages of the frail body she'd clothed me in, with its shameful
> parts both inside and out.[137]

Medical knowledge is sought because it can promise a knowledge of the body where there is none. However, as illustrated here, medicine is called upon to explain the apparent 'disadvantages' that nature has bestowed onto females. Here, medical powers are called upon not to explain feelings of 'shame' or 'lack', but to cover them up, seemingly with a powerful ideology.

Similarly, Bahiah, in *Two Women in One*, is disgusted with the 'suppressed feminine laughter [that sounds like] gasps of eternally unquenchable deprivation.'[138] Her initiation into medicine is originally understood as that which will mask this deprivation. Medicine, she primarily hopes, will free her from the homogenising culture that envelopes her society, a society ignorant of or submissive to the underlying powers that mobilise it. Initially, Bahiah sees nothing but "sameness." She views others and observes that '[they looked as though] they bore some eternal burden', is this the burden of the same?[139] Through diagnosing sameness she prognoses herself as different, different in her search for an identity based on fact. By identifying the other as *not* an individual, she creates her own individual insightful self, the self that sees that all 'mannerisms, gestures and meanings were alike to the point of suffocation' and that it was as if all 'human beings [had been] transformed by some potent power, by some terrible, non-human force that had turned them into other, inhuman beings.'[140] In a sense, Bahiah views the performed element of human existence in everyone but herself. By privileging thought, Bahiah believes that through viewing medicine as a source of knowledge, she can, in defiance, take on a masculine role (resting one leg on the table as the other firmly rests on the ground) unlike the other girls who '[press] their thighs together to protect something they were afraid might fall.'[141] Typical of Saadawian irony, Bahiah feels firm on what is actually shaky ground.

The presence of a void, of something that cannot be expressed (something that cannot be defined by the gender distinctions that are always already in place), seems to permeate the text. This void acts, I think, to offer spaces for alternatives that struggle to emerge but cannot. This "something" promises an answer that is unknown in terms of its complexity. However, it is something that cannot be revealed, *yet* seems to be the key to female existence and pleasure. As Bahiah says of her mother,

> Somewhere deep in her core she was hiding something, burying it in the folds of her very
> self and binding it with a layer of her insides, turning it invisible, keeping its motion ever
> hidden and eternally secret.[142]

The void triggers diverse reactions in the three women. Though they all struggle to find meaning in science each has to experience distinctly a different creativity. I want to suggest at this point that none of the resolutions actually point to a subversive victory (in a socio-political sense). Creativity develops on an individual basis and each women has a personal experience that will ensure a personal sense of achieved individuality. Saadawi's heroines ultimately view their lives as a series of inauthentic performances. They do finally arrive at an experience that they believe to be authentic (even if only imagined to be so).[143] The common experience that is arrived at is that medicine is a discursive operation that takes preconceived notions of gender a priori. Therefore, in the absence of any other sexual knowledge, repressed in the cultural system at hand (proved by the misapprehension that science/medicine will provide the answers) it is significant that the protagonists sense the lack of a humanity underlying this system that seeks to explain the unexplainable, that is, sexual difference. Creativity as we will discover, becomes an alternative that originates in the body. Creative actions mark a stage in the healing process as each woman embarks on a journey toward re-understanding her possibilities as a woman that are not predetermined, and to a certain extent, redefine their role as physicians. I propose an examination of the texts individually to trace this development.

2.7 TWO WOMEN IN ONE

I want to argue that Bahiah emerges as a woman usurped by the law that cannot allow for a threatening member. Survival of the law in the first instance is threatened, and

since she does not arrive at the significant juncture where art and medicine coincide, her attentions are drawn elsewhere, firstly to painting, and finally to the nationalist cause. Bahiah believes that art is a product that she needs to produce from her body and that needs to be acknowledged, firstly by herself in its objectivity and secondly by others in their recognition of her. Through pursuing her artwork, Bahiah finds one way to express herself using her body. She performs onto canvas or a piece of paper and it feels as real as touching her body: 'She could do it with a pen-point on a blank sheet of paper; she could touch it with her fingertip just as certainly as she could touch her body, feeling its external boundaries under her clothes.'[144] Bahiah feels the contours of herself with this act of drawing. By imagining outlines, she then performs them onto the paper, in turn re-defining herself as a being with boundaries and shape, features distinguishable from other features. In this way, I feel, she distances herself from the clinical image of woman as a womb lodged between forceps. This knowledge emerges as one that provides direct contact with the body as a surface of experience that a medical knowledge alone cannot provide for her. Bahiah gradually recognises, however, that although her artwork can return her body to her, it cannot offer all the recognition that she desires. Though she perceives this art as a bodily act that helps define her, it cannot recognise her (or interpellate her) as it remains a part of her. The mis-recognition of science leaves a strong desire to be correctly recognised. Bahiah seeks to be sought and for some other to recognise her newly conceptualised/recognised self. Soon after setting up an art exhibition at the medical school, she hears someone call out her name. The freshness and strangeness of this experience is described and delicately reveals the complex nature of interpellation:

> The name sounded as if it belonged to someone else. She leapt up from her stool. As she did she realised that she had a body of her own, one she could move and shake without other bodies moving and shaking. She also had a name of her own, and when that name was called she would look up in surprise […] someone was calling her own name, *selecting* her among millions of other bodies, *singling* her out among billions of other creatures floating in the universe.[145] (emphasis my own)

To be recognised is here revealed as an important agent in one's own recognition, a reminder of one's own material existence in opposition to another. In a sense, this act of recognition makes the subject, as Judith Butler explains when she concludes that,

we may think that to be addressed one must first be recognised, but here the Althusserian reversal of Hegel seems appropriate: the address constitutes a being within the possible circuit of recognition and accordingly, outside of it, in abjection.[146]

Prior to the address, Bahiah does not understand herself as an object of desire. The performative moment of address, of reconstituting the subject by reminding them of their materiality, in turn serves to place them at the site of desire. Bahiah feels that this power, the power of naming, is a 'dreadfully potent force' capable of drawing one out of one's self as it were, forcing you to recognise the other and yourself through them.[147] So frightened is Bahiah by this experience that she runs away in bewilderment and confusion. Who is she? What is she? Which Bahiah is she if not 'Bahiah Shaheen, hard-working, well-behaved medical student, daughter of Muhammad Shaheen, superintendent of the Ministry of Health.'[148] Likewise, Bahiah's most confusing experience occurs when she is appelled a 'girl'; 'Who told you that I am girl', she asks, as though somehow grasping that only when called a 'girl' does she effectively become one. She relentlessly continues to ask the question 'Who told you that I'm a girl?'[149] Similarly, though menstruation could productively signal womanhood, for Bahiah, it only sets her up as a spectacle, further reinforcing the unacceptable functions of womanhood. When Bahiah experiences her first cycle, she recalls the policeman by her house staring at her and 'sniffing the blood', causing her to run home in fear.[150] Even the law sniggers at woman's functions. Ignorance of her body leaves Bahiah at the mercy of a merciless society. In their article, 'Sex and Patriarchy: Gender Relations in *Mawt al-Rajul al-Wahid 'Ala Al-Ard* (*God Dies by the Nile*) Alamin Mazrui and Judith I. Abala, claim that 'womanhood, [is] at once the most critical in terms of the sheer centrality of her role in society, and the most despised and downtrodden in the patriarchal order of human relations.'[151] Although Marui and Abala are discussing another of Saadawi's novels, their comments here reflect on how Bahiah concludes why 'human beings hide their real desires: because they are strong enough to be destructive; and since people do not want to be destroyed, they opt for a passive life with no real desires.'[152] Only when she sees herself in someone else, when that person calls out her name, can she appreciate herself, yet she is still terrified. Is this an act that negates the other thus making it a narcissistic encounter, and an empowering one at that? Bahiah feels that only these recognising eyes can keep her from feeling 'lost among the sameness of bodies [...] reminding her that she had a body of her own [...] with

clear lines distinct from the outside universe by their own external boundaries.'[153] The

intensity of this feeling opens Bahiah to the possibility that this may be the end of her

search, and yet this frightens her too (amplifying the hegemonic power of discursive law).

This notion of the 'end' of knowledge also forms the medical discourse that implies a

finite knowledge of gender and sex. The ability of Bahiah to conceptualise an infinite

possibility is crucial to the collapse of finite medical knowledge as it presents itself.

Gadamer, in *The Enigma of Health* has made the crucial insight that 'though science is

essentially incomplete [...] it [the practise of science] is obliged to treat the knowledge

available at the time as complete and certain.'[154] However, this conclusion, again, is one

that is hidden behind the mask of certainty that medicine upholds. For Bahiah, the

possibility of any complete knowledge would make it impossible to live with the

deception. If Bahiah is to relinquish deception, then the fear is that she will indeed be

annihilated in terms of her place in her society: 'she stood at the heart of danger itself', at

the cross-roads of deciding whether to live or die.[155] Her disappointment with the futility

of it all culminates in her internal questioning of whether any of the medical students have

an appreciation of beautiful things; medicine here is divorced from its creative possibility

and ultimately from its healing possibilities. Bahiah struggles to make art important and

notes others' lack of appreciation: 'what good was a painting, a story or a piece of music

to them?'[156] Bahiah, unlike the protagonist in *Memoirs*, finds no place for the beauty of

creativity in the dissecting halls; all she finds is the destruction of the human body.

Bahiah is caught in what Vicki Bell, in a critique of Butler, has called a strategy of

mimesis. Bahiah fears repeating her imagined liberation and turning it into subversive

action because she senses that it will be too dangerous (see above). It is a strategy that

remains too threatening to the hegemonic structures for it to work and this is emphasised

in Bahiah's inability to move beyond her feeling of imminent danger. She remains an

example of a strategy doomed to fail in its radicalism. I want to argue that this is what

Saadawi tries to suggest. Rather than fashion a productive subversion she displays the

impossibility of a successful subversion in order to highlight the immovable rock that is

the hegemonic structure.[157] This is exemplified in the following scene:

> One move from him would have been enough to carry her to the end. But she had always
> been afraid of ends. She sensed the danger of arrival and realised the impossibility of

going back where she had come from. She had always known that, in some magical way, she would become another person, someone other than Bahiah Shaheen - she would become her real self [...] she moved away from him [and when she tried] to turn away he stopped her, saying angrily, 'Bahiah Shaheen will always prevent you from attaining any goal. You will always stand in the middle of the road and fall into the trap of the mundane, like countless millions of others.[158]

The beloved object, in his effort to jolt Bahiah's stagnant and hesitant mind, gives her the keys to his apartment and asks her to come to him. Holding on to his keys is likened to holding on to some deep dark secret; it is described as though it were the virginity of honourable girls, something that may accidentally 'leap into view' and simultaneously expose itself and its owner. The key offers her some symbolic sense of the possibility of bonding: 'She was sure of this one conclusion, that only human choice gives this bond any meaning.'[159] In choosing to bond, the power lies in also letting the other single you out 'among thousands of others.'[160] However, again, once in the apartment, Bahiah finds it impossible to disengage from the image of her father and what he would think of what she is doing: 'He thought she was unlike other girls, that her body was unlike other girls', in fact, that she had no body at all, no organs, especially no sexual organs liable to be aroused or stirred by someone of the opposite sex.'[161] Again, like Firdaus, it is a foreign but ultimately authoritative morality that will in the end judge her. What breaks the terrifying vision is the sad realisation that her father is himself dominated, making him momentarily the same as her. Bahiah is ashamed of her father and his ignorant partaking of this stifling sameness. Only this understanding (the humiliation of the other) leaves her free to enjoy the pleasure of the sexual experience. When Bahiah and Saleem make love, she feels a dissolving of two into one and Bahiah is momentarily not two women in one. The 'intertwining' described is a long-awaited fulfilment, a union that brings with it a temporary forgetting of sexual difference.[162] In light of this possibility, sex can be a *creative* act, a bodily act that is neither medical nor artistic, yet which moves beyond these two in order to experience the body in another way, a healing of the body through the body: 'Only with great difficulty could she distinguish her body from his' and Bahiah feels as though the words 'I love you' are terribly inadequate and that only 'silence could express what she really felt.'[163] In a sense, the language of material experience is inadequate, she lives an experience that escapes the binding performative qualities of

gender and partakes of the language of silence. In the place of *them* is the *possibility* of them that requires endless repetition and endless possibility. 'I love you' may fall short, but what are we to replace it with? She feels that the 'words between people were no longer adequate, that she must coin new ones, a whole new language.'[164] This desire to coin a new language is reminiscent of a radical feminism. Though it may appear as logically necessary, is it possible to create a new language to describe this moment of unity yet fluidity, defined yet endless in possibility? A moment or two later, however, they are again separate bodies, two: 'She ran her hand over her body and found that she had a body of her own, separate from his.'[165] She goes home, happy but defeated in her separateness, knowledgeable of the fact that she cannot fulfil the quest for unity between self and self-other. Does Bahiah relentlessly look for a product/proof? In this case does love not function like medicine, where there is no object that in a sense *proves* its existence?

Later in the text, Bahiah is forced into an arranged marriage. Taught to hate and fear her genital organs, Bahiah is confused over what she can term a sexual encounter. Thus, though she has made love to Saleem, she does not acknowledge their relationship as a sexual one in terms of how she has been taught to perceive sex. Though the relationship with Saleem is physical *as well*, it does not collapse into the perception of sex as dirty and sinful, hence the confusion that she feels when her family assume that the way to tame her is to marry her off: 'Since she did not know what was normal, she imagined that sexual desire was abnormal.'[166] Again, Bahiah is torn between a discourse and her own emotions. Taught to be disgusted by sex she becomes disgusted with her parents, who are false in their sexual doctrine, enforcing a strict stance to protect fiercely their own desires: 'She later realised that her parents thought of nothing but sex and imagined that their offspring were just like them.'[167] On the day of her wedding, images of death pervade as everything about the ceremony symbolises destruction, the law and patriarchy. Bahiah feels as though she has been auctioned off and like her counterpart in *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, describes her marriage as signing her death warrant. She feels as though her dress is 'smothering' her and its tail folds 'like a coffin.' Bahiah notes that the 'the bridal stage, surrounded by roses, looked like the grave of the unknown soldier' and the drums sound like 'funeral strains.'[168] When they are ready to proceed to the new house,

Bahiah feels as though the car that will take her there is indeed a police car, no better than the car that was responsible for taking her to the police station. This perception of the car re-enforces the paternal law that she has been unable to relinquish; she is 'property', to be moved and traded at will.[169] Once home, Bahiah soon understands that she is now expected to perform the role of dutiful and sexual wife. She is quick to capture the absurd nature of expectations surrounding women and their sexuality. As she moves towards the pre-prepared wardrobe, Saadawi writes that Bahiah

> found night-dresses with cut-away fronts, backs and bellies, kinky underwear, perfumes, red, white and green bottles of make-up, eye brushes, slippers with red roses on them, hand towels, toilet soap, hair-removing cream, deodorants, and massage and body oils. *Women's tools in their married life are sexual.* A girl moves from her father's house to a husband's and suddenly changes from a non-sexual being with no sexual organs to a sexual creature who sleeps, wakes, eats and drinks sex. With amazing stupidity, they think that those parts that have been cut away can somehow return, and that murdered, dead and satiated desire can be revived.[170] (emphasis my own)

Women, she surmises, are expected to add and subtract pieces of their body as though the process were a surgical one. How can desires be 'cut' and 'revived'? The surgical aspect of medicine, the removing and adding of body parts, is compared to the impossible task of successfully doing the same for emotions and desires, as well as the brutality and violence with which it is expected to be done. Ultimately Bahiah's resistance to these expectations lead her to shun her new husband's sexual advances. Her infamous retort resounds like an echo throughout: 'Anyway, who told you that I'm a woman?'[171] Bahiah steals out the next morning, knowing that there will be scandal when her father comes 'looking for [the] blood' that he will not find.[172]

Is this the culmination of what woman is supposed to be, Bahiah wonders? Ultimately, she gives up the life of involuntary marriage and the advances of a man she does not love, and walks away from the hypocrisy that surrounds her in order to enter a reckless life that fulfils no need. After finding out that Saleem has been imprisoned for nationalist activity, she joins the underground nationalists and helps them publish their illegal pamphlets calling out for a free Egypt: 'People of Egypt! Awake! Throw open your windows, open your eyes and see the chains coiled around your necks!', a phrase that

could well be used to conceptualise her own life.[173] The move from the personal to the public begs the question: can Bahiah meet the demands of a nation that requests more sacrifice. After every institution has failed her, Bahiah clutches for meaning anywhere and everywhere. Suppression is everywhere and it is the cause of hypocrisy and hatred. Even the elderly man who lives on her street cannot withstand desire, though he ironically still pretends to lie down to pray: 'when he bowed down, his body touched the wool of the carpet: he would be overcome by suppressed desire, and his old eyes would search the neighbourhood for any plump body.'[174] In desperation, yet a strange kind of elation, Bahiah decides that she will 'not return to the ordinary faces, would not sink into the sea of similar bodies or tumble into the graves of ordinary life.'[175] Ultimately, Bahiah surrenders herself to the law in a hope to be reunited, on some level, with Saleem. She, unable to make certain reconciliations in the absence of the lover figure, gives in to the law that has taken him. The institution of medicine is not embraced as a possible solution, yet its paradoxical promises are revealed as a non-solution. Bahiah is defeated yet does not allow herself to live within the fiction that she has revealed. The text performs her disappointment by not allowing her to envision a different ending, a new possibility. Saadawi's novel *Two Women in One* is testimony to the difficulty in revealing the fiction that is womanhood. In a sense, Bahiah cannot envision a brighter future for herself because the shock is too overwhelming, the sense of loss too immense. The text, in offering no alternative, performs the destructive as well as the creative forces that it is capable of, as the discourse of medicine informs a destructive knowledge of gender and sexuality when it collapses them into one.

2.8 FIRDAUS: WOMAN AT POINT ZERO

The psychiatrist, through the experience of Firdaus, the convicted killer in *Woman at Point Zero*, understands the power of a discourse that can destroy the material body. Although she begins with a semi-defined certainty of her role as physician (a certainty overcome with reason) she is lulled into another woman's experience through the art of storytelling. In simplistic but not unimportant terms, Firdaus *tells* her story to the psychiatrist and circumvents reason only in order to abolish it. Though the psychiatrist is in essence there to view a case, she and Firdaus significantly change roles during the act/art of the story. Thereby, it is difficult for me to see what Malti-Douglas has termed an

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'empowerment' that Firdaus achieves in the presence of the physician. On the contrary, I would like to argue that by listening to the narrative of Firdaus the physician is then able to transform what she has heard into writing. This ensures that Firdaus' story will be read and heard. The term 'empowerment' however, suggests that without the physician, Firdaus' story would be invalid, unheard. Though this is, strictly speaking, materially correct within the confines of the novel, it is the physician who is empowered by Firdaus' story, as we shall investigate. Firdaus' story obliges the physician to *question* what it is that her own training has taught her about sex and gender roles. As Laderman and Roseman argue in their introduction to *The Performance of Healing*, 'all medical encounters, no matter how mundane, are dramatic episodes. The protagonists, often without conscious thought, play out their respective roles of patient and healer [...].'[176] The psychiatrist in a sense, listens to the story in order to understand herself. Firdaus tells her story on the eve of her execution, (thereby, as I understand it, dramatising her death).

Interestingly, Firdaus begins her story by revisiting her earliest sexual sensation. This situates her story within the framework of a somewhat lost pleasure that she seeks. As a now circumcised woman, Firdaus' recollections of bodily pleasures are vague and infantile yet serve as a possibility against which she can measure her later failed attempt to 'reach the pleasure that [is] not there.'[177] Aware that there is some material aspect of her body that has been removed and which she associates with pleasure, yet unaware of the exact connections, Firdaus is doomed to circulate in domains that forever question the possibilities of retrieving this lost indicator of sexuality. As Judith Butler has insightfully theorised,

> what is refused or repudiated in the formation of the subject continues to determine that subject. What remains outside this subject, set aside by the act of foreclosure which founds the subject, persists as a kind of defining negativity. The subject, as a result, is never coherent and never self-identical precisely because it is founded and, indeed, continually refounded, through a set of defining foreclosures and repressions that constitute the discontinuity and incompletion of the subject. [178]

A certain understanding of sexuality is foreclosed at the site of Firdaus' circumcision that cannot be effectively retrieved. Once she moves from her native village to Cairo (to be

educated and to care for an elder uncle) she catches sight of herself in the mirror for the first time. Shocked and repulsed by how closely she resembles her parents, Firdaus is 'filled with a deep hatred for the mirror' that does not reflect the image of herself that she retains.[179] This disjunction between what Firdaus *feels herself to be* (her authentic instinct) and what she perceives she is being viewed *as* (the self that knowingly sees itself as a performer) is one of the most important impasses that Firdaus finds herself at. Caught between a self-image and another series of public images, she struggles to maintain a hold on reality as she perceives it. In a sense, it is intriguing textually that Firdaus later becomes a prostitute, constantly trying to find this pleasure yet by default doomed not to by the constitution of the prostituted sexual act. On one occasion Firdaus is forced to acknowledge a pleasure that she does not feel. This is significant as a false jouissance is imposed, because it figures, imaginatively, in the orgasm of the other - the narcissistic fact that the other can give pleasure, even in paid sex, becomes part of the sexual exchange yet not part of the experience for the prostitute Firdaus. As Saadawi has pointed out in relation to the prostitute-heroine in Arab literature in her polemic *The Hidden Face of Eve,*

> It is ironic [...] that the woman prostitute plays a much more important role in Arabic literature than that which is accorded to the pure and virtuous woman. It is as though purity and virtue are not attractive enough to evoke interest, whether in real life or in the stories of men and women conjured up by an artist's imagination. The prostitute seems to symbolise real woman, woman without a veil or mask. She is a real woman for she has lifted the mask of deceit from her face and no longer feels a need to pretend that she is in love, or to simulate virtue and devotion.[180]

Is Saadawi suggesting that the performative can indeed be ironic, rendering itself ludicrous in its obviousness, catching itself out? If the essence of the prostitute, someone with no purity or virtue, is the real essence of woman (because she has taken off the mask of falseness) then what of the prostitute who enacts what is desired of her? The prostitute shows the performance to be just that, a performance. What seems to emerge from this argument is that ideas of love, virtue and devotion are what the prostitute strips from her face, thus making her real. This would suggest that virtue and purity are qualities that are not available within the matrix of "womanhood" and/or "marriage" and that, essentially, all women are prostitutes. Of course, this is a generalisation that is ludicrous in its summation. What I am arguing is that if the only representation of woman uninhibited is

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the prostitute and the prostitute herself performs what is desired of her, then how can we distinguish authenticity from gender performance (or do we take the extra step and assume there is no authenticity? Is this an impasse that we are willing to take on?). I feel that Saadawi ridicules the fiction that requires such a complicated configuration.[181] Surely love, virtue and devotion are not always emotions of pretence, yet who ridicules them most but the prostitute who can apply them at will? Who else can perform these qualities in an imaginary exchange in a full understanding of her role but the prostitute? It is through this act that I feel Firdaus emerges as an agent of 'empowerment' exposing a knowledge of performance.

In a particularly poignant incident in the text, Firdaus' aunt and uncle, after deciding on an arranged marriage for her, begin to have sex in the next room, fully aware of Firdaus' presence. As their movements become more and more frenzied so Firdaus seems simultaneously to move. This scene is bizarre in its identification; desperate to understand, Firdaus moves along in copycat fashion until she is merely a reflection. Interestingly, Firdaus copies because she has no experience of her own, she performs something she can only vaguely understand yet has some idea that it is linked to her upcoming marriage. Consequently, Firdaus finds herself married, mimicking the standard wifely roles, aware of her situation yet formed by it in the absence of an alternative. Firdaus soon runs away from the impossible situation with her husband and is taken in by a man who seems to sympathise with her desolate circumstances.[182] After installing her in his home as a servant, he begins to sleep with her *and* begins to call her names such as 'street walker' and 'low woman' when she asks him to find her work.[183] Eventually, Firdaus escapes into the comfort of the street because she is unable to conceptualise herself as a low woman or a street walker and not necessarily because she is sexually exploited; significantly, it is at this point that she walks out. As she tell us, until *named* a low woman Firdaus had never *imagined* herself to be one. Instead, her self image was one of a used and abused woman with little education and no opportunity to gain work. Being appelled a 'low woman' makes her confront the fact that this is possibly what she is viewed as, an image that she in no way had attached to herself. The pain and irreversible damage of this form of hate speech is to set the mould for Firdaus' further encounters with the ongoing linguistic abuse. As Butler has argued, 'If we are formed in language, then that formative

power precedes and conditions any decision we might make about it, insulting us from the start, as it were, by its prior power.'[184] Firdaus is eventually picked up by a madam who, though she is tender and takes care of Firdaus (although significantly, gives her no money), nevertheless exploits her to the point where Firdaus never leaves the bedroom and 'lay[s] on the bed, crucified' while men enter and leave.[185] When she tries to escape from this situation as well, Firdaus is picked up by a policeman who threatens to arrest her if she does not come back to his house:

> You're a prostitute, and it is my duty to arrest you, and others of your kind. To clean up
> the country, and protect respectable families from the likes of you. But I don't want to use
> force. Perhaps we can agree quietly without a fuss. I'll give you a pound: a whole pound.
> What do you say to that?[186]

The law desires and punishes at the same time, thus maintaining the institution of law through the fear of law breaking. Ironically, though Firdaus pollutes the country, she is good enough to be exploited. Fearing arrest, she submits.[187] That same night, alone in the rainy streets she is propositioned by a man who is obviously wealthy. She accepts his suggestion and upon leaving his house in the morning he gives her a ten-pound note. Finally, Firdaus feels as though a shroud has been moved away from her eyes and she can finally see and understand; primarily that she has some value, or can demand some value, within the confines of how she is understood as woman (in this sense, prostitute). This, ultimately, constitutes the difference, what makes her seek independence, and finally what turns a cheap act into a worthy one. When propositioned again, Firdaus declines the man who offers ten pounds yet sleeps with the man who offers her twenty. An unforgettable lesson is learnt and Firdaus firmly establishes herself within an economy in which she constitutes herself as a necessary commodity.

However, fulfilment is incomplete as Firdaus continues to seek a worthwhile reason to live for. Though she becomes a successful prostitute, she remains haunted by the possible judgement that may come from others. Firdaus' fears of misnomy, what Butler calls 'hate speech' and what Sara Ahmed has termed 'words that wound' (see above), instil a desire to do something more, to try and be *respectable*. This action is occasioned when a customer breaks the "sex for money pattern" and declares that he would rather speak to her

as opposed to have anonymous sex with her. Firdaus, surprised, informs her client that he will nevertheless have to pay for her time (as do psychoanalysts!). Disgusted, he cries out,

> 'You make me feel I'm in a clinic. Why don't you hang up a price list in the waiting room?
> Do you also have emergency visits?'
> There was a note of irony in his voice, *but I could not see why*, so I said,
> 'Are you being sarcastic about my work, or about the medical profession?'
> 'Both,' he said.
> 'Are they similar to one another?'
> 'Yes,' he said, 'except that a doctor while carrying out his duties *feels he's worthy of respect.*'
> 'What about me?' I exclaimed.
> '*You* are not *respectable*,' he replied. (emphasis my own)

In what sense are the two professions similar and what connotations and repercussions does this have? The idea that medical practice is like prostitution suggests that it offers a service devoid of any emotional engagement. This implies that a doctor and the prostitute somehow have an obligation to offer human emotion. However, the dialogue further implies that whereas the doctor feels he is worthy of respect, the prostitute is not respectable. This statement presumes that the prostitute has no right to feel that she is worthy of respect. It is precisely this that Firdaus objects to. When she does not offer emotion, when she demands payment, she is revealing herself for what she is, a prostitute offering sex for money. The client in this case forces an interpretation which equates her with an unfeeling medical profession that however assumes itself worthy of respect. This exciting dialogue creates a space for the critique of science that is as cold and unfeeling as a prostitute. Whereas the prostitute is chastised for this aspect of her business which does/not fit in to the consumer scheme, the medical profession is accorded respect. Horrified by the possibility that she does not deserve respect, an idea that had not as yet constituted part of her economy as prostitute, Firdaus is unable to forget or discredit this comment. When she asks her client why he joins her in this 'work' that is not worthy of respect, he tries to take her by force, refiguring her position as a helpless woman rather than a wilful prostitute. Being called 'not worthy of respect' places Firdaus within a system of value and morality in which she has no direct participation, yet by which she is

scrutinised. Being a prostitute in this sense becomes akin to being a disrespectful woman. Though Firdaus does not realise this yet, she is soon to make the connection.

Again, Firdaus leaves everything she has worked for and rents a tiny room in a filthy block of flats and finds work in a small office, secretary to some fat executive. She retains a phantasmic chaste honour and refuses to sell her body for a better standing with her company elders that she (however) witnesses is common practise amongst the other women. Three years into the company though, Firdaus decides that 'as a prostitute [she] had been looked upon with more respect, and been valued more highly.'[188] She witnesses women employees selling themselves for a very low price, for a meal or for job assurance and can only feel disgust. In her ruthless world, it is not what you do but what you can extract for what you do that matters: 'I came to realise that a female employee is more afraid of losing her job than a prostitute is of losing her life.'[189] Although Firdaus falls in love she is again betrayed when her lover marries another without her knowledge. She bitterly concludes that 'a successful prostitute [is] better than a misled saint' and returns to her former life.[190] As a prostitute, Firdaus' success is widespread and one day she is asked to visit a prominent figure of state, a foreigner, as an act of patriotism. She refuses and simultaneously claims that she

> knew nothing of patriotism, that [her] country had not only given [her] nothing, but had
> also taken away anything [she] may have had, including [her] honour and dignity.[191]

Patriotism again appears as a word used to suppress the poor into their servile positions and to limit the possibilities of woman. It is however invoked to promote and mobilise women to their most material use: that of sex object. Firdaus refuses and reminds the psychiatrist that 'he wanted to take a prostitute to this important personality's bed, like any common pimp would do, and yet talk[ed] in dignified tones of patriotism and moral principles.'[192] In fact, Firdaus' destruction finally comes with her refusal to succumb to the threats of a pimp who offers her protection though she needs none. The pimp appears as an amalgam of all the restricting figures in her life who have tried to essentialise her existence. By demanding a cut of her income he again highlights the realities of ownership and production at the same time that Firdaus reiterates, 'My body was my property alone.'[193] Though Firdaus understands the huge implications of this statement, in her re-iteration of it

she retains the ability to demarcate a space out of discourse by creating that space through the actual use of an economic term. She makes money through the use of her body, and in this very material sense (though possibly not in a discursive sense) her body is hers. When she refuses to give in to the pimp's requests, he threatens her life, and when she questions him he beats her. When she prepares to leave her life as a prostitute to rid herself of him, he moves to stop her and raises a knife. She is quicker and stabs him over and over again, in his chest, his neck. A few hours later she is arrested and makes no move to defend herself. Her final act of vengeance is to tear up the money that she receives from her last customer before giving herself up for the murder, unafraid and proud. While talking to the police she turns out a powerful phrase: 'I am a killer, but I've committed no crime [...] to be a criminal one must be a man.'[194] Without fear of death, Firdaus accepts her death sentence and awaits the end. Firdaus, like an Antigone figure, appeals to a sense of justice beyond the man-made laws. While both are technically guilty - and accept this - their cases show the inadequacy of the law.[195]

Firdaus' ultimate rebellion against what she considers to be the stigma of womanhood is the power hidden behind her willingness to die, her fierce fearlessness of death. However, how successful is this? Can it only be a success on an individual level (as we cannot ethically promote a system of death even if for metaphoric glory)? Is it a success for Firdaus to accept what it is that man fears most and to overcome it, not living to tell the tale, except once, ironically? If one truly does not fear death then what can one fear? Firdaus can be distinguished from other women in her 'absolute refusal to live, her absolute fearlessness of death.'[196] Firdaus learns not to fear death because she no longer has anything to lose - having been denied 'the right to live, to love and to real freedom' little else matters.[197] Significantly, Firdaus again reverses the roles of healer and patient. By taking the matter of her death into her own hands, so to speak, Firdaus defies the role of the doctor. The physician/psychiatrist becomes the physician that can never heal *par excellence*. Firdaus usurps the possibility of the physician to be a physician and even overturns the possibility of the physician to be Charon, the mythical Greek god of the underworld. As Megan Biesélé and Robbie Davis-Floyd have argued in their essay 'Dying as Medical Performance: The Oncologist as Charon', a patient can 'participate' in their death through 'conscious living.'[198] I take this to mean that through a participation in one's

life through conscious performance, one opens up the way to also participate in one's death, able to view it as yet another performance and somehow to distance oneself from the material aspect of death. Though Floyd and Bieséle are speaking of patients under very different circumstances, the metaphor of Charon can be borrowed to enrich a point at this stage. Firdaus actively participates in her death by telling her story; she also snatches the coveted role of Charon (to ease death) and healer (to bring back health) from the physician, thereby becoming the agent of her own healing through becoming the agent of her own death. The story also has the structure of a Greek tragedy. As Lacan notes, Greek tragedies begin when the 'race is run,' thus they are eleventh hour recapitulations of what has irreversibly happened and just before the very end.[199] Everything seems over and yet is still to end. Hence, it seems apt to speak of Charon since it is as if we are in a zone that is neither life nor death. In fact, the psychiatrist feels a peculiar sensation likened to this in-between state of life and death as soon as Firdaus end her story,

> I moved my body like someone moving in sleep. What lay under me was not a bed, but something solid like the ground, yet with a coldness which did not reach my body. It was the cold of the sea in a dream. I swam though its waters. I was naked and knew not how to swim. But I neither felt its cold, nor drowned in its waters. Her voice was now silent, but its echo remained in my ears, like a faint distant sound.[200]

This scene works effectively to demonstrate a re-imagining of the womb where all elements converge. More importantly, Firdaus's voice has the capacity to actively remove the physician from her material existence, enveloping her as it were in a partial world. The physician leaves, aware, in a sense, that she has learnt something about the expectations society has of women; the values that rarely change across professions and classes, the ultimate destructive qualities of hate speech and finally, the catastrophic consequences of essentialism.

2.9 MEMOIRS OF A WOMAN DOCTOR

The nameless protagonist in *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* progresses from her fear of femininity to embracing what she thinks will help her overcome this fear and force others to respect her; medicine and science. She says, 'I began to search constantly for

weak spots in males to console me for the powerlessness imposed on me by the fact of being female.'[201] This becomes the disastrous driving force in the early part of her life. As she starts to mature, develop and discover her changing body, so her revulsion becomes more poignant; 'if only I could die! I didn't recognise this body which sprang a new shame on me every day, adding to my weakness and my preoccupation with myself. What would grow on my body next? What other new symptom would my tyrannical femininity break out in?'[202] It is difficult to tell whether these are feelings of true hatred, or, misdirected fears associated with the prohibitions and restrictions placed on these body parts/additions. However, the institution of medicine brings more questions than answers. She realises that while her body seems to be developing and maturing something is lacking. She fails mentally to accompany her bodily changes. Furthermore, mind and body become so segregated in the practice of medicine that she needs to re-experience, almost re-learn her body and her sexuality from scratch. It is the bringing together of the mind and body through the re-evaluation of medicine, and through this a better understanding of the working and mis-working of medicine, that we will try to locate in a reading of *Memoirs*. In a sense, *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* is the only novel where there *does* exist a reconciliation of medicine as a healing art (marking it as a difficult project to achieve but one that needs to be attempted nevertheless).

At the onset of doubts connected to her profession as physician, the protagonist decides to re-evaluate the promises made by medicine to understand how she has been misled for so long. This active seeking is in direct contrast with Bahiah for example (in *Two Women in One*) who does not seek a reconciliation with medicine, and with the psychiatrist in *Firdaus: Woman at Point Zero*, who remains disillusioned. As soon as the protagonist begins to feel that her stethoscope has indeed become the 'hangman's noose'[203] (clothing in this extreme situation becomes part of the discourse of medicine) she flees the confining walls of medicine, flees from the horrific realisation of pharmakon-as-poison. Alone and far from her profession she senses that 'feeling' can sometimes be more true than 'reason.'[204] If a sacrifice to science has been made and this sacrifice has been emotion, she is then ready to give up this sacrifice and feel again. Saadawi writes of the young doctor that,

> for the first time in [her] life [she] was feeling without thinking, feeling the warm sun on
> [her] body and thought about the debased, imprisoned womanliness of woman; the
> arrogant overbearing masculinity of man; and the limited, ineffectual chatter of science.[205]

She feels as though she is coming to life again and experiencing a body long forgotten (if ever experienced). Healing in this respect is re-established, in the first instance, with oneself. Through a direct experience with the body outside the confines of duty and profession, the protagonist is able to experience herself, alone. Once this has been foregrounded, Saadawi sets the scene for the possible re-evaluation of medicine as well, thus, I want to argue, making a direct link between the two types of reconciliation.

One night on an emergency call a look of despair in a patient's eyes reminds the physician that he is 'more than a liver, a spleen or a collection of guts and entrails.'[206] Medicine, at this moment, becomes a healing tool invested with a humanity. As her patient suffers, so does she and her relief equals his at the moment of recovery. She feels, for the first time, a love which gives meaning to the pain she has watched and endured and an answer to the questions hitherto left unanswered. The physician feels a certain cohesion in her role as healer and in the patient's role as a receptor of her powers. In *The Performance of Healing* Laderman and Roseman argue that,

> there is a strong notion of healing as performance: as purposive, contextually-situated
> interaction; as multimedia communication and metacommunicative or 'framed' enactment;
> as historically contingent fusing past traditions and memories with present circumstances
> and problems; as emotionally, sensuously and imaginatively engaging; as reflective and
> transformative.[207]

Saadawi expands her polemics when rendering this particular moment. The healing moment is a creative moment when viewed as a performative one that can bring together knowledge and experience. Compassion and an understanding (rather than a technical medical result) mark the distinction between a successful healing process and an unsuccessful one. Invigorated with this new knowledge, yet frozen with the fear and regret of a wasted youth and wasted sexuality, our heroine returns to her home in the city. Haunted day and night by the lack of love (another unhealed wound), she fantasises over an encounter that will fill the new gap that she feels. Importantly, the experience of her

own body, as well as the invigorating experience of being a potential healer, brings with it the need for an other with whom to communicate and share this newly acquired knowledge. A man who tells her that he desires a 'partner', not a 'servant', seduces the heroine, believing she has found a solution to the unhealed wound.[208] Beguiled by what seems to be an equal and liberating proposition, the heroine thinks she has found someone who can finally understand her as well as her philosophical feelings on truth and justice. She does however experience a moment of doubt and fears the possibility that he may be acting deceptively; she fears a literal performance that she cannot distinguish from true sincerity and truth. This is a significant moment where in fact the idea of an authentic self becomes impossible for the other because it cannot be recognised. Here, only love and trust can be judges in the absence of a more reliable system of measure. Insecurity about one's actions and the actions of the other only heightens the problems of the performative. Is 'insecurity' also part of the matrix of gender play? Though the man arouses her 'maternal instincts', he fails to arouse desire in her, yet she in turn fears that possibly she does not want a truly equal partner anyway (thereby signposting herself as a performer of false emotion). Nevertheless, unsure, she marries him. The moment of disillusion comes when the protagonist realises that her profession has done little to change her actual social situation. Convincing herself that marriage to a man she feels tenderness towards (though not desire) will temporarily relieve the disappointment, she is nevertheless horrified at the structures, linguistic and otherwise, that inform the marriage ceremony and which function to belittle her status as woman and physician. Amongst the talk of advances and balances that go hand in hand with marriage, it is evident that, doctor or not, she is first of all a woman, signing, as she so poignantly describes it, her 'death warrant.'[209] Her husband soon smoothly inhabits a superior role and inscribes his authority almost immediately:

'I'm the man.'

'So what?'

'I'm in charge.'

'In charge of what?'

'Of this house and all that's in it, including you.'

The first signs of rebellion were showing themselves: his feeling of weakness

in front of me had been translated inside him into a desire to control me.

'I don't want you going out every day,' he said.

'I don't go out for fun. I work.'

'I don't want you examining men's bodies and undressing them.' […]

He'd reached the conclusion that it was my work which endowed me with the

strength that prevented him controlling me.[210]

The husband fears the power that his wife assumes in her role as physician. However, endowed with the ultimate power of rule, he pronounces his judgement. The protagonist's reaction is hard and fast. In an unpredictable and innovative move, she decides to go against all social opinion and convention, she leaves her husband and begins to perform illegal abortions. This re-establishes the power that her husband attempted to wretch from her and re-establishes her as an educated woman with freedom of choice. Again, medicine fails to bring with it the respect she had hoped for, the recognition it purports to em/body. Yet she redefines the significance that medicine can have. Performing abortions allows her to use medicine as an empowering tool to help young women. Disgusted with the double standards of a society that punishes the victim of sexual abuse, she retorts that 'this society which broadcasts songs of love and passion[211] [is] the same society which erected the scaffold for all who fell in love or were swept away by passion.'[212] However, the more successful a doctor she becomes, the more the feeling of emptiness becomes as large as a 'giant.'[213] The more immersed she becomes in her "art", the more she feels it necessary to become a sexual being. Though she does not seem to require objectification of her art, she does continue to require recognition in order not to be wholly identified with her art; in a sense, she becomes the object of her practice and this leaves her, temporarily, alone. Though this may seem necessary for the process of realisation to occur: that pharmakon-as-healing can be a positive return to medical practice, it seems an unbearable burden to be unable to share this knowledge with a recognising subject. The recognising subject finally appears as one who does not stare at her body parts but her whole body; upon meeting him, she finally rests, 'feeling calm and secure.'[214] As I have mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, it is a significant step for the women in the literature of Saadawi to be viewed as working minds in the first instance. Though she nowhere denies the intense and immense importance of the body, she does underline the prior necessity to be understood and respected as a thinking and productive individual. In a vastly different politics to the theory of Judith Butler, who conceives of the powers of the body in highly philosophical terms, Saadawi advocates an appreciation and respect of the working of intelligence first. This may be the debate between Eastern and Western Feminism and

would certainly explain the difficulty in speaking of the body for Middle Eastern Feminists in quite the same way as other feminist theorists do. The protagonist needs, in the first instance, to be recognised as a thinking individual.

The moment of unity comes at the end of *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* when an emergency call interrupts the meeting between her and her beloved. He accompanies her to the patient and helps her with a dangerous blood transfusion. Significantly, though she tries to tell him she could not have done it without his help, he tells her that she could have. In a moment of clarity, the protagonist refuses the symbolic amount of one Egyptian pound given to her by the poor patient. This is the moment where pharmakon-as-healing is re-instated once again as is the power of the recognising object. A restored faith in the humanity of the pharmakon as well as in the love object replaces a negative perception of both that dominates sections of the book respectively. The protagonist that accepts a return to medical practise and pharmakon-as-healing (with knowledge of its poisonous potential) emerges as the most complete of Saadawi's heroines. Though this section on Saadawi's particular novel has been brief, it juxtaposes with the unresolved interpretations of the other two novels that suggest a much more difficult re-working of the innate conflicts of the female physician. In a sense, *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* offers an idyllic resolution to the complex set of problems that we have witnessed so far. The two moments that converge at the close of the narrative, that of recognition and that of re-understanding medicine as an art that need not produce anything tangible (the negation of the symbolic amount suggests that healing cannot be quantified and if it is it remains arbitrary), reaffirms that there is a performance that can be satisfactory if understood in certain terms. In short, the heightened moments between physician and patient as well as those between lovers are moments that produce ideas rather than identifiable objects. These ideas, in their elusiveness, and in their non-quantification resound with a *jouissance* that surely does not need to prove itself?

2.10 CONCLUSION: AND THEY DIE OF DESIRE FOR US

For all the separate conclusions reached in this chapter there is an underlying criticism that pervades the texts, a criticism of class and patriarchy, double standards and suffering. In *Two Women in One*, soon after Bahiah is arrested for her involvement in the

nationalist demonstration and as she waits for her father to come and collect her, Bahiah sits among detained prostitutes. The dialogue between these women conceals telling remarks on the twisted structure of patriarchy and the workings of the dominant class as well as the exploitation of women:

> 'When will God have mercy on us?'
> 'God is pleased with us all right.'
> 'Really?'
> 'Sure, we're the best of women.'
> 'I feel better now.'
> 'Without us honourable husbands would have died and respectable households might have collapsed.'
> 'But they hate our smell...'
> 'Because its their real smell.'
> 'And they put us in prison.'
> 'Because we know what their genitals look like.'
> 'They're scared to death of us.'
> 'And they die of desire for us.'[215]

The prostitutes here demonstrate the crux of the arguments that I feel run throughout all the texts. Again, they are shown to embody the essential qualities that man fears in women and which the law is constructed to accommodate. The law requires that prostitutes exist for the reasons explained above, and yet arrests prostitutes and brings them in and away from the public for no other reason than knowledge of man. Though men are 'scared to death' they also 'die of desire', performing both roles at once; simultaneously, the prostitutes act as repulsions and attractions. Being both is a complex figuring of what Saadawi tries to capture in her texts. She re-uses the prostitute figure to highlight the incongruous expectations placed on her, to be desired and desiring, loathsome and loathed. In short, the prostitute contains all possibilities because she can perform all gender requirements, keeping herself a secret that cannot be told (because possibly there is no secret to tell?) and simultaneously ridiculing the law and its purposes. The prostitues here are reminiscent of Charcot's hysterics, knowingly performing a desired effect only to be condemned for that effect.

To conclude, I have attempted to demonstrate that the fiction of Nawal El Saadawi raises many of the issues that are raised and theorised by Western feminism, as elaborated in the introduction. Through the medium of fictional narrative, in a geographical space that is still fighting for women's liberation, a rebellious text (attempting to make possible the impossible) may be the most effective tool yet. Though many more issues are raised that cannot possibly be covered here, I hope to have shown that the themes covered are ones that concern all feminists and gender theorists at various points in their discourse. To find them in these works of fiction is to acknowledge that thematically, the third world woman is more than aware of the web of intricate possibilities that make her what she is. As Nawal El Saadawi herself has claimed, 'at that time [of writing *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*], I had not yet read any feminist literature on women's struggles or on women's status in contemporary society – this only came later […] I still consider *Memoirs* like a first daughter.'[216] This sets up the potential for a universal feminism that seeks these spaces of experience from which to construct a "universal" discourse on women. Saadawi addresses issues of naming, recognition, as well as gender performance and the advantages of this knowledge. Also, she tackles these issues through an exploration of a controversial profession for women in the Middle East, medicine. This gives her a platform from which to criticise the knowledge derived from medicine on issues regarding gender and sex that can be as inconclusive as they can be discriminatory for the female physicians themselves. In the absence of a body of information regarding sexual matters and philosophical gender understanding, attitudes towards medicine, I feel, work effectively as an investigative trope. Finally, this chapter has been concerned with Saadawi's preoccupations with bringing science and art together and marrying critical dissection and factual knowledge with creative compassion and vision.

ENDNOTES

[1] Mavor, Carol, '*Odor Di Femina*: Though You May Not See Her, You Can Certainly Smell Her', *Cultural Studies*, 12: 1 (1998), 51-81 (p. 51).

[2] Malti-Douglas, Fedwa, *Men, Women and God(s):Nawal El Saadawi and Arab Feminist Poetics* (London: University of California Press, 1995), p. 20.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Derrida, Jacques, 'Plato's Pharmacy' in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Rivkin, Julie and Michael Ryan, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 429-451.

[6] See Malti-Douglas, Fedwa and Allen, 'Reflections of a Feminist', in Badran, Margot and Miriam Cooke, *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (London: Virago Press, 1990), pp. 394-404. This is an interesting and insightful interview with Nawal El-Saadawi.

[7] Amal Amireh has just written a long re-appraisal of Nawal El Saadawi as well and her importance to local and global feminism. Please see 'Framing Nawal El-Saadawi: Arab Feminism in a Transnational World', *Signs*, 26:1 (2000), 215-249.

[8] Saadawi, Nawal El, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1997), p. 20.

[9] Her disillusionment comes primarily from her experience with the Egyptian peasantry.

[10] Rinon, Yoav, 'The Rhetoric of Jacques Derrida I: "Plato's Pharmacy" ', *Review of Metaphysics*, 46 (1992), 369-386 (p. 370). In this essay, Yoav uses the duplicity of the word medicine to display the possible collapse of Derrida's theory concerning a language without hierarchies. She argues that the concept of deconstruction inherently assumes that some words will be chosen over others and so cannot maintain a non-hierarchical structure that it professes it can. The use of the multiple meanings of pharmakon serves to illustrate this point. See also Derrida, Jacques, 'Plato's Pharmacy' in *Literary Theory: An Anthology, Rivkin, Julie and Michael Ryan, ed.* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 429-451.

[11] I shall occasionally put the word pharmakon in quotation marks to emphasize it as a word that embodies discrepancy.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 372.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 375.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 382. This idea is elaborated from Plato's comparison of rhetoric to medicine; Hans-Georg Gadamer, in *The Enigma of Health* phrases it as such: 'In this sense Plato's suggestion that the physician, like the true rhetorician, must take the whole of nature into view remains valid. Just as the latter must draw on true insight to find the right word which will influence those who listen, so too the physician must look beyond the immediate object of his knowledge and skill if he is to be a true physician', (p. 42). It is also interesting that Butler herself is Professor of Rhetoric as well as comparative literature.

[15] Gadamer, Hans Georg, *The Enigma of Health: The Art of Healing in a Scientific Age*, trans. by Gaiger, Jason and Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 32.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 39.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

[18] Judith Butler elaborates on this point in Chapter 3 of her work (though she does not specifically identify medicine) *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997). On page 102 Butler tells us that if the injury (as we have seen) is woman, at the site of conflated gender and sex (brought about by discriminatory discursive norms) does it follow that repetition is infinite, whose forms we must seek as spaces of 'healing'?

[19] Mavor, Carol, 'Odor Di Femina: Though You May Not See Her, You Can Certainly Smell Her', p. 51.

[20] Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech*, p.159.

[21] Saadawi, Nawal El, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader*, p. 56.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 166, also discussed in Haiden Moghissi's work *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of a Post-Modern Analysis* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

[26] This conflict potentially becomes a matter of the difference between Westernised and non-Westernised feminism. What is highlighted is the difference between the theorisation of woman-as-body (highly complicit with masculine science) and allowing for a thinking/questioning female subject.

[27] Ahmed, Sara, 'Intimate Touches: Proximity and Distance in International Feminist Dialogues', *The Oxford Literary Review,* 19:1-2 (1997), 19-47, (p. 31).

[28] Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York & London: Routledge, 1997), p. 90.

[29] Moghissi explains 'Islamic Feminism' as a feminism that tries to work within the parameters of a fully religious society. I suppose the issues here are to what extent to these feminists take on the masculinist structure of the interpretation of religion?

[30] Ahmed, Sara, review of *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures,* Mohanty Talpade, Chandra and M.Jacqui Alexander, eds. *Interventions,* 1:3 (1999), 476 - 480 .

[31] Saliba, Therese, 'On the Bodies of Third World Women: Cultural Impurity, Prostitution, and Other Nervous Conditions', *College Literature,* 22:1 (1995), 131-147. I am using the on-line version, p. 11/15.

[32] Lemer, George, 'The Progressive Interview: Nawal El Saadawi', *Progressive* (April 1992), 32-35.

[33] Owen, A.R.G, *Notes from Hysteria, Hypnosis and Healing: The Work of J.M. Charcot* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1971), pp.15-16.

[34] Saadawi, Nawal El, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*, trans. and ed. by Hetata, Sherif (London: Zed Books, 1980), p. 3.

[35] Fatna Sabbah has written much on this topic in her incredibly poignant work *Women in the Muslim Unconscious* (see bibliography). For more academic works, please see the introduction.

[36] Saadawi, Nawal El, *The Hidden Face of Eve,* p. 44-51.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 74

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 78.

[43] Saadawi, Nawal El, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader,* p. 217.

[44] I mention this in the introduction as well. Childhood may be the only time for this as the child has not yet learnt of her devaluation and/or the mother has not yet made a distinction.

[45] Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech*, p. 163.

[46] Tarabishi, Georges, *Woman Against her Sex: A Critique of Nawal El Saadawi* (With a Reply by Nawal El Saadawi), trans. by Basil Hatim and Elizabeth Orsini (London: Saqi Books, 1988), p. 10.

[47] Tarabishi claims to be speaking for many people. The primary source of this information is through a interview with Saadawi herself and of my own knowledge of the resistance she has met with in Egypt and the Middle East .

[48] Tarabishi and his work are dealt with in further detail later on in this chapter.

[49] See introduction for an examination of why we cannot apply postmodern standards to the Arab world.

[50] I am not suggesting that there is no theoretical work on Arab Women. What is there however, has tended to define them in their circumstances rather than questioning fiercely the circumstances that they may not choose (an effect of postmodernism ?) I want to argue that there is no theory in the sense of one that has this trans-national quality at the heart of it which seems to be the only way to merge the 'intimate touches' with the other, a theory that is not against or with the West but in between, as a re-learning process to undo even this dualism.

[51] Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech,* p. 158.

[52] Obviously this can only work if we view the texts chronologically, by which I mean that it is not the body per se that will be the great equalizer, rather, it is a redefinition of one's own body that will aid in the reformulation of the other's body as non-threatening.

[53] Malti-Douglas, Fedwa, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 132-133.

[54] Gramsci is cited by Mazrui, Alamin M, and Judith I. Abala, 'Sex and Patriarchy: Gender Relations in *Mawt al-rajul al-wahid 'ala al-ard (God Dies by the Nile)*', *Research in African Literatures,* 28:3 (1997), 17-32 (p. 12).

[55] Irigaray after Freud.

[56] I have discussed silence in the introduction. See pp. 2, 8.

[57] Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993). This work deals with these issues in depth.

[58] This type of speech is the primary topic of Butler's work *Excitable Speech.*

[59] What I mean here is that if sex is a biological act, and yet informed by a culturally constructed definition of gender, then how can a medical discourse remain powerful?

[60] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Firdaus: Woman at Point Zero,* trans. by Hetata, Sherif (London: Zed Books, 1983), p. 15.

[61] Again, this is a concept that Butler hopes for when she makes the rather difficult claim in *Excitable Speech*, that we are enforcing injurious speech each time that we reiterate it.

[62] Tarabishi, Georges, *Woman Against her Sex,* p. 37.

[63] Al-Ali, Nadje Sadig, *Gender Writing/Writing Gender: The Representation of Women in a Reflection of Modern Egyptian Literature* (Cairo: University of Cairo Press, 1994), p. 9.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[65] Gadamer, Hans Georg, *The Enigma of Health: The Art of Healing in a Scientific Age*, p. 33.

[66] Tarabishi, Georges, *Woman Against her Sex*, p. 190.

[67] Grosz, Elizabeth, *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 189.

[68] Tarabishi, Georges, *Woman Against her Sex*, p. 194.

[69] *Ibid.*

[70] Malti-Douglas, Fedwa, *Men, Women and Gods: El Saadawi and Arab Feminist Poetics*, p. 198.

[71] Tarabishi, Georges, *Woman Against her Sex,* p. 200.

[72] By 'physicality of words' I mean the actual bodily harm that words such as *virgin, shame* and *honor* can cause to a *material living sexual body*.

[73] Tarabishi, Georges, *Woman Against her Sex,* p. 190.

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 191.

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 193.

[77] This claim recurs throughout Tarabishi's work on Saadawi's novels and it is an accusation that the Egyptian government has also made.

[78] Tarabishi, Georges, *Woman Against her Sex*, p. 193.

[79] Greenberg, Judith, 'The Echo of Trauma and the Trauma of Echo', *American Imago*, 55:3 (1998), 319-347 (p. 321).

[80] Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech*, p. 102.

[81] The idea of Tarabishi as Narcissus seems to fit in quite well here but I do not wish to make too strong a connection.

[82] For an elaboration on this point, please see Segal, Naomi, *Narcissus and Echo: Women in the French Recit* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

[83] Tarabishi, Georges, *Woman Against her Sex,* p. 199.

[84] *Ibid.,* p. 206.

[85] *Ibid.,* p. 211.

[86] *Ibid.,* p. 203.

[87] *Ibid.,* p. 205.

[88] By citizenship I mean full participation in all areas of life.

[89] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Two Women in One,* p. 17.

[90] See Bieséle, Megan and Robbie Davis-Floyd, 'Dying as Performance: The Oncologist as Charon' in *The Performance of Healing,* eds. Laderman Carol and Marina Roseman (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 314. Although I am not trying to present Egypt as though it were a Western society, I do want to ascertain that it is informed by a long history of Western medicine, the first country in the Middle East in fact to be directly influenced. For more on this see Fahmy, Khaled, 'Women, Medicine, and Power in Nineteenth-Century Egypt' in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East,* ed. Abu-Lughod, Lila (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), Hatem, Mervat, 'The Professionalization of Health and the Control of Women's Bodies as Modern Governmentalities in Nineteenth-Century Egypt' in *Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Era,* ed Zilfi, Madeline C. (The Netherlands: Leiden, 1997) pp. 66-81 and Kuhne, La Verne, *Lives at Risk: Public Health in Nineteenth Century Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[91] We need to remind ourselves constantly of the strict patriarchal existence of women that Saadawi writes of. These are not Western women who are seeped in media knowledge of sex and seduction. Bahiah is distinctly aware that there is more to the body than what she is told, but there is little, or no evidence that her parents, friends or teachers are going to be the ones to discuss sexuality deeply or frankly with her. In a sense, Bahiah is left to tackle this immense problem on her own and *this* constitutes the validity of her experience, and, in fact, the performative element of the text; the fact that Bahiah slowly comes to the realization that what she supposed were 'natural' attributes that constituted her gender are in fact, by and large, discursive impositions that have been successful *so far.* In Bahiah's questioning, then, lies the power to challenge the restrictive limits of the possibility of an unknown performance in opposition to a knowledge of this performative operation.

[92] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Two Women in One,* p. 23.

[93] *Ibid.,* p. 24.

[94] What I mean here is that there is a sense of hysteria over 'hysteria' which underscores the reality of this supposed hysterical quality of woman; woman is a creature who engages in hysteria as a result of being uninformed. She is then appelled hysterical, thus violently stopping any further questions. That Bahiah continues to question is a positive sign of the fact that she does not conform to this tantalizing label of woman as hysterical.

[95] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Two Women in One,* p. 77.

[96] This is the word used in Saadawi's text.

[97] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Firdaus: Woman at Point Zero,* p. 2.

[98] *Ibid.,* p. 5.

[99] *Ibid.*

[100] *Ibid.*

[101] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[102] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[103] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor,* p. 25.

[104] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

[105] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, p. 34. Can the protagonist only examine the man if she thinks of him as body? Does the shame lessen?

[106] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Two Women in One*, p. 43.

[107] Cixous, Hélène, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' in *Literature in the Modern World*, Walder, Denis, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[108] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* p. 44.

[109] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[110] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Firdaus: Woman at Point Zero.* p. 43.

[111] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

[112] Innes, C.L., 'Conspicuous Consumption: Corruption and the Body Politic in the Writing of Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo' in *Essays in African Writing, Vol II*, Gurnah, Abdulrazak, ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1995), pp.1-19 (p. 74).

[113] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Two Women in One*, p. 16

[114] Probyn, Elspeth, 'Beyond Food/Sex: Eating and an Ethics of Existence', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 16:2 (1999), 215-228, (p. 216.)

[115] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, p. 10.

[116] *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

[117] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[118] A protection it can never live up to because it does not take the individual into account and assumes a universal definition of mother: caring, protective, etc..

[119] Laderman, Carol, and Marina Roseman, eds., *The Performance of Healing*, p. 295.

[120] This echoes Butler's idea of bodies and pleasure rather than sex and desire, a pleasure of the body that does not follow a pre-designated gender or sexual matrix.

[121] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Two Women in One*, p.11.

[122] *Ibid.*

[123] Although this repeats an earlier point, it is re-emphasized in the text again on page 12.

[124] Moghissi, Haiden, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of a Post-Modern Analysis*, p. 127.

[125] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Two Women in One,* p. 81.

[126] *Ibid.*, p. 83.

[127] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Firdaus: Woman at Point Zero*, p. 18.

[128] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Two Women in One*, p. 15.

[129] *Ibid.*

[130] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[131] *Ibid.*

[132] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[133] *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

[134] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, p. 19.

[135] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[136] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[137] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

[138] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Two Women in One*, p. 13.

[139] *Ibid.,* p. 14.

[140] *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

[141] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[142] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[143] How this fits in with Butler is difficult; I am inclined to say that it is here that her theories are not helpful in that there has to be a locus of authenticity (even if imagined) in order for survival of the individual (rather than the discourse). This is explored more fully through the theories of Leo Bersani in chapter 3.

[144] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Two Women in One,* p. 25.

[145] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[146] Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech,* p. 5.

[147] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Two Women in One*, p. 21.

[148] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[149] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[150] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

[151] Mazrui, Alamin M, and Judith I. Abala, 'Sex and Patriarchy: Gender Relations in *Mawt al-rajul al-wahid 'ala al-ard (God Dies by the Nile)*', p. 128.

[152] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Two Women in One,* p. 34.

[153] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

[154] Gadamer, Hans Georg, *The Enigma of Health*, p. 4.

[155] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

[156] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Two Women in One*, p. 39.

[157] See Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, pp. 89-190 where she argues with the rock of the real as discussed by Slavoj Žižek in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989).

[158] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Two Women in One,* p. 47.

[159] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

[160] *Ibid.*

[161] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

[162] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

[163] *Ibid.*

[164] *Ibid.*, p. 68.

[165] *Ibid.*

[166] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

[167] *Ibid.*, p. 99.

[168] *Ibid.,* all the quotes since the last endnote are on page 100.

[169] All the quotes in this paragraph are from *Ibid.*, p. 100.

[170] *Ibid.*, p. 101. There is also a strong suggestion of circumcision here, a literal 'cut[ing] away.'

[171] *Ibid.*, p.102. This is reminiscent of Bahiah in her younger years who claims 'Who told you that I am a girl?'

[172] *Ibid.*, p.103.

[173] *Ibid.*, p.116.

[174] *Ibid.*, p. 121.

[175] *Ibid.*, p. 124.

[176] Laderman, Carol and and Marina Roseman eds, *The Performance of Healing*, p. 1.

[177] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Firdaus: Woman at Point Zero*, p. 15.

[178] Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter*, p. 190.

[179] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Firdaus: Woman at Point Zero,* p. 21.

[180] Saadawi, Nawal El, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, pp. 166-167.

[181] As to which authors Saadawi is referring, I can think of Naguib Mahfouz's trilogy which undertakes to describe prostitutes at great lengths.

[182] Firdaus' husband is described in this scene: 'he was already over sixty, whereas I had not yet turned nineteen. On his chin, below the lip, was a large swelling, with a hole in the middle. Some days the hole would be dry, but on others it would turn into a rusty old tap exuding drops red in colour like blood, or whitish yellow, like pus […] on days when it was not dry I would turn my lips and face away to avoid the odour of dead dogs that emanated from it' in Saadawi, Nawal El, *Firdaus: Woman at Point Zero*, p. 49.

[183] *Ibid.*

[184] Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech,* p. 2.

[185] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Firdaus: Woman at Point Zero*, p. 57.

[186] Ibid., p. 62.

[187] Interestingly, I have come across a description in a contemporary Greek novel that likens a policeman to a common pimp: 'δεν συμπαθούσα τους μπατσους ούτως ή άλλως - ειχαν μούρες ίδιες με τους νταβατζήδες'…['I didn't like cops anyway, their faces were just like those of any pimp'] from Laskou, Aleka, *Hardcore* (Athens: Okeanidis, 2000), p. 42.

[188] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Firdaus: Woman at Point Zero*, p. 75.

[189] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

[190] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

[191] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

[192] *Ibid.*

[193] *Ibid.*

[194] *Ibid.*, p. 100.

[195] Sophocles, 'Antigone', trans. by Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald in *Literature: Fiction, Poetry, Drama and the Essay*, DiYanni, Robert, ed. (New York: Random House, 1986). See Prologue, scene II and scene IV apart from the play as a whole of course. Other authors have also used the figure of Antigone to promote a different politics, among whom are Rooney, Caroline, *African Literature, Animism and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), and Butler, Judith, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (London; Routledge, 2000).

[196] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Firdaus: Woman at Point Zero*, p.iii.

[197] *Ibid.*, p. iv.

[198] Bieséle, Megan and Robbie Davis-Floyd, 'Dying as Performance: The Oncologist as Charon', p. 311.

[199] Miller, Jacques-Alain, ed, *Jacques Lacan: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VII*, trans. with notes by Porter, Dennis (London, Tavistock/Routledge, 1992).

[200] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Firdaus: Woman at Point Zero*, p. 107.

[201] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, p. 11.

[202] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[203] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[204] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

[205] *Ibid.*

[206] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

[207] Laderman, Carol and Marina Roseman, eds, *The Performance of Healing*, p. 2.

[208] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, p. 55.

[209] *Ibid.*, p. 62.

[210] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

[211] In chapter 3 this argument will serve as another 'cure' not as a symptom, opening up the possibilities of meaning for cure/poison. Umm Kulthum, who brings together sexuality with politics, merges the vocabulary of each so that they become interchangeable.

[212] *Ibid.*, p. 81. (here we witness a direct marriage of the polemic and the fiction).

[213] *Ibid.*, p. 84.

[214] *Ibid.*, p. 95.

[215] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Two Women in One.*, p. 94.

[216] Saadawi, Nawal El, *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, p. 8.

CHAPTER 3

UMM KULTHUM: MUSIC AND THE POSSIBILITY OF THE FEMININE

Isn't the society that broadcasts the love songs the same society that puts the noose around everyone that falls in love?

Nawal El Saadawi[1]

Nawal El Saadawi is well known for renouncing popular culture. What is the agenda, she asks, of a society that simultaneously prohibits and allows in this particular context? More importantly, the question Saadawi does not address is that, in its signification, popular culture must allow for some*thing* that necessitates its continuity. Whereas in the previous chapter I argued for the recognition of Saadawi's incremental feminist theories, I want here to approach a topic that she violently condemns; the double standards that inform popular culture.[2] In order to do this I shall delineate the capacity of popular culture in the Middle East. To make my argument more singular I shall reconsider the role of Umm Kulthum, the celebrated Egyptian singer (1904-1975) and posit her as a possible cure for the scepticism that underlies Saadawi's comment. Although to an important extent Saadawi is justified in her reluctance to grant popular culture an authenticating power, I believe that a close study of this self-same culture can reveal a potential for Arab feminism. I want to stress that although this potential is not one that can detach itself from the discourse and jurisdiction of the dominant discourse, it is however a feminine potential that can create a space for the articulation of a parallel discourse, one that does not threaten/is not threatened yet which allows for a certain way of experiencing this 'love' that Saadawi speaks of. This way of speaking about love is the some*thing* that I seek to locate.[3]

3.1 POPULAR LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The importance of popular singers in the Middle East is documented in Jacqueline Kaye and Abdelhamid Zoubir's study *The Ambiguous Compromise: Language, Literature and National Identity in Algeria and Morocco*. In their study of the influence of the written word in the Maghreb, Kaye and Zoubir conclude

that literature seeks dominion over language and fails to achieve it, is particularly clear in the African case of Algeria and Morocco. None of the many books mentioned in these pages [of their study] has truly seized the imagination of the people in the way that the songs of Umm Kulthum or Feyrouz do. Unfortunately, neither impeccable political correctness nor linguistic virtuosity is a guaranteed *laissez-passer* into a people's in-rooted aesthetic sense. The issue of aesthetics in African literature is avoided and evaded in such correct approaches. Yet pleasure and beauty are the only guarantees of popular appreciation. It is doubtful if print culture will ever make that difficult crossing in any African culture.[4]

This is significant in terms of Saadawi's own work and her inability to reach this 'imagination.' The importance of the powerful voices that sing of lost loves and wars, lyrics of revolution and passions foregone and found may be 'particularly clear' to specific cultures and yet the rise of a popular figure to national importance warrants legitimisation. Therefore, alongside the assertions stated above, this chapter attempts to legitimise the most influential singer of the Middle East from the 1930's until her death in 1975 and to attempt to place her in the surge of new feminisms. The use of singing as a powerful medium in Tunisian filmmaker Moufida Tlatli's *The Silences of the Palace* will also be examined and to conclude I will briefly introduce a consideration of the renowned Lebanese singer Feyrouz.

In a chapter entitled 'Allegories of Orality', a discussion of the Maghrebi author Laâbi, Kaye and Zoubir point out that in speaking of his own written work and its potential influence to the people of the Maghreb, Laâbi has concluded

that his voice does not *give voice to others* in the same way as those of Oum Kalthoum and Feyrouz. The references to these singers in writing, and its own speech-like qualities, reveal a level of awareness of the vitality of organic culture as it has survived colonialism. The voice of Oum Kalthoum speaks immediately to a sense of shared appreciation of beauty which is as old as the tribe.[5] (emphasis my own)

It is especially significant to this chapter that the 'imagin[ing]' of 'pleasure' and 'beauty' is located in a voice, and more importantly, in/through a woman's voice that *gives voice to others* (in a *different* way to Saadawi who figures *writing* as a liberating activity). Before

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examining the repertory of Umm Kulthum I will argue for the importance of music in the conceptualisation of culture, the limitations of a discussion on love and pleasure in patriarchal Islamic discourse, and the possibility of just this through the medium of singing. Ultimately I will argue that the event of Umm Kulthum *vis à vis* her audience is one where performative components of gender are exaggerated and crossed (whether consciously or unconsciously can be debated) to allow *simultaneously* a possibility of emotionally *being* or being *emotional.* In aid of this, certain technical aspects of the Arabic language shall be explained in order to clarify points concerning popular culture in the Middle East. This shall be used as a platform upon which to expand the above argument. Furthermore, certain aspects of Judith Butler's theory of the performative/performance will be re-examined alongside the very crucial and material existence of the concept of the 'authentic' (*asil* in Arabic) in the culture of the Middle East.[6] This shall be pitted against Butler's notion of the 'authentic.' The cultural certainty of Umm Kulthum as a *repository* of this 'asil' begs an examination of how this becomes possible. For our purposes, the repertory of Umm Kulthum which includes 'love lyrics, national odes and religious chants' (the meanings of which often overlap) offers a new entry into the possibility of a feminist discussion that listens, feels, and imagines. As Salloum has written in his article 'Umm Kulthum - Legendary Songstress of the Arabs',

> each song usually celebrated the miracle of the Arabs and their Muslim faith. Almost every one was a collection of the great Arab themes which ran through the gamut of pining away for the past, languid love, injured pride and memories of lost passion. They bridged the many gulfs to fuse the diverse social fragments of the Arab world into an emotional whole.[7]

In fact, it is the 'gulfs' that Kulthum 'bridged' to give the Arab world an 'emotional' experience that remains her greatest achievement and ultimately, gift.

3.1.1. *FEMALE PERFORMERS IN EGYPTIAN CULTURE*

Before discussing the cultural significance of music, I will offer a few explanatory words on the history of women's music and singing in Egypt. After revealing the taboos which attach themselves to the entertainment industry, I will explore the possibility of Umm Kulthum, her religious commitment, subtle political activism (through her

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involvement in nationalist song) and romantic voice, that gained her unequalled success. It is important to explore the function of music when it seems to have a function that is beyond entertainment. By looking at a brief history of the entertainment industry in Egypt we can form a picture of the tradition that Umm Kulthum was simultaneously coming into and moving away from, thereby situating herself in a tradition that she ultimately redefined.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century in Egypt it was customary for women to perform, that is, sing, dance and recite poetry and music at public ceremonies such as weddings, saints' day celebrations and funerals. In general, as has been documented in Karen Van Nieuwkerk's work *A Trade Like any Other*, there were two 'broad classes of women performers', the 'awalim' and the 'ghawazi.'[8] The 'awalim' were the learned women and represented the equivalent of what could be termed female scholars. They were educated and highly respected women who wrote poetry and recited it as well as improvised their own songs. The awalim were mostly hired to perform in harems, often audible though not visible to men and often performed from behind a lattice framework. On the other hand, the 'ghawazi' were mainly dancers who performed in coffee houses and streets and were unveiled (though the veil was sometimes used as a seductive prop). Although they were not prostitutes, their profession sometimes led them to be qualified as such, a mis-association, which only came to have relevance much later.[9] Although these negative associations that accompanied the entertainment industry; the turn to prostitution, drinking alcohol and generally, excessive reliance on a male audience (or, 'undignified public display'), were factors that were generally tolerated or accepted, as long as the entertainers kept a low social profile and position their professions seemed to survive.[10] By the early twentieth century, the culture of night-club entertaining had become very popular, especially amongst the Egyptian elite and the resident colonial soldiers. Although these night-clubs had very bad reputations, the artistic level of many of the performers was high and talented artists often had no choice but to work in these venues.[11] Interestingly, 'contrary to the popular wisdom that female singers were foreign or non-Muslim, most of the female singers working in Cairo between 1850 and 1930 were native Egyptians and most were Muslims.'[12] This certainty will make its impact in the subsequent sections.

However, in 1952 with the inauguration of the new president, Gamal Abdel Nasser (and the end of monarchical and colonial rule in Egypt), there began, with 'post revolutionary Arab nationalism and Islamic socialism, a re-appraisal of Arabic culture; folk art, folk music and folk dance, all of which glorified traditional Arabic culture.'[13] In defiance of the popular 'cheap' image of female entertainers described above, Umm Kulthum is said to have exhibited a 'dignified demeanour, and she is widely credited today with having raised the level of respect for female singers generally.'[14] It is the exploration of this credit in particular that I will concentrate on in this chapter in an attempt to explain how it was possible to bring, or more probably, create this 'dignified demeanour' within such an infamous business as that of entertainment and in the prevalent highly gendered atmosphere.[15] Before this however, I shall give some biographical details on Umm Kulthum.[16]

3.1.2 *UMM KULTHUM'S CHILDHOOD*

Umm Kulthum was born in 1904 (date uncertain but possibly May 4th). Her relatively poor family originated from a small village in the Delta region of Egypt. Umm Kulthum's father was 'the imam of the local mosque, and her mother was a housewife.'[17] It was in fact Umm Kulthum's father who introduced her to singing as he himself 'augmented his meagre income from the mosque by singing religious songs for weddings and other celebrations in his own and neighbouring villages.'[18] Umm Kulthum used to overhear her father teaching songs to her brother Khalid who often accompanied his father on his trips and unsurprisingly, Umm Kulthum first sang 'on an occasion when Khalid fell ill.'[19] During her early performances Umm Kulthum dressed as a young boy which suggests the prevalent mixed values surrounding female performances. She however became very popular and her particular presence was often requested at special celebrations. Her powerful voice earned her a good reputation and soon, as she became more renowned, 'the family travelled further and further afield [...] Umm Kulthum later reflected that it seemed to her they walked the entire Delta before they ever set foot in Cairo',[20] a comment that suggests her growing popularity. By the early 1920's village notables had convinced her father that relocation to Cairo was necessary if Umm Kulthum was to continue her singing career. Umm Kulthum finally moved to Cairo in 1923 accompanied by her father. Once in Cairo,

> Umm Kulthum's voice was quickly identified as exceptionally strong and vibrant and garnered immediate notice in the press. However her talent was viewed as unschooled: she lacked command of the vocal subtlety and melodic nuance expected of a first-rank singer as well as the requisite stage presence of the established singers of the day. [21]

Although Umm Kulthum soon immersed herself in singing and music lessons to 'improve her skills',[22] it is important here to mention that she had attended the Koran school in her village from the ages of five to eight. Her memorisation of entire sections of the Koran was to later prove invaluable in her successful seduction of the people.

In 1926, Umm Kulthum broke away from performing with her family and hired a professional orchestra or *takht* to perform with her. 'Her repertory of religious *qasa'id* and *tawashih* gave way to new and modern love songs composed especially for her.'[23] Her ability to sing these religious songs was however to remain very useful to her throughout her career, as we shall later see. By 1928 Umm Kulthum was in a position to compete with other professional singers and by the '1930's […] was producing her own concerts and [negotiating] her own contracts.'[24] Obviously this gave her immense personal power over what she would sing, as well as where and when. In fact, Umm Kulthum continued, throughout her career, to choose who wrote her music and lyrics as well as what type of songs were appropriate to what occasion. This fierce independence proved central to her future success. However, in order to fully appreciate this success, I will discuss certain aspects of music listening that enabled successful entertainers to emerge as well as discussing Umm Kulthum's technique in particular.

3.2 TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF MUSIC LISTENING AND THE VERNACULAR

In their work *Mass Media in the Middle East: A Comprehensive Handbook*, Kamalinpour and Mowlana discuss the impact of radio in the transmission of popular culture. Their conclusion, concerning Egypt, is that in the 1950's with seventy two percent of Lower Egypt and sixty eight percent of Upper Egypt considered as rural areas and with minimal literacy, radio was effectively established as the most popular information mediator. 'Group listening to radio was great in Egypt […] especially among the lower classes' and 'listening increased [because] merchants or owners of coffee shops would have a set to attract customers.'[25] As more inexpensive radios were manufactured, Egypt

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went on to assume the highest ratio of persons to radio statistic in Africa (one hundred and forty four radios to one thousand persons). In a population of over twenty million, this constituted a significant amount of radio audience. Coupled with the linguistic phenomena in the Arab world - the discrepancy between spoken and written language as explained below - radio or oral culture was undoubtedly destined to become more accessible than print culture. Walter Armbrust in his insightful work *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* has documented the split in the Arabic language between official and popular language or discourse. He writes that,

> in the case of Egypt and the Arab-speaking world the classical language is intrinsic to the practice of religion, and cannot be consciously and publicly discarded. Theoretically the national vernacular of all Arab nations is translocal: classical Arabic, albeit a somewhat 'modernised' (grammatically streamlined) variant of it. Europeans tried to write like Cicero; Arabs tried to emulate the Qur'an (with the understanding that attaining full Qur'anic eloquence was beyond human capability). But unlike Europeans, who discarded their classical model of linguistic eloquence in the wake of the Reformation, Arab writers continued to insist on classicism as a literary ideal, although in practice modern 'classical' style varies considerably from region to region and continues to evolve. Parallel to the ideologically and culturally justified adherence to 'classical vernacular' a standardised and locally referenced spoken vernacular developed. Mass media were important in establishing this shadow vernacular, precisely because of their imported character: there are no clear conventions to adhere to in the new media as there is in writing. Hence in modern Egypt we are dealing with two 'national vernaculars,' one rooted in classicism and deeply valued, but hard to learn and territorially ambiguous; the other colloquial, easily understood and highly practical, but a hard sell in terms of prestige. In practice styles of expression are much more complex than this binary model suggests, but ideologically the distinction remains.[26]

In relation to Umm Kulthum, some of the important considerations of this chapter are whether in the emulation of Koran recitation she came closer to the divine and in doing so made the Koran more accessible. More importantly, was she consciously making use of her success in Koranic recitation when elevating the colloquial through the use of it in her songs? These are all important considerations of the chapter and I will return to them in conclusion.

In short, Armbrust suggests that popular culture assumes a closer tie to a certain *type* of language and thus takes on magnanimity because it has a language of its own to refer to that is dissimilar to the variant; written language (classical Arabic). A poignant outcome of this split is that 'the names of entertainers can be mentioned in almost any context to make a point [and] popular culture has been linguistically important in Egypt because it has historically been a qualitatively different vehicle for establishing national identity than official discourse' becoming, in a sense, closer to people's spoken language.[27] Inevitably then, because of its link to a distinct tradition, song finds a place in the everyday discourse of the people. Literature, inevitably restricted to those with the ability and inclination to read, was overtaken in significance by popular music as it required less technical expertise to listen than to read.[28] As radios became more plentiful in homes and cafés, access by a national audience to a single performer became technologically and sociologically simple and commonplace. Likewise, in his essay 'The Roles of Music in Society: the Ethnomusicological Perspective', Gregory explains that 'in many societies music is not an independent art form to be enjoyed for its own sake, but is an integral part of the culture. Music may accompany every human activity from the cradle to the grave, including lullabies, games, dancing, work, healing, battle, rites and ceremonies, including weddings and funerals.'[29] If song in Arabic is also more accessible than literature, then song, or popular culture is what 'accompan[ies] these human activit[ies]' and heightens the importance of this very culture. However, Gregory maintains that 'cross cultural studies show that listeners in general have difficulty in perceiving the emotions expressed by unfamiliar music from another culture. Emotional expression in music thus seems to be culturally determined rather than being an inherent property of the music.'[30] While I find Gregory's first statement useful, I want to argue that emotional expression in music does not always seem to emerge as culturally determined, in fact, it may sometimes act against what would be culturally determined by virtue of its one characteristic; through its construction as 'entertainment', a feature freeing it from social and moral responsibility, it can challenge the culture in question. True understanding of music need not come from total immersion in a culture if we are open to the possible powers of musical rendition and the ambivalent properties of performance. As I will develop later, music need not always *represent*, it can and does often *create* a space for the expression of emotion that is not culturally determined. This conclusion assumes that music from other cultures can inform

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different cultural locations. Furthermore, Gregory claims that 'relationships between music tastes and social class, [are] defined in terms of socio-economic status and occupational category.'[31] Although Gregory is addressing western audiences, his comment does ignore the possibilities of music doing just the inverse; Umm Kulthum's music crossed over class barriers, augmenting her performative capabilities. Moreover, 'Umm Kulthum promoted a carefully constructed image of herself that emphasised several aspects of her background: her identity as a *fallahah* or *bint-il-balad*, a religious Muslim *min al-mashayikh*, and an elegant, educated Egyptian' (the terms mean, respectively, *peasant, child of the land, of the religious leaders*).[32] Also, according to Gregory, studies of gender-related musical statistics relate (in Western Music) that 'males are more likely than females to prefer music described as "hard" or "tough", while females are more likely to prefer music which is "softer" or more romantic.'[33] Again, this cannot explain why men crooned over Umm Kulthum and why 'le Jeudi soir, employés et ouvriers se hâtent de rentrer de leur travail, pour ne pas manquer la retransmission du concert de "la dama" '(*On Thursday evenings, employees and labourers rush[ed] back home from work so as not to miss the re-transmission of Umm Kulthum's concert*).[34] Gregory finally claims that 'the apparent link between gender role and musical tastes prompts the speculation that, in social groups where differences in the gender roles of men and women are less distinct, sex differences in musical tastes will also be less marked, although relevant data are lacking.'[35] Again, in relation to the repertory of Umm Kulthum, this does not apply. In the highly gendered society in question, musical tastes did not seem to differ much at all. In fact, what can only be termed as worship came from men and women alike (this will be considered in depth later). Ultimately, Umm Kulthum's repertory reaches across class and gender categories and reconfigures both.

A more accommodating view of the role of music serves to highlight these potentials. John Shepherd and Peter Wicke in their work *Music and Cultural Theory*, argue for 'how music as a distinctive and irreducible signifying practice can be thought of as a structure with features distinct from those of language, as well as of "communicating" semiologically in ways which are quite different from those of language' and how 'music is an activity central rather than peripheral to people and society.'[36] Their aim is precisely not to discuss music as though it had the function of a language (spoken) which it clearly

does not. In relation to the popularity of Umm Kulthum and understanding an-other music, we need to consider that

> [...] musicology is the only discipline through which it is possible to access certain processes vital and fundamental to human societies. It is only through musicology that these processes and their effects upon individuals can be rendered public for understanding and critical discussion.[37]

Immersion in another culture does not function as a prerequisite to understanding its music, rather, one can try and understand these hidden aspects or 'processes' of a culture through the music itself. To expand their argument, Shepherd and Wicke draw on Raymond Williams' idea that

> if art is social, in other words, its social character need not lie outside itself in some reified notion of society as a thing apart from the cultural and symbolic forms through which it is manifest to people. It can be constituted through art's very practice in the sense that the practice of art is at one and the same time an essentially *social* practice.[38]

Umm Kulthum's place and effect on the community (in the practice of art as a *social* practice) was the ability to bring taboo subjects to the foreground. Here, we are further drawn into the possibility that,

> there are *aspects* of social and cultural processes which are revealed *uniquely* through their musical articulation [...] there are aspects of affect and meaning *in culture* that can only be accessed through an understanding of the specific qualities of the signifying practices of music as a cultural form: that is, its sounds.[39]

Contrary to the argument put forth by Gregory, that music is culturally determined and can only represent, Shepherd and Wicke seem to be suggesting that music can create, as well as represent, meaning. As they go on to argue,

> Kohut and Levvarie link this particular characteristic to music's ability to circumvent the world of language [...] music is thus seen as being quite distinct from language, a characteristic which is in some cases prized. Pfiefer, for example, notes that music can move in the direction of expressing objects, but hopes that it will never be able to attain this goal: 'for if it did so, it would be in danger of turning into a kind of language and of

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ceasing to be an art.' It is almost as though music has a 'direct access to the "unconscious".'[40]

In fact, Umm Kulthum does not attain her goals on a political level because she does not engage in politics except from within her music - this 'distinct[ness]' keeps her music an art that does not *appear* to have a social function. However, if music can invoke access to the 'unconscious' because it never fully signifies, then it can also

> [reproduce] emotional situations in a more direct way than can be done by any other form of art or any intellectual processes. It creates not only a highly emotional reality but also the highest degree of unreality because it is marked by the absence of objective contents to which emotions can be linked.[41]

If sound can have a distinct relationship to the emotions and by extension to sexuality then this theory suggests that there is a way to examine music without *total immersion* in a particular culture. Attention to the reactions and reception to the music will highlight what makes the music significant and primarily, what makes the music popular (I do realise the need for background information but do not understand the need for total immersion as this is, and remains, impossible and contradictory). Can 'music, then [...] take us back to a world in which the barriers between self and objects are dissolved'[42] (the importance of this space where barriers are dissolved will be discussed further in a later section). For the moment, we can ask, can music take us back to a suspended emotion? For if there is a special relation between 'music' and the 'unconscious', then 'what is it within the unconscious or primary processes that "requires" and "generates" music' as opposed to the perception that 'music can tame the desires and tendencies of the ego?'[43] (This stance would question the status of art's moral and social functions). Finally though, as a concluding point in their chapter entitled 'Theorising Difference in Language and Music', Shepherd and Wicke argue that 'by bringing into play the gendered world of the symbolic order, signifiers thus change the entire semiological field as one of power in relation to control.'[44] They establish, in relation to this semiological field that constitutes and maintains the symbolic, that,

> language thus serves to structure the world through relations of difference, but a difference based on opposition if not repulsion. Music, in contrast, serves to structure the world through relations of difference based on attraction [...] music is capable of *evoking,* in a

concrete and direct, yet *mediated* and *symbolic* fashion, the structures of the world and the states of being that flow from them and sustain them [...] music's distinctness and autonomy are guaranteed through its intra-sonic and self-referring character.[45]

Before moving on to discuss these provocative ideas on music and how they can determine the far reaching significance of Umm Kulthum, I will present an anthropological observation that considers that potential of oral poetry for women, before moving on to a brief commentary on gender discourse in the Arab world and the further connection to Umm Kulthum.

3.3 ABU-LUGHOD: BEDOUIN SENTIMENT AND CONTEMPORARY POPULAR CULTURE

In her work on the Bedouin society, the Awlad Ali, Lila Abu-Lughod traces the use of poetry by the female members of the group to express opinions or feelings on themes not usually expressed in spoken language as well as to express *opinions* and *feelings* in general. The study of this phenomenon (unwritten oral poetry) can act as an exemplar to the argument made above concerning qualities that music emphasises with one important exception that I will discuss below. In the tribe of the Awlad-Ali any themes that could *question* the codes of honour, codes that keep the tribe together, seem to get displaced from the dominant discourse (where they have no place at all) and find their way into the exclusively feminine discourse of oral poetry. As her research begins, Abu-Lughod asks,

> why do individuals in Bedouin society appear able to express through poetry the sentiments of weakness that violate the honour code and the sentiments of romantic love that violate the modesty code without incurring the opprobrium of the community or losing the self-esteem derived from embodying the moral ideals of their society? What is the significance of having two culturally constituted and sanctioned discourses available to individuals to express their interpersonal experiences?[46]

What seems to dominate Abu-Lughod's argument is a sense of place, that is, *where* is it that these themes are discussed. In this particular Bedouin society, it is important to the women that the men not find out what they are reciting and that they conduct these recitations in their own private space among other women only (in contrast to writing which would be very difficult to conceal).[47] Similarly, though at the same time

dissimilarly, Umm Kulthum's performances remain within the entertainment industry (that is, within realm of the performance) yet resonate throughout on radio (physically, or materially, the songs are heard everywhere). Though the space where the recitations are made is different in both cases, it is the idea of a parallel discourse and its perpetuation as such that remains significant. Here of course, problems of "authenticity" and the "real" arise in terms of what can and does remain a valid discourse and for whom. If we seek the authentic and the real in the dominant discourse then there can be no place where we accept or allow for the performative (the poetry of women) as real or authentic. I would like to argue for the validity of the performative in its capacity to open an unknown space of experience (that is, not always already constructed). In this sense, we understand the performative as being a subversive moment within a restrictive medium.[48] As Cöçek and Balaghi have argued in their work *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East*, 'voice and experience can be utilised as the two conceptual parameters to recapture the agency of the hegemonised.'[49] Thus, as Abu-Lughod understands it, though we might initially see a 'discrepancy between what people say in the two media [as] suggesting hypocrisy' this alternative discourse can otherwise be seen as a non-threatening way of communicating grievances that are in fact *related* to the strict codes of honour.[50] As Abu-Lughod writes, 'by acting aggressively and proudly in ordinary life while at the same time revealing feelings of vulnerability, people show that they are choosing to act in accordance with the moral code.'[51] After accepting that there is little the women can do as far as political change is concerned, they then seek another method that allows them to circumvent the dominant discourse. The objective seems to be at first a relatively simple one, to make semi-public (to women) what it is they mean to express through the medium of poetry. It remains the main thread of my argument that Umm Kulthum is doing just this; speaking more publicly under the cloak of "entertainment" against the dominant discourse that does not have the space to accommodate her grievances. In fact,

> the expression of sentiments in poetry gives meaning to the discourse of everyday life in a
> second way. By channelling such powerful sentiments into a rigid and conventional
> medium and delimited social contexts, individuals demonstrate a measure of self-mastery
> and control that contributes to honour.[52]

In a way, these expressions/sentiments become sublimated as they are channelled into a discourse that remains completely detached from the discourse of honour from which they emerged (yet within which they remain imbricated). Aggression felt against emotions such as weakness and pain are addressed in poetry and in turn this action 'contributes to honour' in that it retains these topics, but in "private." Like the Awlad Ali, Umm Kulthum speaks to the conventions that restrict her and others but more publicly. The fact that she is still conceived of as contributing to honour through harbouring the essence of 'asil' (the 'authentic') suggests that there is something more at work in this particular situation. Though they may not have revolutionary effects, her songs do bring forward issues that would otherwise remain un-addressed such as woman's capacity to express religious and political issues as well as the authority to speak on love.[53] Her repertory also allows for women and men to experience *together*, something not encouraged by the Awlad Ali.[54]

Abu-Lughod asks the important question 'does poetry represent another set of values and ideals of personhood that inform individual experiences?'[55] If so, then

> poetry may be not just a symbol of the individual's freedom to defy culture's power to
> define and delimit experience, but also a tool to be used in that defiance [...] I would offer
> the related proposition that Awlad Ali's poetry of self and sentiment be viewed as their
> corrective to an obsession with morality and an overzealous adherence to the ideology of
> honour.[56]

In two more recent essays, 'Movie Stars and Islamic Moralism in Egypt' and 'The Objects of Soap Opera: Egyptian Television and the Cultural Politics of Modernity' Abu-Lughod presents local situations that incorporate larger questions concerning the power of popular culture in the Middle East (particularly Egypt).[57] I will discuss these essays in order to highlight a discourse on moralism and to juxtapose this with the leniency practised towards Umm Kulthum as well as lay the groundwork for a further discussion of how this leniency was orchestrated (by herself and subsequently her audience).

In her essays on moralism and movie stars, Abu-Lughod describes the recent phenomena of successful female media stars in Egypt who make a public return to Islam

and the veil. She notes the seeming discrepancy with people's 'infatuation' with media stars and the simultaneous 'demonization and religious renunciations of the world they represent.'[58] Although Abu-Lughod's argument centres around the false feeling of oneness that the people experience (predominantly women) when a media star takes on the veil and re-enters the domestic sphere, her argumentative contribution is the certainty that this oneness is an obvious illusion. 'The women [audience] delude themselves into thinking that these stars are now women like themselves, sharing their moral values and thus other aspects of their situation.'[59] The phenomenon seems to indicate, as Abu-Lughod concludes, that 'poor and rural women [experience] the comforting illusion of equality with their Muslim sisters everywhere, something no other political discourse can offer.'[60] In short, this move deceptively cuts across class. I want to stress that this appears to be a new phenomenon associated with the "new veiling" in the Middle East.[61] This tolerance/intolerance is a trope that has long since been experienced in Egyptian culture. This research on modern Egyptian culture is reminiscent of the particular potential of Umm Kulthum to sustain an audience that did not retain contradictory feelings about her own role as woman or as performer. As opposed to Abu-Lughod's view that,

> the born-again discourse of performance as the work of the Devil carries weight, first, because it resonates with long standing traditional views in the Muslim world that performers are disreputable,[62]

I will argue that moving beyond this disreputability becomes a crucial element in the repertory and reputation of Umm Kulthum.

In her work on Egyptian soap operas, Abu-Lughod tackles the role of television in modern day Egypt. Her research reveals that many of the early television films and serials were based on novels by renowned authors and she interprets this as an educating mission on the part of the media. This same "educating mission" has already been attributed to Umm Kulthum who was claimed to have brought culture to the masses.[63] In the switch from radio to television, the civilising mission seems to change technological tools rather than aims and strategies. In fact, as Abu-Lughod explains, one of the most popular Egyptian soap operas 'Hilmayya Nights' (1980's) was a serial that 'exceeded the state of affairs in terms of ethics, morality [and] politics.'[64] She also argues that the repetitive
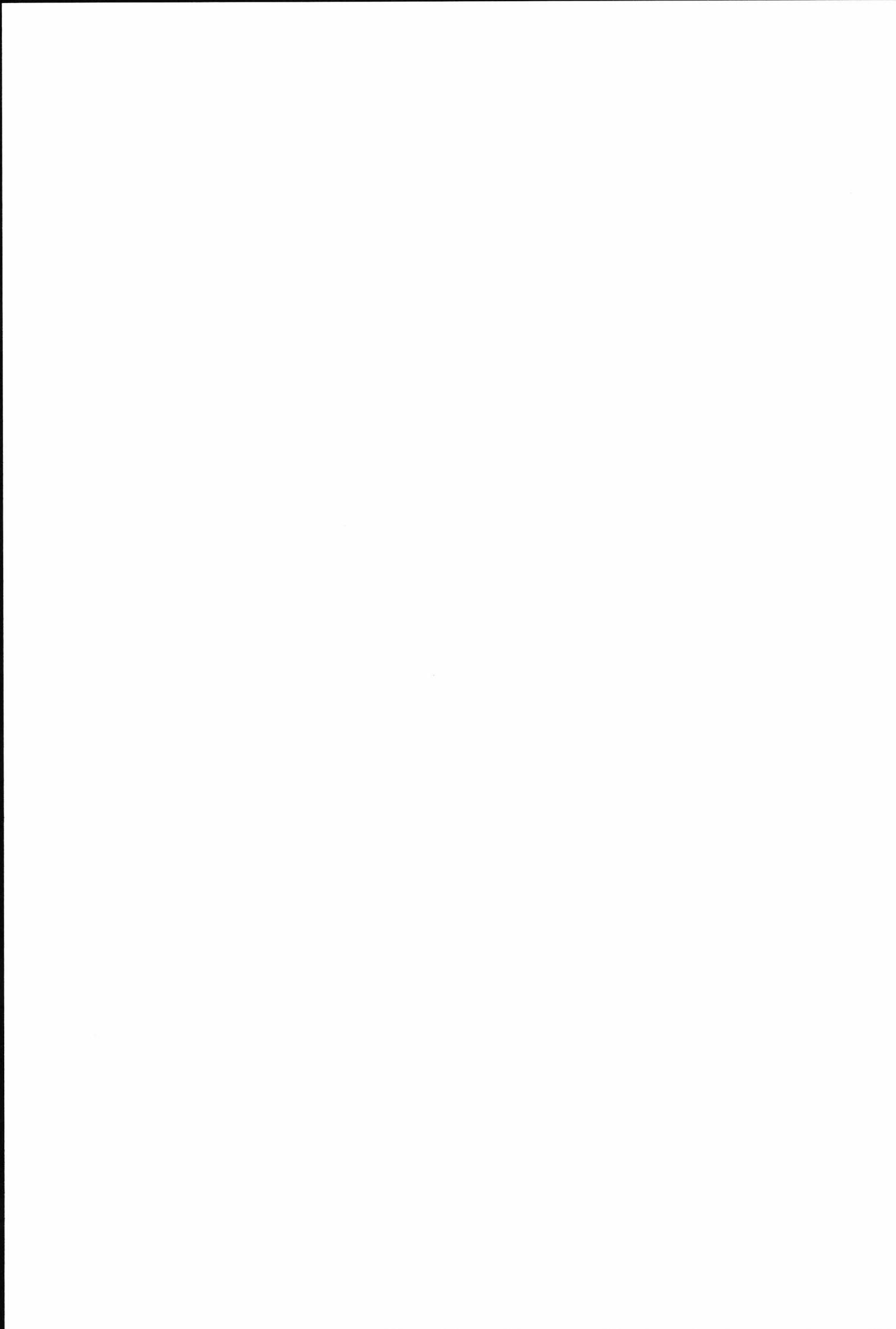
quality of the soap opera 'allows for the development of [attachment] to characters.'[65] Again this reminds me intensely of the repetitive quality of Umm Kulthum's performances (every first Thursday of the month from the 1930's until the 1970's) which undoubtedly did much to establish her as a well-known figure.[66] It seems that the popularity of Umm Kulthum is almost proto-soap in its feverish intensity. Of 'Hilmayya Nights', Abu Lughod states that it 'provided an explicit social and political commentary on contemporary Egyptian life' and 'promoted the theme of national unity.'[67] Though Abu-Lughod speaks of cultural life in the Egypt of the 1980's and 90's, the repertory of Umm Kulthum shares much of the traits that seem to underlie her discourse on the shape of cultural debate in the Middle East, suggesting a continuity in the intensity of popular culture. Through a discussion of gendered roles in the Arab world, I will emphasise what makes the achievement of popularity through the medium of a tainted profession more difficult and complex to conceptualise and achieve. Though response to mass media in the present day Middle East is fascinating in its seemingly opposing values with respect to the revered stars of culture that it worships, a closer look at gender values will help us focus on the manipulation of repertory that allowed Umm Kulthum to stay in the limelight and not fall into this system of opposition.

3.4 THE QUESTION OF HONOUR AND THE CONFUSION OVER GENDERED ROLES

The question of honour as suggested above is a central one in the discourse on feminism in the Middle East and one with which gender is intrinsically tied. In her work *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory*, Fatima Mernissi, Moroccan sociologist and feminist, reveals once again the paradoxical situation created by the polarisation of the sexes. She discusses the exaggerated (to a modern West) concept of intact virginity and uses it to display the array of problems that this sets up not only for the female members of Muslim communities but also, perceptively, for its male members. As Mernissi notes, 'curiously [then], virginity is a matter between men, in which women merely play the role of silent intermediaries [...] the concepts of honour and virginity locate the prestige of a man between the legs of a woman.'[68] The concept of honour then remains tied to the shame that a woman will or will not bring to the male members of her family. Love, a concept that is deemed too powerful, so powerful that it can deflect from almost everything, including the worship of God, becomes the primary target for hostilities. What

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ensues is invariably a state of confusion where the rules (honour) are seen to restrict the maker of the rules (male). Again, as Mernissi has pointed out, '[men] want access to women for brief sexual encounters before marriage, but once they have decided to marry, they launch into a frantic search for a virgin whom no other man has "defiled". '[69] A dead end situation ensues where men come face to face with the actions that they have enforced upon themselves in the name of some higher honour or power and a trap is constructed that commodifies the female members of society. It becomes obvious that 'the female condition and the male condition are not different in the end to which they are directed but in the pole around which they orbit.'[70] Love then, the significance of which we shall discuss later, is thrown into disarray, where, because it has no part in everyday discourse, becomes an exaggerated feature in any other discourse not immediately associated with written language (or official language) and predominately so in the language of music. Mernissi argues that: 'Arabic has fifty words for "love", but no word for "couple" […] the inflation of words for love is […] a mystification, an attempt to hide the absence of the couple in the Muslim family, which is made institutionally unstable by the practices of repudiation and polygamy.'[71] When love is conceived as something that must reside 'outside' of the institutionalised couple, then love becomes an exterior that *must* somehow be realised (since the notion of love cannot be purged altogether). The idea of love is an idea that permeates the unofficial discourse but cannot always satisfactorily find a place within official life. It therefore, in political terms, seemingly obsessively orbits this official life.

In support of Mernissi's theories, Lama Abu Odeh in her essay 'Crimes of Honour and the Construction of Gender in Arab Societies' has claimed that,

> inasmuch as the man is the censor of 'his' own women , he is also censored in relation to other men's women. As he is busy cementing the blocks of 'his' women's walls (hymens, in a sense), he is also, simultaneously, bumping into similar walls elsewhere (that is, those cemented by other men). As women have internalised the censoring look of other men, so have men internalised the censoring look of other men. This has the effect of stylising the space that men, in general, occupy.[72]

We are then caught in this seemingly "no way out" situation where rules imposed on others effectively transform into a self-prison. If love is not to be considered a legitimate

topic because it calls into question what can and cannot be done in the name of honour, then love and passion become topics of conversation with no basis or actuality in the discourse of the every day. "Love" seeks to find refuge in another event, that of the musical performance. Abu Odeh stresses again that the paradoxical discourse of male virginity has eventually led her to conclude that

> [...] Arab men are virgins by default. The culture does not actively seek, stress or demand their virginity. However, it makes it very hard for them not to be, given its stress, and demand an invocation of women's virginity [...] though the literature is rife with discussion of the virginity of Arab women, the virginity of Arab men is hardly mentioned. I would like to stress this point because I believe that both men and women suffer under the yoke of the structure of honour, and that it is experienced as hardship by men no less than by women.[73]

Love (sex and passion) consequently becomes a highly sensitive topic to approach in everyday discourse. Yet, what I want to suggest is that the repudiation of certain values from the dominant discourse and its enforcements, or any concept of the *real*, is not immediately followed by their expulsion. Values, or ideas, such as love, inevitably find their way into another medium. For example. the entertainment industry in this case left women *in general* exposed and unprotected and so in a sense was an accessible screen onto which others could project their emotions. The phenomenon of Umm Kulthum and the possibility of her success can be examined using the rubric set out by the arguments above: she can be viewed as disentangling herself from prejudices associated with the trade while at the same time singing the forbidden to excess. How she disassociated herself from previous performers and orbited the official discourse will be discussed below.

To summarise and emphasise the case being made, I have argued that music, in the Arab world, due to its inherent connection with the spoken language (rather than religious or written language) plays a large role in the aesthetic awareness of the people. Popular culture is often conceived not as the *other* culture but as *the* culture.[74] I have also stated that music can be used to understand not only what another culture is about but what it is about another culture/world that remains unexpressed, remains as it were embodied in the unconscious. Through my example of the Awlad Ali I have tried to suggest that for the

sake of an idea of "honour", certain subjects remain untouched in the dominant discourse, such as love. Though the medium Abu-Lughod examines is oral poetry, the aim of the recitation, that is, the upholding of honour through the expression of taboo topics in private and through poetry as opposed to speech, remains closest to what I will try and argue in relation to Umm Kulthum (though Kulthum exceeds *in public*). In making a case for the Muslim male I seek to define what it is about *both* genders that leads them to play out or perform a certain fantastic reaction that does not adhere to their strict moral codes within the confines of the medium of song. I will do this by exploring the repertory of Umm Kulthum to pinpoint audience reception and the significance of this reception, and possibly how she speaks within an awareness of a 'constitutive outside' that has to enable her. The term 'constitutive outside' is a term that emerges in Butler's work (which she takes from Derrida), and that 'designates the degraded object that the subject vociferously denounces yet 'is "inside" the subject as its own founding reputation.'[75] Umm Kulthum seems aware of this constitutive outside without which neither she nor it could be empowered. I am not suggesting that abjection is at play here as in no way does Umm Kulthum emerge as an abjected figure. What I am suggesting is that she plays with the forbidden. Her understanding of this, as I hope to demonstrate, comes close to designating her as the constitutive inside that enables a continuation of a tenuous honour code to exist and yet question itself.

3.5 ADORNO AND BENJAMIN: THE FUNCTION OF MASS CULTURE

Hans Magnus Enzenburger in his 1970 essay 'Constituents of a Theory of the Media' has argued that the left was misguided in its claim that mass culture imposes false consciousness and false needs on the masses (referring to Adorno, Horkheimer, etc..). Rather, he maintained, the strategies of mass culture could only be as successful as they were because they appealed to *real* needs and desires on the part of the people, although these needs and desires were obviously distorted by the 'consciousness industry.'[76] This statement, though clearly involved in a very different dialogue, nevertheless outlines the properties and functions of mass culture as conceived in this particular context. It would seem that in the Middle East, due to the gap between the language of official discourse and the language of the mass media, popular culture, in its attempt to mediate between the two (for example making films out of inaccessible books) offers a version of the culture at

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hand, its needs and desires as well as the industry's ways of dealing with them (a culture that can often only be partially represented as it is always moving beyond). Yet, it may also seem that the official discourse offers and allows Umm Kulthum to "pass" as "genuine" so as to allow for the expression of an emotion that it never intends to allow into its own discourse.[77] This possibility retains the dangerous element of a totalitarian discourse that seeks to promote one single repository of expressions that it can use to manipulate the people. Umm Kulthum would therefore rise as simply an agent in this discourse of power. I want to dispel any suggestion that this may indeed be the case (though I will later discuss Umm Kulthum's music in terms of a "hypnotic effect", I intend to justify the expression) through pitting Theodor Adorno's essay 'The Schema of Mass Culture' against Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in order to form a space for the repertory of Umm Kulthum that negotiates the accusations it may receive.[78] I will only draw tentatively on Adorno and Benjamin for what it might suggest. Obviously, the parallels will be loose due to the radically differing contexts, yet I believe certain points can be drawn up. It is precisely because Umm Kulthum seems to sustain a *spiritual* and *popular* image that it also seems necessary to discuss her alongside these two (it is possible that we may in future need a new version of their ideas, but for the moment their debates are interesting to use). This discussion will involve the distinctions between "art" and "mass culture" and invariably implicates Umm Kulthum's repertory as one that would seem to find a place in both.

In his essay, 'The Schema of Mass Culture' Adorno argues for a mass culture that creates needs for the masses who then only have the cultural product to turn to for confirmation of those needs. In his own words, 'the mass culture which is so true to the facts absorbs the truth content and expends itself in the material but all it has left as material is itself.'[79] Though Umm Kulthum's repertory would seem at one level to be masking a reality by offering an alternative, her performance, I want to argue that she is evoking a reality and then giving it up for experience. Adorno makes the distinction between art and mass culture and describes it as such:

> ever since the pressure from above has ceased to tolerate the tension between the
> individual and the universal, then what is individual can no longer express the universal
> and art becomes a form of justification or at least a means of eliminating the period of

fruitless expectation [...] but mass culture expressly claims to be close to reality only to betray this claim immediately by redirecting it to conflicts in the sphere of consumption where all psychology belongs today from the social point of view.[80]

Umm Kulthum seems to be caught at the centre of this argument. If her production is art and mass culture at the same time, is she 'eliminating a period of fruitless expectation' or is she creating a false need? Does she only uphold the appearance of freedom whilst in actuality providing for escapism?[81] I shall attempt to answer these questions by using the notion of 'aura' as expounded by Walter Benjamin in his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.' By admitting that 'in principle a work of art has always been reproducible' Benjamin already moderates the gulf between the work of art and mass culture and minimises the totalitarian effect that Adorno feared mass culture would have. However, he goes on to argue that 'the presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity [and that] the whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical - and, of course, not only technical - reproducibility.'[82] What makes a work of art authentic is what Benjamin calls an 'aura'; a sense perception that only comes when viewing something for the first time. In a sense, it is this aura that 'withers in the age of mechanical reproduction.'[83] Unlike Adorno's view that mass culture may annihilate this connection to some authenticity, this idea of an 'aura' than can be lived if one is experiencing something for the first time, would suggest that reproducibility is not in and of itself the prerequisite for the totalitarian mass produced commodity that is modern culture. Within the parameters of performative theory, an emotion being understood for the first time, whether it be in the form of the original or a reproduction, has a place in the subject's experience. This, I want to argue, reveals the difficulty in separating the "authentic aura" from the aura produced at the site of a reproduction (that is, records, radio replays, etc..). Umm Kulthum evokes an authenticity pitched between ritual and politics, using her position in one to speak against the constraints of the other. Her 'aura' is something that travels with each performance because it continuously re-addresses this paradox. Umm Kulthum's repertoire remains a work of art *and* a piece of popular culture because it can create the space for an experience every time. It does not claim to represent this experience but re-iterates what is absent from the dominant discourse and allows it to be lived.

The point of the above reveals Saadawi's aversion to this type of art/mass culture (as mentioned at the start of this chapter) that would seem to go hand in hand with Adorno's objections. What benefits are to be had by crooning over unattainable unrequited love? This view however does not allow for the experience of this emotion as created through the performance. Umm Kulthum is established somewhere between the views communicated by Adorno and more importantly, Benjamin's mobilising views. She does not fit into a totalising framework of mass culture, and neither does she abandon her role in ritual for a role in politics. Umm Kulthum brings these oppositions together and using them comes to terms with her audience. Art, through reproduction, becomes accessible whilst retaining its aura. It achieves this by never appearing to represent an emotion but in fact to create it within the performance. Repetition of the performance, I want to argue, accentuates the fact that the 'aura' is reproduced and is what facilitates the creation of an emotion. Far from being an escapist activity, listening to Umm Kulthum's music requires a certain aptitude or attitude that does not allow it to fit neatly into the totalising and mechanistic view of mass culture. As Edward Said has noted recently,

> Umm Kulthum [was] the great Qur'anic reciter and romantic singer whose records and videos (she died in 1975) continue to have a world-wide audience today, possibly even greater than she had when she was alive and her Thursday evening broadcasts from a Cairo theatre were transmitted everywhere between the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans. Everyone who enjoyed Indian, Caribbean, and 'world' music knows and reverently appreciates Umm Kulthum. Having been fed a diet of her music at far too young an age, I found her 40-plus minute songs insufferable and never developed the taste for her that my children, who know her only through recordings, have for her. But for those who like and believe in such cultural typing she also stood for something quintessentially Arab and Muslim - the long, languorous, repetitious line, the slow tempi, the strangely dragging rhythms, the ponderous monophony, the eerily lachrymose or devotional lyrics, etc [...] which I could sometimes find pleasure in but never quite came to terms with. Her secret power has eluded me, but among Arabs I seem to be quite alone in this feeling.[84]

The following section will develop ideas introduced here to locate what Said has called (though not experienced!) a 'secret power'; the 'aura.'

3.6   UMM KULTHUM'S REPERTORY

Umm Kulthum has been called the possible 'hidden feminist' of the Middle East (see page 184). I will show that her empowerment was created by posing/performing as the maternal figure that could speak of the forbidden-to-her 'love, nation or religion,' (in fact, the 'Umm' in Umm Kulthum is the Arabic for mother).[85] Umm Kulthum will be shown to have evoked, through her repertory and performance, the impossibility of total suppression.[86]

Umm Kulthum's repertory requires close examination for the purpose of establishing what it does not contain (and for what it does contain) that allows it to be there (and not somewhere else) as Irigaray has searched through male history to affirm what had to be absent for its possibility.[87] It is impossible to discuss Umm Kulthum's success without taking a look at the content of her songs and what makes them risky and enabling at the same time. Though they move parallel to the dominant discourse, the songs in the repertory allow, in their embrace of vast topics, a circumventing possibility. The question throughout remains; is Umm Kulthum successful in voicing/making a conquest within the performative moment that speaks of a possible future in the dominant discourse or can the subversive moment live only in the space of the artistic performance (and can this not be political too?).

A tool in Umm Kulthum's project was the fact that she disclosed practically nothing of her private life, making her public persona speak for all of her. In a sense, by doing this, she could construct herself through her songs while at the same time not allow herself to be disclosed through her songs. Umm Kulthum did not hide her childhood past and it is well documented, but as soon as she became involved with the mass media, it became important for her to disclose little on her home life, family and love affairs. To expand on this "private" image, Umm Kulthum remained visually (and virtually) 'asexual' and so in a sense re-directed all her created emotions *back to the audience* since she did not embody them materially (doing so would have jeopardised her role as receptacle of 'asil' and would also have relegated her to the domain of unrespectable singers). It appears that Umm Kulthum was able to create these emotions in any given performance in

order that she could break the rules *within* her singing.[88]   How she successfully orchestrated this is explored in the following section.

3.6.1   *TARAB AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SOLO SINGER*

Tarab is the Arabic emotive word used to describe the enchantment of one by a piece of music, usually evoked by the voice of the singer who is rendering the particular piece of music.[89] To evoke this sense of oneness with the song and so by definition with the performer and the performance, various techniques were in use in the repertory of Umm Kulthum. Danielson writes on 'tarab' in her full-length work on Umm Kulthum and describes it as 'the pleasure of listening to a wonderful singer all night; the excellence of the singer who could enchant her audience until dawn [...] the marvellous strength of the voice that could sing until daybreak.'[90]   To achieve this, certain technical techniques associated with musical rendition had to be adhered to in order to centralise the *voice* of the singer; 'tarab' was no simple feat:

> Provided a song was interesting to the listeners, the virtuosity of the piece itself and, in the case of the monolog [see endnote], the absence of the responding chorus would have virtually precluded one potential for audience rowdiness known to Umm Kulthum in the 1920's; singing along. The emotional impact of the monolog text and its theatrical aim emphasised the solo singer's role as the centre of attention. A by-product of the through-composed structure, virtuosic display and absence of chorus was to rivet *respectful and appreciative attention to the singer.*[91] (emphasis my own)

As shown above, 'tarab' was connected to the singer in the first instance, it was what the singer *generated*. It was also a concept crucial to song composition and reflects a careful selection of songwriters and music-composers (that Umm Kulthum chose herself). In particular, one of Umm Kulthum's composers, Zakariya Ahmed, 'highlighted the singer's leading role [...] his rhythmic structures accommodated extra time for clear articulation of a consonant, addition or omission of a melodic embellishment and prolongation of the cadence; all important practices historically in Arabic song.'[92] In fact, for years, Umm Kulthum avoided collaboration with her male counterpart Muhammad Abd -al Wahhab on account of his use of too many European instruments in his 'takht' (orchestra) that could interfere with the solo voice. When they were finally persuaded to collaborate, it was obvious that,

Umm Kulthum feared that the vocal line of any song Abd al-Wahhab wrote would be overwhelmed by the instrumental parts and that she would be made to appear weak. Abd al-Wahhab, well aware of Umm Kulthum's usual involvement in the process of composition and her command in the rendition of a song, feared that the song he wrote would, one way or the other, be 'mutakalthum' or dominated by Umm Kulthum to such an extent that his composition would become nothing but an insignificant vehicle for her vocal style.[93]

Though this may seem primarily an obvious scene for the battle of egos it does clarify that 'tarab', though appreciated, expected, and revered, was in fact something difficult to produce and contain. When 'asked [herself] to define tarab, Umm Kulthum said that it was attained when the listener "felt" the meaning of the words. Usually she sought to evoke meaning(s) in indirect ways, drawing the listener closer to the themes and *emotions* of the text.'[94] 'Tarab' then, excited the emotions and could not only be evoked through text but required a certain strength of voice as well. It was assumed that a song could be carried at times by the voice alone with little accompaniment, thus creating a unique space where the creation of 'tarab' is solely dependant on the voice. This will become clearer when examined alongside Umm Kulthum's expansive repertory and her style of performance.[95]

Tarab was an element incorporated into all of Umm Kulthum's vast repertory: in the love songs as well as the religious and nationalist renditions. Thus, by extension, she was able to occupy the position of a dignified singer of passionate lyrics, a title no woman singer had been able to hold successfully. This extensive repertory was made up of the '*Monolog*: a through-composed song developed in musical theatre and characterised by the emotive, often virtuosic expression by a solo singer, the *Quasidah*: a classical poetry genre characterised by a single rhyme scheme and meter throughout, this is a lengthy poem constructed of hemistichs [a half-line of verse] and often treating themes and images having to do with wandering in the desert and coming upon something that has been lost: usually through-composed in musical settings, and the *Ughniya* or Ughniyat (plural): literally meaning "song", this term is applied to modern songs often with colloquial texts cast in a variety of musical shapes that frequently include a refrain or some other form of internal repetition.'[96] By proving herself a devout reproducer of these styles, she kept her audience and critics in check, simultaneously expanding on what have rarely but

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poignantly been referred to as outrageous love texts. Clever oscillation between these styles ensured that Umm Kulthum was known and remembered for an array of singing styles, namely; that she could sing religious songs well (as she had been trained to recite the Koran and this gave her the skill of clear rendition), that she could sing songs for and of the nation convincingly, and thirdly, and most importantly, that she could consequently sing about love and passion as though they were discussed freely and without inhibition, as though it were not *the* forbidden subject for women, as though it were not *the* subject made forbidden by religion and the state. This notion is evocative. The fact that clear articulation of words, learnt as a result of reciting the Koran, is ultimately used in the love songs is significant. How Umm Kulthum manipulated her repertory of Quasidah's to establish herself as a solemn singer and how this enabled her to sing of the revolution and the countless love songs for which she is so famous will be expanded upon. Her capacity to move between popular language and religious or "high language" was admirable and allowed for a wider audience. The lyrics further delineate the relationship between audience and singer; what is eventually sung and how does this stretch the boundaries of strict gender definitions?

Quasaid (plural of quasidah) are characterised by aloof titles that allude to the qualities of the genre outlined above. Some examples are 'The Light of Dawn Spring Forth', 'A Gazelle of the Valley', 'The Saviour is Born', 'The Nile', 'I Heard a Voice Calling Out', 'I Envy the South Wind', 'The Ruins' amongst others.[97] These songs were reflective of a sombre mood that celebrated the beauty of Egypt and its inherent values, all that was taught to be praiseworthy in the narrative of Nation (even when concerned with themes of love they rarely expanded on sub-themes such as desire or passion). Quasidahs are also the oldest types of "odes" located in pre-Muslim culture; they therefore invoke an Arab rather than purely Muslim past. As R.A. Nicholson has documented in his work *A Literary History of the Arabs*, according to 'the ancient Arabs, the poet, (sha'ir, plural shu'ara) as his name implies, was held to be a person endowed with supernatural knowledge, a wizard in league with spirits (jinn) or satans (shayátín) and dependent on them for the magical powers which he displayed.'[98] The first Arabian ode is assumed to have been composed in the first decade of the sixth century A.D[99] and 'during the next hundred years in almost every part of the peninsula we meet with a brilliant succession of

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singers, all using the same poetical dialect and strictly adhering to the same rules of composition.'[100] This suggests that the different variations in poetic recitation all seem to have come together at around this time to form one type of ode with its rules and specific form. This form was the 'quasidah' or ode that was 'the only finished type of poetry that existed in what, for want of a better word, may be called the classical period of Arabic Literature.'[101] Finally, as Nicholson notes, 'this ancient poetry may be defined as an illustrative criticism of Pre-Islamic life and thought.'[102] Historically then, the quasidah was a poetic form, an ode that represented 'great technical skill' and to recite quasidah was synonymous with being a great poet, a great *Arab* poet.[103]

3.6.2   *MANIPULATION OF LOFTY SONGS OR 'QUASAID': WHEN AND WHERE*

Out of the three hundred and eighteen songs documented in her repertory[104] only forty-nine are Quasaid.[105] And yet, the constant re-imposition of these Quasaid ensured that Umm Kulthum would not be categorised as one who had lost self-respect (and of course as one who obeyed the law). The use of Quasaid ensured that Umm Kulthum could pass for someone who was in allegiance with what made for the real and authentic, 'asil.' This idea of an authentic Arab culture is significant, although it reminds me of the melancholia of culture as described by Judith Butler in a recent interview, a melancholia that does not transform into mourning because it cannot be given up.[106] Butler is concerned over a sense of cultural loss that leads to a constant searching for this loss in a lost past. She argues that this is not always useful as it creates a constant state of melancholia that is not productive because one cannot move beyond it. It is important that Umm Kulthum becomes a part of this re-appraisal of the cultural past of Egypt and yet re-moulds it anew, avoiding this state of melancholia. As Danielson has noted, some of Umm Kulthum's songwriters 'believed [that] the problem confronting Arab poets was "insufficient acquaintance with the resources of Arabic and insufficient faith in its possibilities of development"[they wrote] works [that] alluded to Islamic and Arab history while addressing contemporary personages or reflecting on recent events or conditions of modern life.'[107] Another songwriter went one step further and by 'casting the classical poetic genre in modern moulds opened new avenues for creativity in Umm Kulthum's repertory. He modernised the genre without stripping it of its links to the classical heritage

of Arab music.'[108] The peculiar feature about these Quasaid is that there seems to be a underlying strategy in terms of when they were sung:

> while her [Umm Kulthum's] habit was to concentrate on new songs, rarely singing pieces that were as much as ten years old [...] in the 1940's she regularly performed the old quasaid underscoring her interest in the genre. As Umm Kulthum's own statements about them indicated, the appeal of these sophisticated songs to a large audience lay in their recognisably Arabic structure and themes, musically and textually [...] and may be viewed as important expressions of the widely held support for locally and historically Arab culture, for that which was 'asil' or authentic [...] an ordinary individual might not be capable of singing the songs himself, but the *musical phrases and Umm Kulthum's style of delivery were as familiar to Egyptians as Qur'anic recitation.* Musically and textually, the important primary sources for these quasaid were Arab, Egyptian and Islamic.[109] (emphasis my own).

A well known example of the modern quasidah was 'The Ruins' or in Arabic, 'Al-Atlal.' Ahdaf Soueif has translated this song in her novel *In the Eye of the Sun*. In the particular scene, the protagonist, Asya, remembers when she first saw Umm Kulthum and Gamal Abdel Nasser, the then president, who had recently liberated Egypt from monarchical and by extension, colonial rule. She writes, (the song translation in italics are Soueif's, the others my own),

> it had been a top-notch affair. In the huge, domed Festival Hall of Cairo University, Ummu Kulthoum would sing for the President and his guests. The stalls, the boxes, the circle and the galleries were full to capacity when 'Abd el-Nasser had walked in at half past eight [...] Ummu Kulthoum stands in a long grey gown of French dantelle, with the famous dark glasses on her thyroid-bulged eyes and the famous long silk handkerchief clasped in her right hand. The legendary voice soars and drops in the concert-hall. Up and down and around and up and down and around:

My heart, do not ask me where love is	*'O my heart do not ask where is love*
It was a dream that quickly disappeared	*It was a fort of my imagination*
let us drink to the ruins	*Let's drink together over its ruins*
and I will tell you as my tears fall	*Let's drink and let my tears slake my thirst-*
how this love, though it may be over,	*(A thirty two line lyric is made to last for two*
became a myth	*hours)*

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I will not forget you, you have enchanted me

with lips that spoke kind and tender words

with a hand that stretched towards me

like one who comes towards a drowned man in

the flood

with a look that makes anyone who sees it want it

but where has this splendour gone?

my beloved whose hiding place I had visited

Like a glorious bird I sing my pain

he who punishes and rewards,

the supreme judge, has rewarded your kind feats

the passion that I had for you has consumed me   *My yearning for you burns into my side*

and your delay is a burning in my heart   *And the seconds are live coals in my blood.*

give me my freedom, unleash my hands   *Give me my freedom! Let loose my hands!*

I have given you everything and   *I have given you my all and held back*

kept nothing for myself   *nothing.*

my wrists hurt on account   *I ache with your bonds drawing blood from*

of the binds you made me wear   *my wrists*

why do I keep them since you have   *Why do I hold on to them when they have*

taken everything?   *Availed me nothing?*

Why do I keep promises that   *Why do I hold on to vows you have broken*

you do not honour?

Why should I remain captive   *And this pain of imprisonment when the*

when the whole world is mine?   *world is mine?*

Where is he, my beloved enchanter

keeper of greatness, dignity and decency?

Confident, he advances as a king

marked with a forbidden beauty and a certain majesty,

full of the charming scent of the hills

pensive as an evening dream

The novel immediately goes on to comment:

> For a moment the audience is apprehensive. Would he perhaps think that this was a veiled
> reference to his Mukhabarat [an intelligence organisation]?[110] How very audacious she is.
> *Who else would have dared to sing this stanza* - even though it is in a love song? Then

the Chief is seen to laugh and clap his hands and the audience goes wild: 'Tani,' 'Encore,'

'Bis,' they cry. And it is only when she has repeated the stanza four times that they allow

her to go on..'[111] (emphasis my own)

As Soueif has documented, the question remains, who else but Umm Kulthum could have sung these lyrics? Danielson goes on to confirm in her work *Shaping Tradition in Arabic Song* that Umm Kulthum's new quasaid were used to comment on a whole 'complex of nationalist sentiments and religious overtones.'[112] 'The Ruins' emphasises a political stance, the binds of the various stages in Egyptian history, yet it can also refer to a lover who will not set his beloved free and in a more imaginative tone, it laments the loss of the prophet and his teachings, rendered here as ecstatic ones. Enhanced by the multiple interpretations, performance of these quasaid 'deeply coloured popular perceptions of [Umm Kulthum], contributing substantially to her image as an educated, respectable, religious Arab woman.'[113] This image of Umm Kulthum prevails and is exemplified by her central inclusion in the poster published by the ministry of culture in 1990 entitled 100 years of Enlightenment.[114] Also,

[Umm Kulthum's] voice became almost as important as the speeches of the charismatic Nasser. To ensure an Arab world-wide audience, important political news items were broadcast before Umm Kulthum's concerts. Hence, the saying that, 'in the 1950's two leaders emerged in the Middle East, Jamal Abd al-Nasser and Umm Kulthum' has a solid base [...] during the Second World War her lyrics had such a sway over the Arabs that both the Allies and Axis, in their programs broadcast to the Middle East, utilised her records.[115]

As Danielson notes in her work, Umm Kulthum sang 'nationalist songs for the new republic' in the 1950's, thus making her political alignment more solid.[116] Danielson has also noted that 'virtually every singer made efforts to record songs in celebration of Egypt and its new regime.'[117] However, in the case of Umm Kulthum, these nationalist songs 'constituted almost [fifty percent] of her repertory [between 1952 - 1960].'[118] As with the quasidah, Umm Kulthum strategically manipulated genre to ensure positive audience reception and often used the *quasidah* form in the rendition of *nationalist songs* (thus aligning herself simultaneously to tradition and nationalism).[119] This suggests political alignments and highlights her participation in the new emerging nationalism of Nasser's state. She further involved herself in her capacity as singer and held concerts to raise funds for the 'national treasury.'[120] Although Danielson argues that Umm Kulthum did not

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directly involve herself in politics, the concerts she held promoted Nasser's plan for the Pan-Arab Union. She often acted as ambassador to other Arab nations and promoted goodwill on her various tours. I think what Danielson is trying to stress is that she was not in the service of the state. This is a significant point if we are to remain in touch with the problems discussed in the previous section regarding Umm Kulthum's purpose. Though she may not have been intensely political, Umm Kulthum did become close friends with Nasser and this personal affiliation led her to be intensely identified with Egypt's cause, affirming some type of nationalist affiliation.[121] She 'became willing to speak on issues she considered to be important to every citizen, to remind Egyptians of their national heritage through her expressed opinions as well as her musical style.'[122] Umm Kulthum undoubtedly retained a strong patriotic inclination and nowhere is this more evident in her songs of and to the new president himself. However, an overtly anti-political stance would have jeopardised her career and objectives.

An example of a song/ughniya to the president emphasising the points made above is 'Gamal, Emblem of Patriotism.' This song emphasises a love and respect for the president rather than a particular political stance:

Gamal, emblem of patriotism
you are the leader of our republic
the most beautiful of our Egyptian celebrations
Repeat after me,
The most beautiful of Egyptian celebrations
was your rise to the leadership of the Republic

For your dedication to the nation
we have kept a place for you in our heart
and the heart protects its loved one
and is not lured away by loftier affections,
strong are the promises that the heart makes
repeat, repeat after me!

You have freed the Nile from its usurpers
that are restless and desperate
In Egypt, today, you have lit a guiding light
In its shine all countries converge

You have united the Arab world!

Repeat, repeat after me![123]

Such revolutionary renditions were popular with the people and secured an audience that could be certain of her affiliations to the new regime. Her close ties with the political regime also ensured a type of unacknowledged propaganda. Affirmation of a new political power and exultation over its leader left no doubt of Umm Kulthum's nationalist commitment. Another example of this exultation is 'Loved by the People.' Again, the president is invoked to highlight what he can bring to the people if they believe in him,

Be relieved, hear me (listen), I am the people

Wait, you are the protector (dam) of the people

The Ultimate hope of the people

You are what is good, you are the light; you who eagerly face destiny

You are the victory and the victor

Wait (listen), you are the loved one of the people

The love and blood of the nation

(Chorus)

Rise up, we have dried our tears and have smiled

Rise up, we have listened and understood

Reply to the cry of the people, take away their misfortunes

Dream of their coming, forgetting their past

Come and comfort us after our loss

And lift the people's heads in pride

(Chorus)

Rise up, answer the sacred call, tell the enemy that

'In spite of our wound and bitterness, in spite of our pain,

Long live Egypt'

Tomorrow at dawn, you will call us to prayer

Tomorrow, the bells of victory will ring

Rise up, we are ready

Rise up, we are united

Mark the avenue of our return

(Chorus)[124]

(It is interesting to speculate as to whether she may be referring to herself as well?)

This song suggests an interplay of voices, a complicated merging of the people and their leader. It also suggests a responsibility that she and Nasser have to the people, is this what unites them? Is Umm Kulthum questioning her role as singer and her role as a political voice? The use of 'we' also suggests that she is implicated in the love that she gives to the leader and that somehow her music is a way to transmit this emotion; she becomes (or makes herself) indispensable.

Techniques used in renditions of all her songs (namely extensive repetition and lengthy concerts) all contributed to cement her in the minds of the people. With quasaid and nationalist songs (or nationalist quasaid) safely secured, Umm Kulthum's love songs and their success take on a peculiar importance, empowered almost by the manipulation of religious and nationalist affiliation. However, tarab, in its flexibility and non-determinate nature yet posing as an indicator/marker of 'asil' becomes by default an event that eventually allows for what would otherwise be prohibitive lyrics. Alongside this exploration I would like to suggest that *tarab* here functions as a type of evoked jouissance as theorised by Leo Bersani. In her repertory, Umm Kulthum covers the political, the religious and the erotic, thus bringing together discourses that would otherwise seem disparate and impossible to link (because of the discrepancy in oral/written culture and the heavily gendered society as mentioned above). In the next section I will offer an interpretation of Umm Kulthum's songs as evocative of a certain jouissance. As her music purports to assimilate various discourses, it nevertheless, in the invocation of tarab, and in the linking of tarab with joy, accentuates and elaborates an erotic element. Though tarab designated the creation of an emotive link in the nationalist/religious songs, in the love songs it designated emotion par excellence. The dependence on tarab highlights a conscious performance that will invoke this tarab. The absence of tarab would designate a song without feeling/emotion and vacate the role of the performer. In its invocation, tarab (because of its fluidity and association with religious and nationalist songs) allows for songs of passions and feelings of passion within the performance.

3.6.3   THE ART OF DESIRE: JOUISSANCE AS THE AUTHENTIC, TARAB AS ASIL

In the 1998 film *West Beirut* two young Lebanese boys, in the wake of the civil war, are lamenting the re-institutionalisation of the fundamentals of Islam. The civil war

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in Lebanon awakened a revision of religion and its concepts as Muslims and Christians were pitted against each other in a fifteen year strife. Forced by this extremist view, and consequently by their society, to adopt the traditional ways of Islam, the two friends argue over the strange choices that have been made by the religious leaders over what music is permitted and what is not. Amongst the sinners are Neil Sedaka, a popular Lebanese-American rock and roll artist[125] whom the young boys enjoy along with all other music of the early seventies destined to be saturated with allusions to dancing, lust, love, the body and its movements.[126] In anguish and despair (presented quite comically and intelligently) they summarise those artists that have been forbidden overnight and those that have not. In a very telling moment, one of them disappointingly says 'Oh no! how come we are allowed and even encouraged to listen to Umm Kulthum?'; 'What do you mean?' says the other boy, 'Well, I don't get it, all she ever sings of is sex.'[127] Although the boys significantly miss the multi-layered possibility of Kulthum's repertory they, unknowingly, emphasise the contradiction within it, a contradiction that the religious leaders presumably suspect yet ignore, allowing Umm Kulthum to "pass" into the realm of what is permitted.

Likewise, in his article 'The National Vernacular: Folklore and Egyptian Popular Culture', Walter Armbrust, in trying to understand what would make one artist vulgar and another not while their repertory would on the surface appear to be similar, quotes the commentary on a particular post-Umm Kulthum Egyptian male singer Ahmad Adawiyya:

> When asked about the frequent accusations of degeneracy levelled at Adawiya, Hani Shenuda [his composer] readily supplied examples of similarly suggestive lyrics sung by Umm Kulthum, who is probably the most canonical (and popular) of all classically-oriented Egyptian singers. One example is 'come and we will finish our love in one night.' Shenuda strongly asserted that the line refers to physical, not platonic, love. He also mentioned a line from a song by Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab, who is one of the few singers who ranks with Umm Kulthum in terms of both popularity and classicist orientation: 'life is a cigarette and a cup [of wine or liquor].' Obviously whatever it is that some listeners find problematic in Adawiya's music, it isn't just that the lyrics are suggestive.[128]

Armbrust emphasises this discrepancy when pointing out that 'although the driving rhythm and insistent tone of the singer doubtless contributed to the perceived raciness of the lines,

there is certainly nothing in them inherently more salacious than much popular music, or indeed, much *classical poetry*.'[129] (emphasis my own)   This emphasises that the manipulation of this very classical poetry and its inclusion and resuscitation at particular suggestive moments (national or religious crisis) in the repertory of Umm Kulthum ensures the impossibility of her being labelled as vulgar or degenerate.   In a sense, this manipulation is symbolised as a 'perforated sheet' through which Kulthum sings of love and passion.[130]

It is these aspects of the repertory of Umm Kulthum that remain the most controversial and it is this kind of singing, that seemingly offers what cannot be realistically experienced, that I imagine Nawal El Saadawi is referring to when she remarks that,

> Arab songs and literature increasingly swamp [the Arab woman's] senses with associations and feelings related to love, yet if she responds to the call of love, punishment and reprobation is swift and merciless.[131]

> The love that seems to exude and well up from Egyptian songs and throb with sighs and cries, is not really love.[132]

> 'hob el ozri' or 'romantic love' is what governs these powerful songs, a love which has no place in domesticity and cannot really be practised and accepted.[133]

However, how can, as Virginia Danielson has noted,

> 'fifty years' in Arab society, where women appear to outsiders to be oppressed, silent, and veiled, be represented by the life and work of a woman?[134]

Umm Kulthum cannot but know of the nature of Saadawi's objections to 'hob ozri.'   I argue that she offers a counter argument to Saadawi and offer the possibility that it is in these songs that Umm Kulthum comes closest to being a radical, to using her fame based on the quasaid, which no other singer had done before, and to continue to sing the love songs that evoked such emotion in her audience.   The knowledge of a depraved romanticism mobilised Umm Kulthum's risky songs.   Love songs touched upon themes not often openly related to, themes far removed from the sombre air of the quasaid and

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nationalist poetry. Through these love songs, Umm Kulthum created a legitimate space in the moment of listening with others that allowed the audience to experience the emotions she sang (simultaneously layered, through associations, to the experience of the nation and religion). In a sense, the audience felt that they were *allowed* to experience pleasure in the love expressed through the lyrics because the source had been declared by official discourse as none other than *the* receptacle of cultural authenticity; Umm Kulthum as 'asil.' This notion of a receptacle is aptly illustrated in a caricature that shows Umm Kulthum literally housing the people of Egypt (see Fig. 2).

Reactions to Umm Kulthum/s performances emphasised her popularity. In Paris, when she sang for the first time in 1967, Le Figaro wrote that,

> 'Pendant le premier quart d'heure de son récital, elle n'a rien fait d'autre que de rester assise et de répondre par des petites signes de tête condescantes aux tempêtes d'applaudissements qui maintaient de la salle. (Sa simple présence déchaîne des cris d'hystérie. Ses admirateurs escaladent frénétiquement leur fauteuil, se tordent les bras et lancent dans l'air moite des cris inarticulés).[135]

> (for the first half hour of her concert she did nothing but stay seated, responding with little knowing/condescending signs to the thunderous applause that resounded in the concert hall. (her mere presence was the occasion for hysterical cries, her fans frantically moved in their seats, wrung their hands and let loose inarticulate cries).

This reaction is evocative of a situation that is slightly out of control, 'out of language.'[136] In his essay on Leo Bersani, H.N. Lukes, in his exploration of the possibility of locating a fixed desire that can fulfil,[137] offers the paradox that because 'language fails to signify completely' we keep mistaking various situations as articulations of our desires. In opposition to this is Shepherd and Wicke's notion that music/art need only suggest (not fulfil) a desire; its function remains this and so the disappointment is reduced or annihilated. What informs the articulation or materialisation of our desires is a certain system of ethics (informed by a hierarchical language) that we administer into our conceptualisations of our desire. Bersani himself, in his essay 'Against Monogamy' appears to offer the space of lovers as a space that leaves no room for the effects of social power. He quotes Freud by reminding us that 'a pair of lovers are sufficient to themselves' and continues to claim that 'what we "re-find" in the erotic attachments of adult life are

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Fig 2   *Umm Kulthum*, Hammidi Ben Hammid.

not only the warmth of pre-Oedipal intimacy but also the desires, the furious aggressiveness and the ineradicable guilt of the Oedipus complex (the outside can never remain outside because it is always constitutive).'[138] Therefore, even if this pair of lovers only think that they have located their desire, they have escaped social forces momentarily, though their system of choosing a desired object may be socially and ethically constructed. If language fails to signify, and if our desires are always predetermined in that we can never hope to meet them fully but only through a mediate (ethics, the social) then the situation of the pair of lovers comes as close to the real as any situation can. However, Bersani theorises the possibility of a 'quasi-real when he refers to a feminised "lost jouissance" […] as opposed to phallic "virilised" enjoyment of the symbolic realms which always conjoins moral superiority and sexual domination.'[139]

It appears that there may be a way to relax the honour codes; can tarab within Umm Kulthum be a "lost jouissance?" Interestingly, though the members of the Awlad Ali tribe have found a way of expressing their grievances and emotions in a medium (poetry) that does not threaten the strict codes of honour essential to the group as designated by its authority, and although Abu-Lughod *does* make a case for men and women reciting poems in times of courtship, she does state that 'Poetry (related to emotions and grievances, weakness and sentiment) […] does not cross the boundaries created by differential power and status, including those associated with gender. The firmest barrier is between men and women.'[140] In effect, the experience does not make its way to the object of grievances and so the words are not shared with that object (only with other members of the group). The experience remains highly gendered and there are no re-configurations taking place in the experience. Though women make their grievances known, they only make them known to themselves in the domestic space allotted to them. I want here to suggest that, as described below, the event of Umm Kulthum serves to question the honour code and to induce a hysterical reaction that comes at the moment of visual contact with the body of Umm Kulthum, a reaction that evokes an emotion that can be experienced by all (as discussed in Chapter One: hysterical in that it is men acting as women and enjoying breaking the honour code because they do not have to feel responsible at the moment that they do so). Though this reaction probably did not always occur at every performance, there was always a certain amount of engagement with the songs, especially the risqué love lyrics

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(most live concert audiences would have consisted of men only, though women of course would have been listening to Umm Kulthum on radio and would have owned records at this stage. Broadcasts would be repeated on radio ensuring situations where men and women would experience the music together).

When Umm Kulthum came on stage there would be clapping that could last up to half an hour. After she began a song there was absolute silence, yet when she had finished singing a new line or a particularly difficult piece there would be thunderous clapping and cries of approval from the crowd (see Appendix B). In this way, Umm Kulthum constantly engaged with the crowd who awaited her next sentence as she awaited their cries of joy. It appears that Umm Kulthum sought to create 'tarab', and only when sure of this would she move on to the next line of lyrics. A typical rendition of Umm Kulthum would start with a piece of music that builds the suspense until the arrival of the singer is realised. She is on stage as the orchestra plays behind her, she stands and listens: Umm Kulthum relied heavily upon improvisation and so it was never clear how many times she would repeat the same line/s, I would imagine it depended on the reaction of the audience to a certain line that had been sung in a particular way.[141] In the performance of Umm Kulthum, the event, or the experience *becomes* the moment (not before or after) of circumvention - of the redirecting of concerns as it were, of the moment of forgetfulness where the dominant discourse, evident elsewhere (everywhere), is absent and can be momentarily ignored. In the art of entertaining, a social space is created that is conveniently placed away from the law, in this case, from secular and religious law. Here is a brief example of a love song (see Appendix B).[142]

Arouh Li Meen? *(Whom shall I go to?)*

Whom shall I go to to seek refuge from you? *(cries and applause from the audience)*
repeated around 4 times depending on version
You are my joy, my wound, and the cause of everything gone wrong,
whom shall I go to to seek refuge? Whom shall I go to
and whom shall I tell who will rid me of you?
(cries, whistles and intense applause from the audience)
(repeated - followed by the same - from the beginning again - this reaction would continue throughout)
A word, a look from your eye stealthily escapes

Two hearts are in league to whom the heart promises much

In the night of passion, love will come

Your tenderness brings ecstasy, and realises all my desires

that have inspired passion, you enslave my oppressed heart

And my wishes were that this good fortune would last (my vows)

Why will you not endure?

Your love is an affliction and a grief

It has been a long while since you've been away

Whom shall I go to seek refuge? Who shall rid me of you?

repeat

Your staying away seems eternal and I live alone

(and far from you) amidst my sadness and dejection

I am a captive of my indecisions, who will relieve me from this confusion

And, hiding my tears

I pass a night of sorrow, in the company of my pain

Light of my eyes

My soul is distraught and vacant

Your absence hurtful

Watch my tears fall

Who shall I kiss since you neglect me?

Whom shall I go to to seek refuge? Whom shall I go to tell, who will rid me of you?[143]

Umm Kulthum thus engaged with her audience as one would engage with a lover. If the audience responded positively, Kulthum would repeat the line, if the response was extraordinary she would continue for a few lines, repeat the same line again and see if it would have any effect. This highlights the importance of a live performance in which the audience participated in the event and audience reaction thus remained integral to the performance.[144] Ultimately this back and forth motion with the crowd would inevitably result in an exhausted Umm Kulthum and doubtlessly an exhausted audience, enchanted and drunk with the lyrics of love.

I want to argue that Umm Kulthum creates the space for a tarab/jouissance that does not enforce the honour code of an Arab society at the moment of its expression, but rather, a code of the expression of love, a new ethical common ground where social boundaries do not impose on the confines of the music. If jouissance relates to a time

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before subjectivity[145] then through tarab Umm Kulthum produces a space for the experience of this joy. She does not embody or bear meaning per se (she is not the object of desire), rather, her singing creates a different ethics based on the unexpressed emotion of the society, rather than one based on its enforced political and social codes. Likewise, H.N. Lukes in 'Is the Rectum Das Ding' makes the point that,

> the position in which Bersani would insert himself in the meta-mythology of Lacanian psychoanalysis is that of the subject capable of experiencing what Lacan calls 'feminine jouissance', a mysterious enjoyment that exceeds even exceptional status in phallic systematicity.[146]

This 'mysterious 'enjoyment' is akin to what Arab critic, Georges Bahgory has written about Umm Kulthum. 'There is a secret here […] what it is, I cannot say. Everyone knows it. It sings for itself.'[147] The delivery of Umm Kulthum, believed at the moment of performance to be the receptacle of 'asil' creates a tarab. This tarab cannot be captured and defined and can only be conceived as audience reaction, that emerges as a hysterical one (where social/gender conventions are abandoned). Tarab can, I think, be conceptualised as a jouissance that both *men and women* can experience via the delivery and response procedure and through which men in particular can conceive of a feminine love, or a feminine jouissance, unbound by the codes of honour.

A closer reading of the above text reveals elements that elicit an engaged reaction in what would otherwise have been a very composed crowd. For example, to refer to a loved one as a wound and a joy and to want to seek refuge in a sense is an exaggeration of the woe of the lover sighing for his beloved. The 'night of passion' alluded to is beyond anything that would be deemed acceptable in the economy described by Mernissi, Saadawi and other radical Arab feminists.[148] Indeed to say that 'your tenderness brings ecstasy' is to allude without doubt to the sexual act or the expectancy of it, all of which would have undoubtedly enthralled a male audience (not to mention put to words the emotions of millions of Arab women). 'Your love is an affliction and a grief' speaks of the unspoken torments of unrequited love that yearns to be rid of the beloved and at the same time desperately awaits his return. Kulthum's emotional emphasis on the words allow us to visualise the pains of the lover. The straining of her voice does not allow you for a second to forget that she is in agony (performing/living the agony) and she will repeat the sentence

in case you forget, in case you have not understood, in the event that you have not felt. Repetition and lengthy performances (songs could last up to three hours) meant that the audience had enough time indeed to immerse themselves in the lyrics and as it were the mood of Umm Kulthum. This can be seen as a type of hypnotism, explained in the Collins English Dictionary as 'an artificially induced state of semi-consciousness characterised by an increased suggestibility to the words of the hypnotist: used to reveal unconscious memories, etcetera.' This is significant particularly because Umm Kulthum's lyrics create a hypnotic effect in *men* and *women*. This extremity in emotion suggests a feminisation for both parties, a potential space of emotional excess that finds little expression elsewhere. This possibility suggests a resurgence of some unconscious maternal, pre-symbolic desire that becomes conscious again though not in a threatening or incestuous way.

3.6.4   THE MATERNAL IMAGE

Importantly, Umm Kulthum did not exude a sexual *material* image, rather, a maternal one.[149] This ensured that she was not the object onto which unresolved fantasies could be projected, but rather, as I have argued above, a body that could produce the emotion of love in order for others to capture it (this is very significant because otherwise it would have jeopardised her respectability) and a body that could provide for the experiencing of a fantasy. In its non-subjectification, the experience of a 'unmitigated pleasure' becomes possible and more significantly, juridicaly acceptable.[150]   Elizabeth Cowie in her work *Representing the Woman: Cinema and Psychoanalysis* discusses the site of the maternal image in relation to cinema though I think some of her conclusions can be used to understand more fully the importance of this maternal image in this particular context. Cowie asserts fanstasy to be the 'fundamental object of psychoanalysis.'[151]   In her elaboration of this point Cowie suggests that,

> fantasy is an imagined scene in which the subject is a protagonist, and which always
> represents the fulfilment of a wish albeit that its representation is distorted to a greater or
> lesser extent by defensive processes [...] the difference between these modes [of fantasy]
> does not involve a difference between conscious or unconscious, but a difference in their
> relation to repression, and the working of censorship.

The word fantasy is usually understood as 'an imagined scene', with the associated meanings of: 'fabulous; fancy (now a separate meaning); imagination, mental image; love, whim; caprice; fanstasia; preoccupation with thoughts associated with unattainable desires'.[152]

I want to suggest that the experience of Umm Kulthum provides this 'scene' of 'unattainable desires.' Positioning herself as a mother figure, in psychoanalytic terms the first object of desire yet the most forbidden one, Kulthum simultaneously allows for an emotion to be experienced, a jouissance, yet does not function as one who can be conceived as experiencing the desire herself, as she retains the maternal figure. She provides but does not become the fantasy. Rather than distinguish Umm Kulthum's repertory as one that offers a fantasy rather than reality, though 'fantasy has come to mean the making visible, the making present, of what isn't there, of what can never *directly* be seen,' (emphasis author's own) we can redefine it as that which allows for a psychic reality rather than a material one.'[153] Thus fantasy can be redefined to fulfil the needs of the context at hand, especially if we accept that it is originary fantasies that inform all later fantasies. If this original fantasy (to wish either to take the father's or the mother's place) is a 'structuring' tool rather than a 'structure' then we can argue that the fantasy is a structuring concept as well, not a predetermined structure.[154] In other words, it allows for an experience that is otherwise censored rather than merely holding up an experience for viewing. Placing this starting point of this fantasy at the site of the maternal also ensures juridical acceptability. It is not that the audience desires Umm Kulthum, as fantasy need not desire a 'determinate object,'[155] rather, the maternal is invoked by Umm Kulthum as a site from which the fantasy can be safely experienced without repercussions; 'fantasy involves, is characterised by, not the achievement of desired objects, but the arranging of, a setting out of, desire; a veritable mise-en-scène of desire.'[156] Finally, as Cowie has emphasised,

when a wish has undergone repression a fantasy may provide a satisfaction not by presenting a scenario for the achievement of that wish but, on the contrary, by enacting the failure and frustration of that wish [...].[157]

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In fact, were the fantasy to be presented Umm Kulthum would have to take on a sexual image whereas she refrains from just this by enacting the 'failure and frustration' of the 'wish' that is difficult to achieve.

Honour then, as a moral code, is momentarily forsaken for the emotive/feminine experience. Unlike Butler, Bersani seems to be stating that we can locate a possible (quasi) real in the jouissance of the feminine. This would mean that certain performances, in certain social contexts, do more than re-iterate in order to subvert, they reconfigure the meaning of the body and posit the performative moment as one that exceeds the performance and becomes a significant moment in and of itself. What I mean here is that although Umm Kulthum's performance does not seem to exceed the confines of entertainment materially, it does becomes performative in that it suggests the possibility of an/other ethics that 'exceeds even exceptional status in phallic systematicity' (see above). In his critique of Butler, H.N. Lukes writes that,

> Judith Butler makes clear that performativity designates not the agency of the subject but the way in which the subject is both primarily and continually interpellated into power relations which mark his or her identity through coerced identifications. She takes a deconstructive slant that sees inaccurate repetitions in language as an ironic site of a kind of non-egoistic agency which allows disidentification.[158]

H.N. Lukes goes on to offer the critique that this unconscious repetition (this performative moment that may or may not occur) may not always offer a possibility of agency, it may develop into a vacuous performance. Indeed repetition is a conscious technique within the repertory of a literal performer, in this case Umm Kulthum, that *cannot* slip up or be inaccurate, because this would suggest, literally, a 'bad' or unrehearsed performance.[159] Rather, she knowingly effects a perfect performance and produces a site for the expression of real emotions that are suppressed within the parallel real of authority using language already imbedded in the discourse of love that can however be used to comment on religious and political situations as well (familiarity of words here is very important). By offering this sexualised/emotive space Kulthum seems to knowingly touch on taboo subjects without the fear of punishment. Her manipulation of aspects of her repertory gave her the space to create and produce an ulterior discourse to that of male honour. Indeed, 'what was responsible for th[e] protracted length [of her songs] was the growing number

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of *audience requests* for repetitions of lines and entire sections [...] though Umm Kulthum finally reduce[d] her program to two songs [...] her style of rendition and audience response remained the same. A song could occupy up to an hour and so two or three songs in one night could well take over three hours.'[160] (emphasis my own) Audience participation is symptomatic of the particular performance at hand.

In a sense, I believe, repetition allowed and ensured that one would remember the experience of Umm Kulthum and in the flux of the performance, love was something immediate and tangible, something that could be created in the duration of the song, unhindered by other values and social obligation. One could, and did, get lost in the incessant words that spoke of love in all its forms and possibilities. An engagement with the singer was inevitable and indeed most probably the aim. Though this may seem an exaggerated metaphor, I feel that Umm Kulthum acted the coy maiden in the guise of the mother while the audience took the role of the lover, thus forming a pair of lovers 'sufficient unto themselves.' The long performances and the insistence on them fetishistically symbolise the patience of those involved in a passionate affair and the agony traditionally associated with it. So strong did her presence become that,

> after the Egyptian defeat in 1967, intellectuals decried what they believed had led to the disaster, namely collective delusions of grandeur, pride, lack of concern with the real problems of the Arab world and lack of critical approaches to their solution. They viewed Umm Kulthum's long performances and pride in local culture as avoidance of real economic, social and political problems.[161]

Umm Kulthum, speaking of herself in the third person responded:

> they say that Umm Kulthum is one of the reasons for the June defeat because her voice numbs the people instead of arousing them. I am ready to retire from singing in return for the Arabs winning the war.[162]

Kulthum's power was undeniable, and by responding to criticism with an equally absurd suggestion, she involved herself in a dialogue with Egypt's foremost intellectuals of the day. Again, this highlights her intrusion into every facet of Egyptian life.[163]

Umm Kulthum however, did not change her repertory. Some songs continued to be sung into the 1970's. An example of a love song written in 1972 was 'Ya Msahirni', or 'He who keeps me awake at night.' This intense sexual song questions dynamics that revolve around the axis of the forbidden versus the allowed. Was Umm Kulthum so well cloaked that she could sing about anything and still assume a composed figure when faced with heads of state? Was love and pain and suffering after all not another unrecognised reality of the rigid society that she inhabited? This next example is testimony to this love, pain and suffering (see Appendix C).

Ya Msahirni (*He Who Keeps Me Awake*)

Did it not occur to you today, to ask after me?
My deserted eyes cannot sleep, I stay awake

My heart asks me, why does it have to be like this?
And it tells me, (for god's sake), did it not occur to you?

Where is your esteemed love?
Where is your kind and tender heart?
Where is your sweet closeness?
Where is your love? Do you not miss me?
You may have forgotten me but your image remains in my mind

Give me some respite
Have mercy on my thoughts
I cannot close my eyes, they are filled with thoughts of (desire)
And I don't think it even occurred to you, today
to ask after me, the thought of you keeps me awake

Do you ever ask yourself, who is it that spends their nights
amongst the pain and memories?
Consider my worrying heart, I grow anxious, I grow impatient
And tomorrow comes and goes and the day after that comes and goes
And still, no word, no message

These past few days feel like a lifetime,
the distance you keep from me seems so great,

You may have forgotten me but you are constantly on my mind

The image of you is never far from me

Give me some rest and respite from this overwhelming doubt

I cannot shut my eyes and rest, and yet, it probably did not even occur to you, today,

to ask after me, you who keeps me awake

I stay awake, and the thought of you keeps me up all night

It is so hard always to be patient,

The longing for you is lost in the seas of my desire

I ask my soul, who is close to me? I tell my heart to dream of you

What have I done wrong, why will you not wait for me?

You have forgotten me,

though the image of you remains in my mind, it never abandons me

Give me some rest and respite from all this doubt

My eyes cannot go to sleep,

and it probably did not even occur to you, today, to ask after me, you who keeps me awake.[164]

Desire, impatience, and unrequited love are the main concerns. In speaking unabashedly of love do these songs not offer another (pre)solution (or space of understanding) to the polemic/problematic that Nawal El Saadawi speaks of in the *Hidden Face of Eve* rather than merely enforcing the status quo as Saadawi herself has suggested? In fact, Umm Kulthum's repertory and success suggest a *recognition* of the difficulties in breaking loose from the *restrictions* within the shame/honour schema set up by the patriarchal economy.

Umm Kulthum's songs do ultimately speak of the impossibility of reconciling the need for love with the love proper, and where she does, it is ultimately an unequal love, a love that overwhelms the one because it is strictly concerned with the other. I would like to argue that because these are the only two extremes available, they are the two extremes that remain expressible. An example of the later is the song that was written by her lifetime rival for her to sing, Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab.

Inta Umri *(You Are My Life)*

Your eyes bring back days gone by

And promise to forget the past and its pain

You are my life always and
I glisten under the shine of your light

What had I known before knowing you

Has been eternally lost

How can I count them as part of my life?

The days I have lived without you

My beloved, what pain I have endured?

My heart has known no joy before you

And has tasted little but the wounds of this world

It is only now that I have started loving life

And to dread that time may run out

And the joys of which I dreamt

My heart and thoughts have found them in the gleam of your eyes

Life of my life, oh you who are more dear than my life

Why had I not found (known) your love before?

Chorus

The tender nights, the passion and desire

have been, for such a long time, locked in my heart

let's enjoy love

My passionate heart awaits your tender passion

let my eyes sail in the universe that is your eyes

Let my hand rest in the intimacy of your hand

Come, my beloved, we have wasted enough time

What we have wasted is enough

Chorus

Oh you, more precious than my days

You, who are sweeter than my dreams

Keep your tenderness for me, take me

away from the world

As far away as possible, just you and I

As far away, us two, all alone

The day breaks with our love

The night falls with our desire

Thanks to you, I have loved (reconciled) life again

And have forgotten the past

Forgotten the pain

And the dread

Chorus

In this instance, the lover is completely overwhelmed by the final arrival of the beloved. Complete commitment and an annulment of all that has come before is apparent. The love may be an equal one but this aspect is not lived in the duration of the song and so essentially it remains a sad and painful rendition; one cannot help but feel grief for the suffering that has gone on before or for the realisation of an empty life prior to the arrival of the beloved. The beloved is always present in the text yet the lover (in this case the singer) has always been in flux to find the lover who has finally come but who has abolished her past in the coming. In a sense, woman lacks a history that is finally created in an encounter with the other, though never her own history.

3.7 CONCLUSION: THERE IS A SECRET HERE [165]

Ultimately, the success of Umm Kulthum in respect to a modern and even non-Arab audience is that she attained world-wide recognition at a time of intense political and social upheaval in a country that was still fighting for colonial liberation while trying to maintain a hold on internal concerns including a re-appraisal of religion and traditional Arab values (also known as revivalism). A female singer, valued as it were from outside the dominant discourse, from the well-protected domain of entertainment, takes all these factors and moulds the inherent components of song and its traditional closeness to religion and the category of the authentic/ 'asil' and makes it her own. By making use of the 'quasidah' I believe that Umm Kulthum firmly established her role in Arabic/Islamic music and used this as a platform from which to sing nationalist songs and ultimately, songs of lost love and pining lovers, thus highlighting the deficiencies in a system that does not allow for an open dialogue between the genders but which promotes it in a space where it cannot be ethically responsible to the dominant discourse and so remains at arm's length from the law. Umm Kulthum's grandeur was that she sang of religion, her home land, her imaginary love, and in doing so convinced everyone that she was part of all that made Islamic and Arab tradition, that she had woven herself into it so to speak and could create 'tarab' though she embodied 'asil.'

To recall Shepherd and Wicke, Umm Kulthum strikes me as indeed 'evoking' albeit in a 'mediated' and 'symbolic' fashion, the 'structures' of her world that remain enclosed. Like the Awlad Ali she expresses 'sentiments of weakness' and 'sentiments of romantic love' that would otherwise remain silenced. Through the sanctioned space of music, Umm Kulthum manages to speak within the honour code (through her manipulation of religious music) *to the* honour code (through her passionate lyrics). By adopting the master narrative of 'asil' or 'authentic', Umm Kulthum guaranteed herself a space within it. In fact, 'Hajartak' (I Left You) is to my knowledge the only song where the protagonist takes decisive action.[166] This is a testimony to the economy alongside which Umm Kulthum was working and from which she could never fully escape. Her work though survives as an attempt to do just this.

Ghidda Sinni has noted, in her insightful article 'Umm Kulthum vs Nirvana' that it is time for a re-appraisal of Umm Kulthum. After questioning the merits of this singer that was forced on her as a child, she now writes of her current reaction to what could well be 'Egypt's hidden treasure':

> Staring intently at my video screen, here is what I discovered. Umm Kulthum, the political maverick? The skilfulness with which she handled her political career is a lesson to behold. Yet, in her case, it is always her 'God-given' talent that gets praised, not her political astuteness. One wonders whether it was sheer luck that her life should witness the upheaval of a revolution or whether it was of her own design that Egypt should look up to her for unity and inspiration. Did she allow herself to be manipulated by the Nasser regime or did she lead the way to the quickest shortcut to mass unity? Was she answering the call of duty by touring for the sake of raising weapons for Egypt after its defeat in the Six-day War or was she carefully carving herself as a symbol of the revolution? One thing's certain: her ideological struggles were profound, her commitment to Egypt was stunning, and so was her talent. Umm Kulthum, Egypt's hidden feminist treasure?[167]

What remains of Umm Kulthum's work is this ability to offer a new common ground for men and women, a common ground based on the experience of emotion through the musical rendition. The lived moment offers a space for the articulation of certain ideals otherwise unexperienced. The performative moment is the entire duration of a performance and so the two become one and the distinction is blurred.[168] Kulthum utilises her entire repertory and cross-repertory relations as described above in order to maintain a

respectable position within the 'constitutive outside.' This in turn allows her to break with mainstream opinion attached to the entertainment industry and in so doing re-defines the musical performance. Rather than creating a diversion or a 'false need', I hope to have shown that Umm Kulthum's repertory provided for an emotional catharsis or release of sorts. By accentuating tarab as an undefinable element within music, I maintain that this idea of a 'feminine secret' need not be defined in order for it to be utilised. Tarab functions to make juridicially acceptable the essence of emotion. Through locating this essence in a *performance*, Arab culture provides for itself a space for the articulation of this essential emotion. Umm Kulthum, by perceptively linking herself with this term and its definition as 'that which makes for an authentic performance' ensured an unequalled audience and an unequalled musical achievement.

3.7 THE SILENCES OF THE PALACE

I want briefly to discuss this apt film that conceptualises some of the ideas discussed in this chapter. As the title suggests and as the film expertly portrays, *The Silences of the Palace* speaks of how to break the silence, how to move beyond a muted existence where silence guarantees life and a voice guarantees destruction. Tunisian filmmaker Moufida Tlatli takes the home of the last Tunisian bey (prince) before independence from the French administration and uses it to explore the lives of the female servants who keep house and entertain the prince and his family. Poor with nowhere to go and given limited access to the outside world and with a mentality ruled by fear, these women are exploited, both financially and sexually, finally forcing Alia, the protagonist, to choose another life for herself, a life through her voice and finally through her child. Significantly, at this time of revolution, Umm Kulthum songs are played and listened to on the radio and Alia learns to sing by listening and reproducing the songs of the Egyptian enchantress. I will argue that the use of voice in this example is a much more violent one, used literally to break free from the bars of confinement and can be extended to symbolise the Tunisian fight for liberation from the last princes and by extension French colonial administration. Through an examination of woman as controlled and imprisoned, the equally suffocating role of the prince is revealed as is the impossibility of cross-class love. Ultimately, though temporary exultation is reached through singing and music, the long

road still to be covered by the new Tunisia is magnified in Alia's realisation that her singing cannot bring her back to life and out of the horror that she has lived. Rather, what will make her whole again is to have a child and name her after her dead mother Khedija, an action that will re-new the possibility of an-other life for Khedija, a life with song *and* freedom entwined, be it with or without the social approval of marriage. Moufida Tlatli's film is,

> stuffed with music: the choked claustrophobia of anachronistic feudal routines is in clear contrast to the subtle spaces and freedoms in the Tunisian melodies. Sidi Ali [the prince] escapes from his increasingly fatuous and impossible role into his music, and Alia, inheriting his gift, hopes to make her escape route also. One of the film's most striking achievements is the unobtrusive forward step that the soundtrack makes, from local colour to perilous vector.[169]

By extension, Sidi Ali and Alia both prove to be prisoners of a stifling and pre-structured life, one that Alia manages to escape but which Sidi Ali escapes only through death. The film is 'stuffed with music' and it is the use of music to accentuate events in the film that I will discuss: 'Music is crucial, emotions that can't be spoken find release in song.'[170]

Alia is raised in the house of the beys and is the daughter of one of the servants, Khedija. There are suggestions throughout the film that her father in indeed the prince, but the fact that this is left unconfirmed (except through certain strategic looks and pauses that I shall allude to later, all in silence) attests to the fact that it does not ultimately matter whether he is her father since he will not legitimise their relationship. As Khedija aptly tells Alia when she questions the possibility of the bey being her father, 'I am your father and your mother, do you understand?' This phrase, which Khedija screams out at Alia while shaking her for emphasis is a moving moment in the film where it becomes apparent that all the women have in this tragic setting are each other. 'Growing up between the downstairs world of her mother and the upstairs world of her unacknowledged father, Alia [finds] her outsider status confusing and dangerous.'[171] In a moment of fury Alia tells her mother that she does not want to spend the rest of her life in the kitchen (reminiscent of Saadawi's heroines) and her mother sarcastically replies that it is the only place for her. Alia's singing becomes her ticket to the world of the upstairs, to the rich and luxurious world of collaborators (with the colonial administrators), to the world of the beys whose

interests waver between keeping the country in check, negotiating with the French and 'playing perilous cross-class relationship games - games played as a compromise within and petty release from an unbending social etiquette they have inwardly lost faith in and daren't have done with.'[172] In reaction to this,

> *The Silences of the Palace* gives voice to the generation of women who, like Alia's mother, obeyed the law of silence in the palaces and hovels of patriarchy. It also shows that despite a political and social revolution, women did not achieve liberation. If anything, the promise of a freer society made the absence of sexual inequality even more bitter.[173]

Interestingly, the women move upstairs in their capacity as lovers or servants while the prince's family always move in their capacity as masters freely, up and down. While allowed to watch the daughter of the prince's brother (whom she befriends) take lute lessons, Alia is not allowed to touch the lute itself. This brings her unequalled grief and on one occasion she cannot help herself and grabs the lute and runs. Stopped by a male member of the family who leers at her lustfully as he asks her to give back the lute, Alia defies both suggestions and runs to an attic where she tinkers with the lute, trying out her voice: 'The possibility of breaking silence in a way *that is specifically female* - although fraught with danger- is represented by music.'[174] (emphasis my own) Khedija bellydances for the princes and their friends on request and can never say no. In her performances her body is left bare for the violent stares imposed on it, all cleverly shot as the camera moves from Khedija's body to the faces of the onlookers in turn and then back again to the body. The servants have to fight to keep their bodies their own and this is not always possible. In struggling to keep her daughter away from Sidi Ali's brother, Khedija defies his request that she bring her daughter to him and offers herself instead. What is also important throughout the film is that the love that Sidi Ali feels for Khedija has to remain silent also. Part of Khedija's frustration, I feel, is that she cannot be with Sidi Ali as he cannot be with her. When Sidi Ali feels that the Tunisia he knew is collapsing around him he laments the loss of his power and claims that he is no longer wanted by the people. By extension, he no longer wants his wife and desires his servant yet cannot make this public. In a sense, Alia represents these desires and makes them public, giving them a voice through her singing that she will use to earn a living and escape her confinement:

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Upstairs, where the princes live, is [also] the realm of silence. Downstairs, the servant women sing, drum and squabble. But for Alia, finding a musical voice will be perilous - it will make her an object of predatory lusts and her mother's jealousy, and lead to the scandal that causes her name to be silenced [Alia disappears with a revolutionary].[175]

Music accompanies every step of the lives of these women. Death, birth, Alia's sickness where she refuses to speak (but which she wakes out of when her mother uses all her savings to buy her a lute), the revolution, celebrations; there is not an event to which music does not contribute. To add to this, Alia's father requests that she sing for a private party upstairs for which her mother dresses her up and allows her to draw kohl on her eyelids and wear red lipstick. In a painful shot, Khedija realises that she cannot always protect her daughter from the public (as she once ordered her to stay in her bedroom after the prince's brother has asked after her), especially in the world of the beys where her word is lost, silenced.

In her moment of triumph, Alia is asked to sing at her friend's wedding. Her rendition of Umm Kulthum's 'Lesa Faker' is perfect but she interrupts it to sing a revolutionary song popular among the militant groups. Guests leave the banquet room and Alia is left alone bellowing for the freedom of her country. To adapt Umm Kulthum is also to place Alia amongst the great singers of the Arab world. Alia does not choose to emulate any other singer but Umm Kulthum and when she leaves the palace and sings at weddings for a living she sings Kulthum songs in this way aligning herself with the great singer who achieved so much. In the opening sequence, before the flashbacks to the past begin, Alia's hair and dress also resemble Umm Kulthum's. Alia however, is not happy in her role as performer. It has not brought her happiness; it has only served to unlock her from servitude: 'Brilliantly shaping traditional melodrama toward feminist ends, Tlatli has made a movie that is simultaneously volatile and analytic.'[176] The film cannot have a positive feminist end though, as this end is entangled with a realisation that it is not enough to have a voice but one also needs to be heard with love. Although pressured by her partner to have yet another abortion, Alia will keep this child in the hope that it will listen to her with love and stop the chain of violence and silence.

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Though music plays a large part in *The Silences of the Palace* it is the absence of speech that looms over the film. Alia's father never admits his involvement with her mother, Khedija never admits her love affair with Sidi Ali or her forced affair with his brother. The servants do not talk to each other about the favours that they bestow on the men upstairs. They cannot, as women, give up material security for an unknown and abstract "freedom." In an important scene, Alia rushes to the main gates and lets out what can only be imagined as a scream of horror but which is strategically silenced by the director, no voice can be heard, only the vision of Alia screaming is remembered, and the voice is left to the viewer's imagination.

Tlatli raises issues concerning the female voice that are not easy to present, let alone criticise. Silence is the price paid at the service of the law. The women are silenced at the hands of the bey, the country is silenced at the hands of the French colonials. Though it is not necessary to see a correlation, Alia's singing does coincide with Tunisia's call for revolution, inevitably linking the motherland with the female once more. Though her voice is prostituted at cheap weddings where no one listens, Alia is in some way true to the talent that has led her away from entrapment. By keeping her child, she will forego her partner if necessary and with him, another obstacle in her search for meaning and freedom.

3.7.1 *FEYROUZ: SINGING FOR LEBANON*

The legacy of Umm Kulthum continues. In their study, Kaye and Zoubir mention the famous Lebanese singer Feyrouz. Younger and more modernist that Umm Kulthum, Feyrouz charmed the Middle East with her songs of patriotism that were constantly aired during the Lebanese civil war. The next two chapters specifically deal with this 15-year conflict and I would like to introduce them here with a citation from this internationally renowned singer. In a recent interview with Nelda Lateef (1997) who put together a collection called *Women of Lebanon: Interviews with Champions of Peace,* Feyrouz claimed that during one of her performances,

> [She had] seen Muslim and Christian militiamen who days earlier were fighting each other
> on the streets, standing up in the aisles with tears streaming down their cheeks, hugging
> each other and singing the words to the song along with [her].[177]

The power of the performance to act as a performative moment, a moment that does not produce the expected reaction, is undoubtedly one that cannot be ignored.

ENDNOTES

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[1] Saadawi, Nawal El, 'The Truth Sometimes Shocks', *Index on Censorship,* 11:3 (1992), 18-20.

[2] By double standards I always mean those standards that women in the Middle East (though I do not want to essentialise) as discussed in the introduction, live with. In this particular instance Saadawi argues against a popular medium, love songs, that does permeate Egyptian society. The discrepancy she finds is one between the claims of this culture (the idealising of love and passion) versus a more grounded reality that is part of her committed feminism.

[3] As Kristine McKenna has noted in her article 'Sharing a Beloved Middle East Secret' in *The Los Angeles Times,* 20 October 1997, '[that] [Umm Kulthum] remains virtually unknown outside the Middle East is proof that there are still unexplored frontiers of experience.'

[4] Kaye, Jaqueline and Abdelhamid Zoubir, *The Ambiguous Compromise: Language, Literature and National Identity in Algeria and Morocco* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.133. Though the countries referred to are Algeria and Morocca, Kaye and Zoubir focus on the countries of their respective expertise. It is significant of course here to note that Umm Kulthum is Egyptian and Feyrouz is from Lebanon. The fact that each had such far reaching success in the Maghreb is a sign of their translatability in terms of social and political context (though the language connection remains obvious).

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 53.

[6] We must not forget that 'authenticity' in Butler is imaginary and the performance is the *first* act. I have engaged with the problems between the 'performance' that Butler speaks of as opposed to the 'performative.' This has been recently theorised and exposed by Moya Lloyd (see bibliography).

[7] Salloum, Habeeb, 'Umm Kalthum - Legendary Songstress of the Arabs', at
http://almashriq.hiof.no/egypt/700/780/umkoulthoum/biography.html

[8] Nieuwkerk, Karen Van, *A Trade Like Any Other: Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), p. 26.

[9] Danielson, Virginia, 'Artists and Interpreneurs: Female Singers in Cairo during the 1920's' in *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender,* ed. Keddie, Nikki R. and Beth Baron (New York: Vail-Ballou Press, 1991), pp. 292-309. Danielson's article includes a summary of background information to the entertainment scene in Cairo. I have selected certain significant events. It seems that for a while tax advantages outweighed the disadvantages of public protest against female entertainers who were now performing more and more for soldiers and infidels. However, this soon reached a maximum in 1834 that could not be ignored because the religious authorities or 'ulama' could no longer tolerate the 'foreign gaze' on women of the 'true faith'. In June 1834 Muhammed Ali banned female entertainers from in and around Cairo - most performers had to leave and perform elsewhere - some remained and worked clandestinely while the higher class awalim where allowed to keep performing in the harems - what occurred here though is that younger males started to replace the missing women.
The ban proved to be counter productive because foreigners followed the migration of the dancers to Upper Egypt or wherever. Many travellers in fact, came to Egypt only for this reason. Away from too much focus and observation the European gaze took a different turn. Eventually 'alma' lost its meaning/educated singers became singers-dancers and eventually dancers-prostitutes , many were forced and others complied with upcoming demand.
In 1849, the ban on private performance in Cairo was lifted and public performances were allowed on occasions only. With the British occupation of 1882 performances became more institutionalised and regulated - they moved in to the coffee houses and out of the streets - dancers danced on a stage while singers sung from behind screens - at the turn of the century live dancing shows were offered at night-clubs and local dancing was called belly-dancing for the first time.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 304-305. 'Male and female singers, as well as actors, actresses and dancers, occupied relatively low social positions [...] the prevailing attitude had two aspects: one was the belief that musical performance was an unworthy use of time [...]another was the association of entertainment, particularly commercial entertainment, with such vices as prostitution, drunkenness, gambling, consumption of drugs, and undignified public display [...].the presence of foreign soldiers in Egypt exacerbated the situation, as these men, alone on holiday in the city, had plenty of money and few constraints. It was generally believed that their behaviour encouraged vice and, in turn, corrupted Egyptian youth.' (A literary example of this is Naguib Mahfouz's principal character in *The Cairo Trilogy* who is a stereotypical Muslim tyrant in his home yet who keeps a mistress and frequents a house of entertainment and drinks every night.)

[11] See Nieuwkerk, Karen Van, *A Trade Like Any Other: Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt*, pp. 44-45. Sometimes the main task of female entertainers was to sit and drink with customers; this ensured a huge income to the club and was called *fatihat*. Prostitution was not part of the performers duties although some did engage in it. Although female entertainers were paid to sit and drink dance and sing not sleep with customers - they were generally regarded as fallen women.
Prostitution and entertainment were often associated because some women used one to cover up the other. Some women entertainers and contemporaries of Umm Kulthum were: Hikmat Fahmi, Beba, Samia Gamal.
Night-clubs thrived in the war and inter-war periods. In fact, 'Hikmat Fahmi is said to have danced for Hitler and Mussolini and Amina Muhammad for Goering in Libya', (p. 47).
Night-clubs in Egypt thrived on British soldiers.

[12] Danielson, Virginia, 'Artists and Interpreneurs: Female Singers in Cairo during the 1920's', p. 301. Some other examples of successful women entertainers were Munira al-Mahdiyya, Fathiyya Ahmad, Badi'a Masabni (pp. 296-297).

[13] Nieuwkerk, Karen Van, *A Trade Like Any Other: Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* pp. 48-49. 'Belly dancers were seen as bad advertisement for Arabic Muslim womanhood' and 'fath was eventually abolished under Sadat in 1973 and has not been re-instated since.'
The Awalim re-appeared for a while / they formed groups led by an experienced performer - the 'usta', and performed at weddings and saints day celebrations and occasionally at night-clubs (p. 56).
From 1973 to 1981, 'the rich spent their wealth on recreation and this brought about a flourishing period for entertainers' (p. 56). 'Wedding processions gained new vigour [...] the procession of the bride was enlarged' (p. 56). 'Growing demand for entertainers resulted in higher wages' and 'gradually entertainers no longer formed separate groups [rather], individuals worked for the highest bidder' (p. 57). This individualisation is related to the end of the monopoly of the Muhammad Ali street entertainers (summarised by Nieuwkerk on p. 57).
Many women could no longer become employees because it had become dangerous and highly profitable trade dominated by an increased problem of 'drugs, alcohol and quarrels [....] hard drugs, which were introduced in the early 1980's when Egypt became a transit country for heroine and cocaine, caused rising criminality' (p. 58). All these elements quickly became associated with the entertainment industry.
In fact , 'the older generation claims that presently the women's success is based on going with customers and wearing scanty costumes and not on their artistic level' (p. 58).
In the 1940's and 1950's films 'invariably starred belly dancers and singers [...] acting was of secondary importance' (p. 61).
As of yet, 'there was no distinction between the classical or serious art heard and seen in the media and the lighter entertainment heard at weddings. Belly dancing was prominent on the screen, and the songs of respected singers could be heard on the streets' (p. 62).
However, from the 1960's onwards a distinction was created (due to a growing number of schools and institutes) between institutionally trained artists and those w/o formal training . Professionalisation of the 'performing arts circuit' had established a rift between high and low art (p. 62).
'Entertainment cou[ld] no longer be consider[ed] one profession with the same status for all performers - the status of entertainers became increasingly determined by the form and context of their performances' (p. 62).
'Also, Egypt has sporadically witnessed religious revivals unfavourable to entertainment' (p. 63).
Today, 'belly dancing is banned from t.v.' though singing at weddings has remained popular though 'most people still enjoy art and entertainment and invite performers to their weddings. If they [do] forego these pleasures, it is mostly because of economic rather than religious reasons' (p. 65).

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 304

[15] Umm Kulthum was not involved in singing in Sala's (night clubs) for very long. As soon as she could do so, she booked halls where only she would sing. See Danielson, Virginia, 'Artists and Interpreneurs: Female Singers in Cairo during the 1920's', pp. 300-301.

[16] Kieuwkerk, Karen, Van, *A Trade Like any Other*, p. 111. Umm Kulthum did earn the name 'awlâd il-balad', a term that encompassed certain elements and guaranteed one's Egyptianess and which literary means 'children of the land/nation.'

[17] This biographical information is taken from the summary of Danielson's work at http://almashriq.hiof.no/egypt/700/780/umkoulthoum/biography html.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 1

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 2

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[24] *Ibid.* Umm Kulthum never worked with an agent or manager.

[25] Kamalinpour, R.Yahra and Hamid Mowlana, eds. *Mass Media in the Middle East: A Comprehensive Handbook* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994), p. 60-74.

[26] Armbrust, Walter, *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 9 The beginning of this quote makes the distinction with European language. Armbrust writes that: 'The two - popular and official discourse - have always been conceptually distinct. In both Egypt and the West modernity began with a rediscovery or reinvigoration of classical languages. Europeans tried to write classical Latin rather than 'vulgate Latin' or the local dialects they spoke, but eventually discarded classical languages in favour of more practical (and more easily learned) standardised vernaculars. Using vernaculars greatly amplified the effect of print technology and became a powerful force for European nationalism.'

[27] *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8.

[28] Though it appears that it was also difficult for some to *listen* to Umm Kulthum. See section 3.5 'Adorno and Benjamin: The Function of Mass Culture' in the main text for a relevant quote by Edward Said.

[29] Gregory, H. Andrew, 'The Roles of Music in Society: the Ethnomusicological Perspective' in *The Social Psychology of Music*, eds. Hargreaves, David, J and Adrian C. North (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 124.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 138.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 143.

[32] Danielson, Virginia-Louise, 'Shaping Tradition in Arabic Song: The Career and Repertory of Umm Kulthum' (Ph.D. diss. University of Illinois, 1991), p. 317.

[33] Gregory, H. Andrew, 'The Roles of Music in Society: the Ethnomusicological Perspective', p. 147.

[34] *Le Monde*, 12 Nov, 1967. People (it was usually men who attended the shows) who could not afford to attend the live performance would catch the radio broadcast the following day.

[35] Gregory, H. Andrew, 'The Roles of Music in Society: the Ethnomusicological Perspective', p. 147.

[36] Shepherd, John and Peter Wicke, *Music and Cultural Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), p. 3.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 6. These processes is what we shall explore in relation to Umm Kulthum

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 58. In a sense, Umm Kulthum can but achieve a 'gap', one that contains much significance though.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 60.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 62.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 183.

[46] Abu-Lughod, Leila, *Veiled Sentiments: Honour and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 233.

[47] In a sense, Umm Kulthum goes one step further because her sphere, though it may be the enclosed one of entertainment, is still one open to the public and in the service of the public.

[48] It is here that I differ most radically from Butler, as mentioned at the end of Chapter One. In this case, Butler would emphasise the "already constructed" that can only be replicated but with aberrations whereas I must here acknowledge a space for creativity.

[49] Cöçek, Fatma Müge and Shiva Balaghi, *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity and Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 1.

[50] Abu-Lughod, Leila, *Veiled Sentiments: Honour and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*, p. 241

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 245

[52] *Ibid.*

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 195. Some examples from the Awlad Ali are poems such as 'Separation from intimates is hard - the heart dries up and the heart goes blind' and 'Strong-willed in the send off - the self did not cry until they parted […].'

[54] Abu-Lughod even documents that the female members of the tribe begged her not to mention their private moments to the men or the contents of their poetry, *Ibid.*, p. 234.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 256.

[56] *Ibid.*, pp. 258-259.

[57] Abu-Lughod, Lila, 'Movie Stars and Islamic Moralism in Egypt', *Social Text*, 42 (1995), 53-57, and Abu-Lughod Lila, 'The Objects of Soap Opera: Egyptian Television and the Cultural Politics of Modernity' in *Worlds Apart: Modernity Through the Prism of the Local,* Miller, Daniel, ed. (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 190-210.

[58] Abu-Lughod, Lila, 'Movie Stars and Islamic Moralism in Egypt', p. 505.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 510. This reminds me of the Union of Decorative Arts, mentioned in chapter 1, that sought to cut across class barriers but simultaneously ignored the circumstances in which the poorer women produced their crafts, see Chapter one.

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 511.

[61] Please see Berger, Emmanuelle-Anne, 'The Newly Veiled Woman: Irigiray, Specularity, and the Islamic Veil', *Diacritics*, 28:1 (1998), 93-119.

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 505.

[63] Fig.3

Armbrust, Walter, *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt,*. Book cover.

[64] Abu-Lughod, Lila, 'The Objects of Soap Opera: Egyptian Television and the Cultural Politics of Modernity', p. 194.

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 195.

[66] Danielson documents that these performances became 'events of singular importance. By way of describing their impact, many stories circulated: 'Such-and-such a military leader postponed an attack because Umm Kulthum was singing' or 'Life in the Arab world came to a halt on the first Thursday night of each month.' Detractors complained that 'You couldn't read about anything else in the newspaper that day

except the colour of Umm Kulthum's dress and what jewellery she would wear.' On those Thursdays, 'we lived in her world all day.' It is important to remember, and Danielson reminds her readers of this point here also, that Friday is the Muslim religious holiday - the equivalent to a Christian Sunday, thereby making Thursday night a very important night of the week, or as she states 'prime occasions for evening entertainment.' See Danielson, Virginia, Danielson, 'Shaping Tradition in Arabic Song: The Career and Repertory of Umm Kulthum' p. 228 and *Nasser 56*. Dir. Mohammed Fadel. 1996. A Middle East Communication Assn.Co. Presentation.

[67] Abu-Lughod, Lila, 'The Objects of Soap Opera: Egyptian Television and the Cultural Politics of Modernity', p. 196.

[68] Mernissi, Fatima, *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory* (London: Zed Books, 1996), p. 34.

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 36. Also, Mernissi goes on to make clear her position as regards the de-humanising factor involved in the upkeep of this strict moral code.
'The patriarchal sexual act is childish [de-flowering], it is the act of a man who has never outgrown the terrible fear of his insignificance in relation to the life-giving mother, and who has never become adult enough to see sexual pleasure as a relation between equals rather than as a mechanism for establishing a hierarchy and enforcing power, domination and therefor dehumanisation' (p. 38), [...] 'each time a woman is cornered between the satisfaction of her own needs and conformity with a contradictory set of demands imposed on her by her social group, she resorts to trickery, which is the corollary of inequality'(p. 40).
'In a sense the veil can be interpreted as a symbol revealing a collective fantasy of the Muslim community: to relegate them [women] to an easily controllable terrain, the home, to prevent them moving about, and to highlight their illegal position on male territory by means of a mask' (p. 42).

[70] *Ibid.*, Mernissi continues to expand on this : 'I want to suggest that woman's disobedience is so feared in the Muslim world because its implications are so enormous. They refer to the most dreaded danger to Islam as a group psychology: individualism' (p. 109).

[71] *Ibid.*, p. 112

[72] Abu-Odeh, Lama, 'Crimes of Honour and the Construction of Gender in Arab Societies' in *Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives,* ed. Mai Yamani (Reading: Garnet, 1996), p. 152.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 153

[74] Since it encompasses both politics and religion.

[75] Disch, Lisa, 'Judith Butler and the Politics of the Performative', *Political Theory*, 27:4 (1999), 545-600.

[76] Modleski, Tania, ed. *Studies in Entertainment: Critical approaches to Mass Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 1986), p. x.

[77] This reminds me of the case of Noam Chomsky. Chomsky has been asked incessantly how he manages to escape prosecution though he is such a controversial figure in American politics. His response is that he is allowed to be so loud-spoken because he embodies the illusion of 'free speech.' The irony here of course is that he is ignored by politicians and so his out-spokeness serves only to designate itself - the material content of his arguments are ignored. Also, the idea of 'passing' is an important issue for Butler when she discusses the work of Nella Larsen in *Bodies that Matter*.

[78] The different problems with mass culture that Adorno and Benjamin outline are reminiscent of what has already been discussed earlier in the chapter vis á vis the differing attitudes towards music (Shepherd and Wicke vs Andrew Gregory).

[79] Adorno, Theodore, 'The Schema of Mass Culture' in *The Culture Industry*, Bernstein, J.M., ed. (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 56.

[80] *Ibid.,* pp. 57-8.

[81] Adorno puts it a little differently: '[...] thus variety already represented the magical repetition of the industrial procedure in which the selfsame is reproduced through time-the very allegory of high capitalism which demonstrates its dominating character even as it approaches its necessity as the freedom of play,' *Ibid.,* p. 61.

[82] Benjamin,Walter, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1979), pp. 219-253.

[83] *Ibid.,* p. 223.

[84] From Said, Edward, 'Farewell to Tahia' in *Al-Ahram Weekly* 7-13 October, 1999. Edward Said has also called Egyptian entertainment well versed in the 'arts of desire.'

[85] Fig. 4. This drawing reads 'Mother of the Arabs' from Hammed, Hammadi, Ben, *Oum Kalthoum* (Paris: Alif Les Editions Méditerranée, 1997), p. 159

[86] Sinni, Ghida, 'Umm Kulthum VS Nirvana', *Alive,* Premiere Issue (1999), 24-26.

[87] Irigaray, Luce, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference,* trans. by Burke, Carolyn and Gillian C. Gill (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), pp. 5-19.

[88] Through her dress, hairstyle, demure lifestyle revealing little.

[89] Danielson, Virginia, *A Voice Like Egypt,* pp. 11-12, 132-133, 137-140.

[90] Danielson, Virginia, *A Voice Like Egypt*, p. 137. Charles de Carcy has commented on a similar experience of this hypnotic quality of Arab music in his travel literature of the nineteenth century in his *work De Paris en Egypt: Souvenirs de Voyage* (Paris: Berger-Levraut, 1874) as quoted in Buonaventura, Wendy, *Serpent of the Nile,* p. 183.
'[…] it surprises; it begins by assailing the ears of the listener, then one becomes accustomed to it; one listens without tiring of it; and finally it brings on a kind of drowsiness or trance state, which is not unpleasant, and against which one has neither the power nor the will to resist.'

[91] Danielson, Virginia Louise, 'Shaping Tradition in Arabic Song: The Career and Repertory of Umm Kulthum', p. 157 - describes the 'monolog.'

[92] *Ibid.*, p. 170 - a 'cadence' is in this case a 'fall in the pitch of the voice' (collins english dictionary).

[93] *Ibid.*, pp. 216-217.

[94] *Ibid.*, p. 388.

[95] A European counterpart would be opera.

[96] Danielson, Virginia-Louise, 'Shaping Tradition in Arabic Song: The Career and Repertory of Umm Kulthum', Appendix E, p. 521. Other song forms include the Dawr: virtuosic genre of song developed in nineteenth century Egypt

[97] Hammed, Hammadi, Ben, *Oum Kalthoum.* Other examples include 'I Would Not Give My Hand but to You', 'I Will Not Come Back to You', generally more sombre of serious songs of love and devotion rather than songs of impatience and passion. The best known example is Al Atlal or 'The Ruins' which became, according to Danielson's research, a theme song for Umm Kulthum.

[98] This information is from Nicholson, Reynold A, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (Cambridege: Cambridge University Press, 1977). In particular Chapter III 'Pre-Islamic Poetry, Manners, and Religion', pp. 71-79 (p.72).

[99] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

[100] *Ibid.*

[101] *Ibid.*, p. 77.

[102] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

[103] I am reminded here that Gamal Abdel Nasser tried to organise a Pan-Arab League, not a pan-Muslim league. Obviously a history based on one's Arabness does not always ultimately link with one's religion. The Lebanese war presents this factor. Most people who were horrified with the outbreak of the war would claim, 'but we are all Arab.'

[104] This number is not wholly reliable as different sources sometimes do not attribute the same amount of songs to Umm Kulthum.

[105] By aligning herself to the 'quasidah' Kulthum connected her repertoire to one with a long and important history. The 'quasidah' or ode was a genre used to express the death of relatives or friends. This genre is pre-Islamic and so remains is characterised by its Arabness.

[106] Bell, Vicki, 'On Speech, Race and Melancholia: An Interview with Judith Butler', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 16:2 (1999), 163-174.

[107] Danielson, Virginia-Louise, 'Shaping Tradition in Arabic Song: The Career and Repertory of Umm Kulthum', p. 182

[108] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

[109] *Ibid.*, pp. 188- 189.

[110] The Mukhabarat was an organisation that supposedly kept everyone who was not in line with the new regime and its policies in check.

[111] Soueif, Ahdaf, *In the Eye of the Sun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), pp. 62-63. There are also numerous references to Umm Kulthum in Soueif's more recent novel, *The Map of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999).

[112] Danielson, Virginia-Louise, 'Shaping Tradition in Arabic Song: The Career and Repertory of Umm Kulthum', p. 189

[113] *Ibid.*

[114] Valassopoulos, Anastasia, 'Virginia Danielson, The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century', *The Oxford Literary Review*, 19 (1997), 157-162.

[115] Salloum, Habeeb, 'Umm Kalthum - Legendary Songstress of the Arabs.'

[116] Danielson, Virginia Louise, 'Shaping Tradition in Arab Song: The career and repertory of Umm Kulthum', p.199.

[117] *Ibid.*

[118] *Ibid.*

[119] Interestingly, one of the songs that Umm Kulthum sang became the national anthem until it was replaced in 1977, *Ibid.*, p. 200.

[120] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

[121] *Ibid.*, Danielson elaborates on this briefly on p. 311.

[122] *Ibid.*, p. 311.

[123] 'Jemal, Emblem of Patriotism', 1954.

[124] 'Loved by the People' (1967).

[125] Neil Sedaka, 'Oh Carol' in 1959 in the United States. The lyrics are a follows:
Oh Carol
I am but a fool
Darling I love you though you treat me cruel
You hurt me and you made me cry
But if you leave me I will surely die
Darling there will never be another
'Cause I love you so
Don't ever leave me
Say you'll never go
I will always want you for my sweetheart
No matter what you do
Oh Carol I'm still in love with you

(how different is this song to Umm Kulthum's?)

[126] The boys pretend to walk like John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever* and listen to most disco music - a sound that has since come to be associated with camp culture - see Dyer, Richard, *Only Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[127] *West Beirut*. Dir. Ziad Doueiri. La Sept Arte 3B Productions, 1998.

[128] Armbrust, Walter, 'The National Vernacular: Folklore and Egyptian Popular Culture', *The Michigan Quarterly Review*, 13:10 (1992), 525-542.

[129] *Ibid.*, p. 534, Also, for example, Umm Kulthum sang the Rubbayyat of Omar Khayyam.

[130] The term 'perforated sheet' refers to the scene in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* where Aziz the doctor can only examine his patient through the perforated sheet, ultimately uncovering her entire body but only bit by bit. See Rushdie, Salman, *Midnight's Children* (London: Picador, 1982).

[131] Saadawi, Nawal El, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), pp. 84-85.

[132] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

[133] Saadawi, Nawal El, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World.*

[134] Danielson, Virginia, *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arab Song and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 2.

[135] *Le Figaro*, Novembre 14, 1967, my translation into English.

[136] In his article entitled 'Contemplating Harmony' Georges Bahgory reminisces Umm Kulthum as he draws a portrait of her. He says ' Can the stroke of a pen translate for the eyes the pure aural delectation that one experiences when listening to the incomparable Umm Kulthoum? As I draw, I am transported back in time, I am sitting at one of her concerts, bathed in sound, shouting out despite myself: 'More! More!' [...] the present seems insipid in comparison, but my memory is accustomed to these prodigious feats of purely cerebral yoga [...] there is a secret here [...] what it is I cannot say. Everyone knows it. It sings for itself.' See *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 3-9 February 2000.

[137] As opposed to the argument presented by Cowie in *Representing the Woman: Cinema and Psychoanalysis*, that desire can never be fulfilled because it needs the absence of the fulfilment to legitimise its continuation.

[138] Bersani, Leo, 'Against Monogamy', *Oxford Literary Review*, 20:1-2 (1998), 3-23, (p. 12).

[139] Lukes, H.N, 'Is the Rectum Das Ding? Lacan, Bersani and the Ethics of Perversion', *Oxford Literary Review* 20:1-2 (1998), 103-143, (p. 129).

[140] Abu-Lughod, Leila, *Veiled Sentiments: Honour and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*, p. 234.

[141] It in interesting to keep in mind that the Thursday evening crowd would often hear one new song. This means that, unfamiliar with the lyrics, there must have been a system of hidden signals that informed them when to applaud and when *not* to interrupt. I assume that it was a combination of i) the intensity and volume of the music and ii) some learned aspect of Umm Kulthum's behaviour e.g. the lowering of the scarf.

[142] The first 15 minutes of 'Arouh Li Meen' have been included in the tape recording.

[143] 1958, translated by myself from the French translation of Hammed, Hammadi Ben, *Oum Kalthoum* (Paris: Alif Les Editions Méditerranée, 1997), pp. 124-125.

[144] It is also significant that most of the audio material available on CD and cassette is recorded live.

[145] A Lacanian concept as explicated by H.N. Lukes in 'Is the Rectum Das Ding?: Lacan, Bersani and the Ethics of Perversion', p. 113.

[146] *Ibid.*, p.135.

[147] Baghory, Georges, 'Contemplating Harmony.'

[148] I refer here to claims made in the introduction.

[149] I have never come across a document or opinion that describes Umm Kulthum as sexy or otherwise sexual. By calling her maternal I fear I am somewhat imposing a non-sexual definition, however, it appears that Umm Kuthum displayed maternal characteristics devoid of sexuality in her appearance. Where she did express sexuality and passion was obviously within the confines of her music.

[150] Lukes, H.N, 'Is the Rectum *Das Ding*?', p. 113

[151] Cowie, Elizabeth, *Representing the Woman: Cinema and Psychoanalysis* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 127.

[152] *Ibid.*

[153] *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

[154] *Ibid.*, p. 131.

[155] *Ibid.*, p. 132.

[156] *Ibid.*, p. 133.

[157] Ibid., p. 135.

[158] Lukes, H.N. 'Is the Rectum *Das Ding*?', p. 125

[159] Butler herself does not engage with the idea of performance within theatre/ the arts.

[160], Danielson, Virginia Louis, 'Shaping Tradition in Arabic Song: The Career and Repertory of Umm Kulthum', pp. 235-236, who also footnotes that when Umm Kulthum went to Paris she kept to her lengthy performance 'to the amazement of French officials and non-Arab audience. The length of her concerts, which extended to seven hours, ending at 3 am set a new local record. 'Not even for Wagner' had the Olympia theatre remained open so late and it was reported that special permission had to be obtained in advance from the city authorities.'

[161] *Ibid.*, p. 313.

[162] *Ibid.*, p. 314, and also, 1967 was the year of the defeat of Egypt by the Israeli army

[163] A memorable incident is when her records were not aired after the military coup that brought Gamal Abdel Nasser to power. When Nasser asked his officials why this had happened, they answered that it seemed improper to air a singer who had previously sang for the overthrown king. Nasser is reported to have said that this was a ridiculous notion and that her songs should be broadcasted immediately before the entire country turned against the new regime!!!

[164] 1972, my translation from the Arabic with the kind help of Rana Dayoub and Maggie Awadalla.

[165] Baghory, Georges, 'Contemplating Harmony.'

[166] This has also been noted by Danielson.

[167] Sinni, Ghida, 'Umm Kulthum VS Nirvana' pp 24 - 26.

[168] Moya Lloyd discusses the difficulty in separating the two. See Lloyd, Moya, 'Performativity, Parody, Politics', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 16:2 (1999), 195-213.

[169] Sinker, Mark, 'The Silences of the Palace' in Sight and Sound

[170] Taubin, Amy, 'Speak, Memory', *The Village Voice*, 41:16 (1996) 78-83. I am using the on-line version, all citations will be out of /4, p. 3/4. Also, see Cowie, Elizabeth, 'A Tunisian Search for Independence', *Women: a Cultural Review*, 6:1 (1995), 124-128.

[171] *Ibid.*

[172] Sinker, Mark, 'The Silences of the Palace', *Sight and Sound*, 5:3 (1995), 53-53.

[173] Taubin, Amy, 'Speak, Memory', p. 2/4.

[174] Romney, Jonathan, 'Women on the verge of Rebellion', *New Statesman and Society*, 8:343 (1995), 33-35, (p. 33).

[175] *Ibid.*

[176] Taubin, Amy, 'Speak, Memory', p. 2/4.

[177] Lateef, Nelda, *Women of Lebanon: Interviews with Champions for Peace* (London: McFarland & Company, 1997), p. 24.

CHAPTER 4

DANGER AND CREATIVITY[1]

We write, I write in wars and civil wars because I have no power, no strength, no weapons and no soldiers. I write because I crouch in the cellar like a rat, raising my cowardice like a child in times of hardship. I belong to the dark dampness and the forgetfulness of those who have placed history in the streets. But I also write as the rat that gnaws at foundations and pillars. I betray the establishment and give evidence against it. I write beneath the boots which stamp on my face, as if *I* were the emperor or dictator.

Hoda Barakat [2]

Does anything more than danger stimulate our creativity? And does anything threaten our creativity more than danger?

Nawal El Saadawi [3]

In her article 'Arab Women Arab Wars' Miriam Cooke reminds us that 'some events like wars are so existentially important for their communities that they demand a greater degree of collaboration in the construction of the narratives than of the counternarratives. Differences of perspective and in sociopolitical roles that are acceptable in normal times become intolerable in war time.'[4] Writing during war-time, is, to Cooke, an experience that is part of war itself, an experience that informs the sociopolitical roles that precede it. In this chapter, the novels *Beirut Blues* and *The Story of Zahra* by Hanan Al-Shaykh and *Leaving Beirut: Women and the Wars Within* by Mai Ghoussoub will be examined as instances of Lebanese women's war literature where the 'intolerable' is written. Firstly though, this chapter will introduce the concerns of Middle Eastern women's war literature and the manner in which this production has been theorised thus far. Specifically, a brief look at the history of Lebanon will reveal a tenuous political past, geographically and discursively. The concerns and specificities that arise will then be used to inform a distinct understanding of women's gender roles and expectations as they emerge in the situation of war. Also, I want to show how these expectations are negotiated through the locus of writing and allowed to take shape in order to form part of a new history of war. I will argue that existing criticism of war literature sometimes views writing as the authoritative tool against the violence of war. Though this is significant, it

is also crucial to re-understand the stories that are being delivered as stories that try to comprehend the changes that war brings. Events are re-written so that they can acquire an active role in this re-negotiation of the consequences of war. The means of resistance that I shall examine within the texts are sexual and militant. The texts incorporate both the paradox of *writing as resistance* and *writing of methods of resistance* that themselves resist strict gender rules and applications. Ultimately, the experience of war, though it may initially seek to highlight gender roles, ends up blurring the definiteness of just these roles. War in this instance provides the arena for actions to be divorced from their supposedly feminine or masculine matrixes. What we see instead is a personal attitude or resistance to the idea of war and a strong inclination towards survival and life. This inclination though is satisfied in ways that do not fit in with the every-day social code and the writers and the characters in their texts consequently remain involved in re-structuring their participation in war.

Expanding on Chapter two, 'Nawal El Saadawi: Medic and Woman' and Chapter three, 'Umm Kulthum: Music and the Possibility of the Feminine', this chapter hopes to show how involvement in subversive activity (such as sexual or militant ones) can be a way forward for understanding the ways that women can better survive and create new spaces of experience for themselves within the life available to them. Interestingly Ghoussoub's and Al-Shaykh's writings refuse to judge the war on moral grounds. Instead, they are involved in re-writing the suffering of war to discover new sites of experience and ways of reconfiguring the possibilities available to them as women. By taking on otherwise forbidden military and sexual activity (among other activities), the women in these three novels emphasise the notion of free choice produced by the situation of war where regulatory norms lose some of their centrality. The women do not remain constrained as social structures are redefined and obligations and responsibilities change. I hope to engage with all of these premises in the following pages, with the aim of ultimately clarifying the role of war literature as I see it in the narrow context of gender re-configuration. The question will centre around how successful this literature is and how does it engage with ideas of individuality and the validity of individual experience.

4.1 WAR STORIES

Fadia Faqir, in her conclusion to the collection of essays on Arab women writers, *In the House of Silence*, concludes that much of Arab women's writing emerges as a writing of suppression or is influenced by the idea of suppression. Faqir argues that ideas relating to gender awareness and sexuality have tended to remain silenced. Though she is predominantly referring to autobiographical writings, we can contest Faqir's statement if we look for these perspectives in the literature of war where these questions seek their answers *within* the confines of the war: the only available reality. This chapter seeks to illustrate that issues pertaining to gender awareness are dealt with in very untraditional ways. In her work *Sexuality and War*, Lebanese author Evelyn Accad claims that 'nonviolent struggle' is the only viable and hopeful strategy.[5] Ruth Hottell, in her appraisal of Accad's work emphasises that 'the douceur apparent in Accad's work is not passive but active resistance to hate, injustice and oppression.'[6] She points out that: 'political action and writing' are linked, as it is the only way to sustain a 'nonviolent political activity.'[7] This understanding of writing as action, and within the novels themselves, of living the war as action, blurs the masculine and feminine understanding of the terms "active" and "passive." In the novels that I will discuss, action within the novel does not conform to Accad/Hottell's notions of non-violent activism. Instead, some of the most significant actions taken by the women are to an extent violent ones and it is important to address these as empowering moments as well (rather than treating them as representations of the ills of war). Though I may not be taking a traditional[8] route in this examination of the texts, it is important to distinguish that although the activity of writing may be an act of non-violent activism, the events portrayed within the text are oftentimes violent. This does not diminish their importance; on the contrary, it emphasises the need for an examination into this violence in order to understand how these texts are performative and how they challenge accepted feminine narratives.

In the literature examined, injustice and oppression emerge as not just products of war, but rather, social phenomena already familiar to women that are re-examined in the literature of war. The religious, political and sexual norms that inform these products are re-interpreted by the women who write. The authors use the space of their work to interrogate how women view themselves as performing certain gender configurations

underscored by these norms. This self-assessment is crucial to how women understand or seek to challenge the hatred, injustice and oppression that they feel as women and Lebanese authors take the opportunity of war to make these sentiments clear.

The scaffold of war will be used to explore how once again gender expectations are questioned in this a-social expectation which is war. Women's writing insists that it be heard as part of the war and not simply as an afterthought or something to be exploited only in times of war.[9] Survival becomes a central issue for all the women concerned in the literature of war. Liana Badr, writing of war and the Palestinian cause says that 'the only indestructible thing left in life was everybody's obsessive will to survive.'[10] Survival is an issue that the women of Lebanon engage with, and within each means to survival is a seeking of gender re-definition, a need to reveal their selves as gendered, to reveal *knowledge* of the performance of their excess, to say *yes I know but I do not accept*. Within this argument lies the question, is it possible to reduce this 'will to survive' to performativity (which remains narrow in its scope)? I will attempt to argue that the will to survive redefines performativity. Survival does not take into consideration laws (juridical or familial) that govern peacetime, consequently women answer to themselves. The notion that an act that breaks with the law momentarily is *performative*, rather than a performance which is understood as a reiterated aspect of behaviour or its component, becomes, in times of war, an act that *remains* performative as it continues to question and re-structure the gender norms. Without this rubric from which to enter and exit (performance – performative - performance), the will to survive via the re-shaping of one's gender expectations through acknowledging them as such becomes an endless performative moment and so inherently exceeds itself and breaks with it. The performative moment normally succeeds, in its definition and articulation, because it is a distinguishable fragment with a short life span. The extended performative moment, or shall we call it the *attained* performative moment in the works under study, constantly re-configures gender norms and so never truly returns to the 'performance' that was before (within the confines of the text, many of the participating women die, become legends, or are radically changed, but they do not return to the life they had before). I hope to make these ideas clear with textual examples and discussion.

Fadia Faqir has argued that certain Middle Eastern women writers try to write from a genderless space.[11] This attempt has been understood by me as marking the fact that some Arab women seek to emerge as writers who discuss feminist issues rather than writers who want to proclaim themselves feminist. This attempt also allows for a broader critical framework that does not seek to align itself with a specific discourse. Again, this emerges as a conscious choice, one that sees the pitfalls of having one overarching system (feminism). As Arab writer Fawzia Rashid has argued in her essay 'Writing and the Pursuit of Female Identity',

> in writing it did not concern me that the realisation should be feminist in the limited subjective sense, but rather intellectual in the general sense, since in my view women's issues were always part of local and international social issues and the conflict was not with men so much as with distorted and regressive inherited ideas which controlled both men and women […] we can no longer simply [be] concerned with what a woman says in her writing, but also with how she says it and how her creative self communicates itself to others.[12]

The 'creative self' emerges as one that needs to communicate more than just her experience as a woman. Instead, it becomes important to try and negotiate what makes up this experience. This section seeks to broaden the scope of "experience." We are accustomed to understanding the value of women's experience in the telling of the war story, as this becomes a crucial part of the history of war. Miriam Cooke, expert in women and war literature, in her work *Women and the War Story* is interested in 'those moments of women's empowerment, though they seem to be invisible.'[13] However, I not only seek to search through the rubble of war writing to seek out moments of 'gender awareness' and 'women's empowerment' as Cooke and Faqir do, but also to address, beyond the work of Cooke and Faqir, empowerment as also located in militant and sexual action, not only in writing. Cooke's aim is to situate women in the war story and to highlight their gender roles through this very writing. She looks 'in postcolonial Arab war literature for alternatives to the master narrative of war' and examines women's 'fight to retain the authority to write about an experience that they are not supposed to have had.'[14] This seems a somewhat conventional line as it assumes that war literature represents actions of war and that it is the writing itself that remains significant. This appears to impose a rather stagnant view of the events whereas it is these events, *created* by the author, that in fact

force us to question what we think the war experience is. I would like to add that the war story is used (be it misused by committed nationalists) as a platform from which one can experiment with the structures, or loose strings, that bind the gender codes together. However, rather than try to find women's war story in the *war story*, I am more inclined to find *woman* emerging from the story, having learnt from her story and others. In short, rather than give more female perspectives on war I seek to explore the war experience for the new understandings of gender that it produces. Women who write their own war story, Cooke argues, 'object to the way in which men have generally overlooked their involvement, whether active or passive. Their writings show how women wage peace, in other words, how women fight for justice without necessarily engaging in destruction.'[15] To expand, it is important to also explore how women *use* war to understand or explore certain gender related issues and how they redefine themselves through *engaging in destruction as well* (sexual and military destruction). Women can only prevail in the war story by claiming their own action in the experience of the war. What I mean by this is that the writers and their protagonists may reject the dynamics of war, yet they use the dramatic moments of war to make statements about themselves as different and differing women.[16] In the case of Lebanon and women's writing surrounding the Lebanese war, the failure of a coherent nationalism would seem to attract even fewer coherencies in the writing produced. War writing emerges as an enabling type of writing and Cooke touches upon this when she observes that,

> women who choose to write about wars they have lived are defying an age-old silencing code. Their speaking out now and in knowledge of their transgressions allows us to read back into the gaps and silences of the War Story. Their stories threaten the privilege assumed proper to the right to tell the War Story. As the right to tell diffuses among all who may claim to have had a war experience, however unrecognisable as such by the standard conventions, the masculine contract between violence, sexuality, and glory comes undone.[17]

Furthermore, in her essay of 1993, 'Woman, Retelling the War Myth', (the letters 'Wo' are actually placed under a cross, emphasising the initial cancelling out of women from the war story) Cooke explains that 'by placing gender at the centre of an analysis of war we begin to question the myth of war.'[18] I would like to subvert the quotation and claim that 'by placing war at the centre of an analysis of gender we begin to question the myth of

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gender.' This chapter is about how war creates another war within the psyche of the overlooked participants, women, whose body and spirit are at stake. Specifically, in this section, I will provide a brief outline of women's war writing in the Middle East as well as a synopsis of the Lebanese war in particular. Hanan Al-Shaykh and Mai Ghoussoub's works will be used to discuss the Lebanese context in detail.

4.2 HOW TO WRITE THE WAR

In her essay 'Arab Women Arab Wars' Miriam Cooke points out that,

> Postcolonial wars have transformed the relationship between women's participation in war
> and its narration: the change in women's experience has found a necessary corollary in the
> change in discourse. Women are inscribing their experiences in war into the war story.[19]

To define how women have written themselves into the war story has been a necessary and essential task. The authors that I shall examine below have covered it extensively and comprehensively. However, it also important to examine to what extent a Western style feminism (whether imposed by Arabs or Westerners) can become another imprisoning performative injunction as discussed in terms of Cooke's work above. I will delineate the arguments and research undertaken thus far to ascertain the directions that we can move in.[20]

In her work *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East*, Evelyn Accad stresses the 'importance of sexuality and sexual relations and the centrality of sexuality and male domination to the political struggles occurring in the Middle East.'[21] Accad emphasises a locus which highlights sexual discrimination and inequality amongst men and women as central to the political struggles of the Arab world. Also, Accad accentuates the role that colonialism has had to play in the re-appropriation of strict patriarchal codes by the post-colonial Arab states. She writes that 'while nationalism has been necessary for the young Arab states gaining their autonomy from colonialism, it nevertheless, like fascism, "reclaimed many of the most patriarchal values of Islamic traditionalism as integral to Arab cultural identity as such".'[22] Mai Ghoussoub, (whom I shall discuss further on) together with Evelyn Accad seeks to locate the root of the difficulty in establishing a strong and successful Arab feminism.[23] Although it is difficult

to determine which political platform has predicated a more stern appropriation of 'patriarchal values of Islamic traditionalism' this remains the point of departure for the discussion of war literature.[24] The silencing of women and their sexuality leads to a fundamental fracture in society and the language of nationalism (Accad cites the words *fatherland/motherland* and *patriotism* as examples) and this suggests a gendering of objects that reflects the fissure in the Arab societies Accad speaks of. She goes on to cite numerous Arab activists who argue along the same lines.[25] It seems then that there is an almost natural tendency to try and speak of inequality and suppression without always referring to gender awareness and sexuality.[26] Also, there emerges an intellectual conflict concerning personal responsibilities; should one choose to be loyal to one's country or to one's self? In fact, as Accad has noted in *Sexuality and War*,

> the discussion of sexuality and its relationship to political and social conflicts is also silenced through women's unquestioning adherence to dogmatic political systems of thinking. Many nationalist and leftist women [feel] that women should rally behind the existing movements and ideologies. Yet in these movements, traditional morality often filters through dogmas, setting new barriers between women's sense of obligation and their search for truth and freedom.[27]

This uncertainty coupled with the large numbers of political factions within individual countries in the Middle East makes it even more difficult to discuss and agree on what women want to express themselves or how they conceive of themselves.[28] The 'sense of obligation' to nationalist causes defers questions of sexual discrimination and the vacillation over *which* issues are important to *each* group makes it difficult to set agendas.[29] However, Accad concludes in the introduction to *Sexuality and War* that 'if sexuality is not incorporated into the main feminist and political struggles, the struggles for freedom will remain on a very superficial level.'[30] Although I agree with this contention, sexuality also needs to be addressed in terms of how it is understood and perceived by the participants in the struggle. It is too simple to say that a healthy view of sexuality leads to a successful struggle for freedom. Surely all types of experiences need to be examined in order to re-assess how the constraints have been internalised and consequently expelled in favour of a different perception of this lived gender.

I will elaborate on the examples of the literatures of the Algerian revolution and the Palestinian Intifada as instances of war writing where women have been criticised for not introducing the pursuit of sexual equality into their agenda for freedom. In her important essay 'Arab Women Arab Wars' Miriam Cooke is perceptive in pointing out the role of the critics of war literature. The possibility of again re-writing a war story through re-reading a war story illustrates the impossibility of a comprehensive history of war events.[31] She claims that

> war as a condition of militarised alertness has become endemic to our daily lives. We realise that it is as hard to separate armed, organised conflict from unarmed, disorganised violence as it is to distinguish between combat and noncombat. Yet, we have few guides to thinking anew about war. Fiction is one such guide.[32]

Contemporary fiction then becomes important for Cooke who wants to ensure that the 'experiencing subject' has a place in the literature of the war story. The problem here is that she seems to be reconstituting the old opposition between 'reality' and 'discourse', a reality that she is all too willing to inform us of. She argues that since single subjects construct a unifying picture of the war, these unifying constructs need to be brought together and compared in order that we can have a multi-faceted idea of the war and consequently, the war story.[33] The notion that there is a war myth that we need to dispel because it can become an 'ordering principle' is a problem that 'Arab Women Arab Wars' seeks to bring to the forefront and solve.[34] However, this myth may contain *useful* understandings of war. Cooke's solution seems to be to integrate women's writing into the way that we speak of and remember war so that 'these clumsy components, these heroic women combatants, [can] survive the manipulation of time.'[35] As Mona Fayad has written in her article 'Re-inscribing Identity: Nation and Community in Arab Women's Writing',

> as women writers redefine and renegotiate 'culture,' then, their *writing* both reinforces that culture, and, at the same time, questions the terms in which that culture has come to define itself.[36]

Fayad argues that 'an awareness of the function of writing' is very important in the building of an 'imagined community', a term that she borrows from Anderson and

subsequently Bhabha in her discussion of history as a 'performative' rather than a 'pedagogical' act.[37] This is a much more mobilising view as it suggests that we can look to the narratives of war to understand experiences rather than simply extract moral or ethical lessons. This notion of history as performative constitutes it as a discourse that we need not take at face value and that we can and must question.

4.3 ALGERIA

Women's literature that emerged as a result of the Algerian revolution has been criticised for its inability to document the significance of women's contribution to this struggle. It has been argued that Algerian women, who contributed to the revolution as mothers and fighters, did not engage with the following possibilities that were open to them. It is said they did not

> (1) emphasise their importance *as women* to Algerian success in the war; (2) continually affirm, particularly in writing, their presence and its importance so as not to be ignored or forcibly repressed; (3) articulate their experiences not as cross-dressing but as transformative; and (4) act in terms of the discourse they had thus created.[38]

Cross-dressing here refers to the revolutionary method that Algerian women adopted as a method of war. Women used their heavy chadors to hide weapons in, or abandoned their conservative clothing for Western style attire in order to move about freely in Algiers without arousing suspicion.[39] The fact that the literature of the period does not seem to reflect an understanding of how important these actions were in terms of women's contribution *as* women remains a disappointment for critics of war literature. The argument seems to be that the consequent war literature did not give women enough credit for their participation. In her critique of Algerian novelist Assia Djebar, Cooke claims in her essay 'Woman, Retelling the War Myth' that Djebar portrays her characters' actions as 'empowering but not transformative.' Further, of Djebar, she writes that in one of her novels,

> the two women who have dedicated themselves to military endeavours are flatly portrayed, and the Westernised Touma is a traitor and a prostitute, a caricature of what 'Westtoxification' can do to a Muslim woman.[40]

Although Cooke is astute in perceiving the lack of a 'transformative' model of woman, the two representations mentioned above do seem to be significant nonetheless as they present military involvement as well as women who are indeed influenced to excess by Western values. It is important here to question Cooke's didactic injunction. It appears that Cooke assumes "change" is a matter of Westernization that should be portrayed as good in the narrative of Djebar. She also points out the failure of Algerian women to criticise or even read and familiarise themselves with male writing on their own participation in the war, thus assuming an extremely traditional western style feminist intervention. Moreover, she emphasises the lack of reading and research on the part of the women that would have revealed a male view of the female militant as a 'mythically terrifying' being.[41] This suggests that women may have subsequently felt empowered by this image and used it to their advantage. This lack of cross reading as well as the lack of a feminist context from which to work seems to have inhibited Algerian women from seeking transformative action after the revolution. It appears that because of the immediate focus on national liberation, women's mobilisation was imminent and permitted. However, women did not view their participation as one that they could have exploited: 'The Algerian Revolution was an anti-colonial war whose representation was still controlled so that only certain groups could speak about the war and even then in prescribed ways.'[42] Although I understand Cooke's argument in that Algerian women did not seize their opportunity, it seems that what underlies this is the fact that Algerian women writers may not have viewed their active participation or their literary production as a space from which to foreground feminist issues. I hope to come back to this in my discussion of the Lebanese novelists. As Algerian 'nationalists rejected the implication that male oppression is more painful than the biculturalism born of colonial oppression; they demanded that the feminist struggle be subsumed under the revolutionary struggle.'[43] Consequently, what emerges is a lack of war literature that asks serious questions about the price that women have had to pay for their involvement in a war that does not acknowledge their contribution as women. This however, does not diminish the significance of their literature. According to critics such as Cooke and Marie-Aimée Helei-Lucas, women's capacity to rally for their post-revolutionary rights is lost in the newness of post-colonialism. This possibility emerges as one that is also lost in the literary production of the period; a move that could have enabled the feminist cause that is

only now receiving serious re-assessment.[44] It is not discursively useful however to revisit old ground in order to point out what is lacking. This suggests a pre-determined agenda that tries to re-write experience. It is more useful to re-visit the texts in order to see what they do offer.

4.4 PALESTINE

The question of Palestine,[45] especially the year 1967,

> marks the beginning of a seismic shift. Wars in the Arab world, which until then had been treated as discrete events, usually in connection with a colonial power, came to be regarded as systemic. The Palestinians' plight became a pan-Arab cause, if not always in reality then certainly in rhetoric. With this came a change in expectations of Palestinian women's behaviour and coincidentally, of their writing. Five years after the end of the Algerian Revolution, Palestinians were invoking its lessons: the use of violence in the struggle for independence; the indispensability of women to national liberation; and the importance for women of remaining vigilant on all fronts so as to be able to withstand [...] a repetition of Algerian women's experience.[46]

In fact, women participated both militantly and otherwise in the Palestinian war and many writers and artists, both male and female have emerged to represent Palestine and Palestinians.[47] The literature produced in pre-Intifada Palestine by women seems to be heavily involved in the nationalist cause. Again, as long as women wrote about national and not women's issues, they were allowed to say what they wanted.[48] However, with the onset of the Intifada, initially a female uprising, women were saying what they wanted to say and how they wanted to say it (within the framework of a nationalist cause). The Intifada marks the ongoing 'women-specific ways of resisting Israeli aggression in Gaza and the West Bank.'[49] The movement consisted of women 'taking to the streets', sometimes with their children 'under the ever watchful eye of the international television cameras' and coming into conflict with Israeli soldiers.[50] This peculiar situation, of women and children deliberately provoking soldiers creates a dilemma for the soldiers who 'have to improvise in the face of the unexpected,' and find themselves very much in the public eye under international surveillance.[51] Cooke significantly points out that the position of the soldiers here was precarious since, if they did not retaliate, their identity as soldiers/males would be threatened. Hence, 'the combatant masquerading as a nonsoldier,

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as a woman or as a child, threatens the soldier with his own dissolution should he not keep himself under complete control.'[52] However, towards the end of 1987, the Intifada took on a different turn as arms began to be used and men entered the arena (consequently re-asserting the position of the enemy/other soldier and of themselves as soldiers). This war "text" or phenomenon, as it changes its focus, makes women into symbols of Palestine while diminishing their active roles. The women's war writing reflects this activism and so the story of the Intifada is written. What emerges from the Palestinian writing is the question of 'how may activism be connected to its interpretation so that discourse itself can become an agent of change? How can literature become a nonviolent way to participate in the nationalist movement as a feminist activist?'[53] How events are represented marks a personal participation in the war that can be interpreted as activism. This idea of non-violence will be addressed again below.

Although I do not intend to essentialise the Algerian Revolution or the Palestinian Intifada, my aim is to outline some of the concerns that arise from them in relation to women's war writing. How events are represented is crucial to their effectiveness, as the memory of events remains central to how these events are later interpreted and used in the feminist discourse. As we have seen, revisionist work in Algeria is reconsidering women's role in the revolution and the depiction of the Intifada remains a way of voicing women's non-violent involvement in the Palestinian cause. Before turning to the war in Lebanon, I will briefly examine Rajeswari Mohan's 1998 article 'Loving Palestine; National Activism and Feminist Agency in Leila Khaled's Subversive Bodily Acts.'[54] Mohan argues that there is room to discuss feminist agency, even in the seemingly non-feminine space of active militant resistance. She uses Butler's ideas from *Gender Trouble*: *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* to emphasise that while the idea of subversive bodily acts is a crucial one introduced by Western feminist theories, we need to be constantly aware of the surrounding contexts such as class and race in order to fully understand what we mean by subversive. Mohan's subject, Leila Khaled has been consistently active in 'representing women's issues to the PLO' and in her lifetime has 'attempted two hijackings.'[55] Mohan argues that academic feminism does not allow for the type of performances staged by Khaled. As a Palestinian militant Khaled advocates the

use of violent situations in order to achieve the emancipation that she fights for. Mohan notes that,

> narratives such as Khaled's are important for feminist discourses precisely because they offer concrete instances of the contestatory relations between feminisms in a world order driven in its most minute forms by hierarchies of wealth and political influence, and demonstrate what exactly it means, in terms of available political options and strategies, to be the ubiquitous subject of feminism.[56]

It appears that 'concrete instances' of activism become vital to the understanding of women's roles in war. Patriotism becomes paramount and ultimately becomes 'increasingly [...] invested with libidinal energy as Palestine gets figured as an estranged love, as the promise of wholeness, as the only way towards the restoration of her humanity' and thereby of [Khaled's] life.[57] Mohan's article is crucial here as it highlights the significance of differing contexts that require attention in order that they be understood as *subversive* rather than *emasculating* (further, the masculinisation process for men might produce the women as manly). Her position is also similar to Martha Nussbaum who, while appreciating Butler's notions of mobilising bodily acts fears that these acts may not be political enough if they remain within the confines of the single experiencing subject. As this is a problem that I am soon to face in the exploration of Lebanese fiction, it is worthwhile examining the example of Khaled a little further. Though Khaled reiterates (albeit through reversal) male practices in war, (for example naming the nation the motherland though traditionally Palestine is known as the Fatherland) or takes decisive action in order to alert the world to the Palestinian cause (hijackings), these incidents cannot only be viewed as masculine actions appropriated by female activists. Khaled's autobiography, which Mohan discusses, underscores the deep commitment to family and country and in so doing 'pose[s] a challenge and questions feminist theory and practice,'[58] that seeks to undermine military activism.[59] Agency and context are re-introduced in this specific case to underline their significance and this remains important if we are to seek gender reconfigurations in the texts that we study. The example of Khaled further illustrates assumptions made under the rubric of performance theory concerning the role of the militant's body; who does it belong to? Mohan points out that,

> Leila Khaled's case [demonstrates] that while Butler's theoretical interventions make visible the subtle far-reaching effects of women's political actions, the linkages between

women's positioning as sexual subjects and the other locations of their subjectivity and agency need to be mapped in detail if we are to appreciate the full range of political effectivity of subversive bodily acts.[60]

Subversive bodily acts then, as well as subversive representation in fiction in our case, need to be studied in context if we are to remain within a valid ideological framework where each feminist or subversive action is appreciated for its far reaching consequences and for how it questions the status quo of women in that particular situation. Keeping this point in mind, I will now move to a short history of Lebanon and the Lebanese civil war before putting to the test the above arguments with the literature at hand.

4.5 THE LEBANESE CONTEXT

Context, as I have outlined above, is an indispensable component in the analysis of war literature, especially if we are arguing for a broader feminist understanding. As I shall elaborate below, the Lebanese war has promoted a certain kind of writing that reflects each of its complicated stages as well as its pre-war political and social circumstances. 'Lebanese nationalism' as Evelyn Accad has termed it in her work *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East*', means 'electing to belong to a culture conceived as pluralistic, as accepting others' differences.'[61] The geographical area known today as Lebanon has always been 'multiconfessional and multicommunal.'[62] By multiconfessional, I am referring to the fact that Lebanon is made up of many differing religions: Maronite, Greek Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Protestant, Shi'ite, Sunni, and Druze among others. Thus, although the main grouping appears to be Christian/Muslim, the outbreak of civil war in 1975 saw all these factions creating their own oppositions and armies. Though I do not intend to give a comprehensive view of the Lebanese war and history, I will highlight the major events to emphasise the particularly sensitive and unique social situation that arises and that make the conception of a harmonious 'pluralistic' society particularly difficult.[63]

The outbreak of the civil war has generally been attributed to the 'loyalty of the Lebanese to their sectarian, kinship, and local communities, rather than to the country as a whole; increasing legitimisation of the sectarian system; and nonseparation of religion

from the state.'[64] These factors have made it increasingly difficult, for example, for persons to marry outside their group, thus maintaining a 'local community' feel inside a larger community which is Lebanon. Inevitably, these initial bonds were revealed during the war to be the strongest. Consequently, the issue of sectarianism is an important one for historians and social critics of Lebanon. Ussama Makdisi in his article 'Reconstructing the Nation-State: The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon' argues how even though the new Lebanon presents itself as a 'modern reconstructed state' sectarianism is still present and does not only operate as a 'metaphor for the unwanted past.'[65] This unwanted past defined by sectarianism, Makdisi argues, cannot be annulled precisely because the history of Lebanon lacks a unifying event. In fact 'the Lebanese state was created as a result of a series of compromises between the French mandatory power and the indigenous elites, and not as the result of popular anti-colonial mobilisation. An ethos of national unity was never forged in a collective struggle.'[66] French troops had arrived in Lebanon in 1860 to protect the Christian Maronite community from the Druz invasion and when the Ottoman empire collapsed in Syria in 1914-1918 France soon gave up the mandate for Syria and Lebanon (but did not promise full independence until 1945 and did not evacuate troops till 1946).[67] However, differences based on religion seem to have been a colonial ideological import since colonial influence had reigned in the region since the late 1830's. Makdisi explains that 'colonialism transformed the social, political and economic significance of religion into a reified order wherein decontextualised religious identities alone defined individuals.'[68] Makdisi argues that prior to the 1860 arrival of the French army, 'communities in Mount Lebanon were predicated not so much on religious distinctions as on hierarchical politics of nobility that cut across religious lines' and 'the notion of a unified, territorially demarcated nationalism of adherents of a particular religion that transcended kin, village or religion was absent.'[69] As Robert Fisk also emphasises, 'the nineteenth century European powers only exacerbated the differences between the communities.'[70] Religious difference, once it began to be used as a tool for 'social liberation' amongst classes, further undermined the community characterised by village/kin or region. Makdisi argues that matters are complicated even further if we take into account that

> precisely because the meaning of religion as an exclusive base of identity was new, its
> coherence was constantly undermined by continuities of old regime definitions of identity

that stressed region or family. As a result, despite the appearance of two sides during the 1840-60 period, one Maronite and one Druze, there were in fact intra-communal contestations over what a 'true' Maronite or Druze was. These generated violent, complex and protracted struggles among peasants, landlords and clergy.[71]

The 1870 war emerges as a complicated event influenced by the new religious identity still embroiled in sectarian constructs of nation. As the idea of the nation-state slowly infiltrated Lebanon after World War One, so essential differences between Christian and Muslims were emphasised. Lebanese elites, 'particularly the Maronites who stressed their pro-French character' helped create the new nation-state that was Lebanon.[72] By now, 1920, the largest Muslim majority discarded the 'idea of Lebanon and favoured a pan-Arab nation, specifically Greater Syria.'[73] By 1943 Lebanon had been given independence and power was to be shared in the new nation-state.[74] Simultaneously, 'there could be no Lebanese citizen who was not at the same time a member of a particular religious community.'[75] Religious affiliation as such became a dividing factor that disabled Lebanon. These religious affiliations affected internal politics as they reflected external associations, and allegiances to the East or West (Muslim and Christian) took on a peculiar form in the new nation-state. When in 1958 Lebanese Muslims rallied to the pan-Arab calls of Egyptian president Nasser causing an outbreak of civil war, Maronite President Camille Chamoun requested the aid of the then American President, Eisenhower.[76] Between independence and the outbreak of the fifteen-year civil war Makdisi argues that,

> compromises between the elites [that] were meant to divide power amongst different communities [had] in fact divided power among the elites of various communities at the expense of the divided and disenfranchised majority. Whereas the elites compromised in the hope of containing sectarian conflicts, many of the citizens used sectarianism to express their discontent with the product of elitist compromises.[77]

This growing dissatisfaction as well as the increasing problems throughout the Middle East and in particular Palestine, forms the backdrop to the Lebanese 1975 civil war. On April 13th 1975 four Maronite extremists (Phalangists) were assassinated. This incident coincided with the attempt on the then president, Pierre Jumayyil's life: 'perhaps believing the assassins to have been Palestinian, the Phalangists retaliated later that day by attacking a bus carrying Palestinian passengers across a Christian neighborhood, killing

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about twenty six of the occupants.'[78] Serious fighting began the following day between the Phalange militia and Palestinian forces (soon to be joined by Muslim militia). This began a fifteen year war that divided Beirut specifically into East and West (West Beirut housed the Muslim community while East Beirut was composed mainly of Christians).[79] Geographical division made access very difficult and social mobility was stunted. The later involvement of Syrian and Israeli forces as well as American and European troops soon made it impossible to remember what the aims of the war were about. However, given Lebanon's sectarian history, whether religiously or communally based, the war continued to be dominated by the inability of all the minorities (which continued to faction further as the war developed) to agree on what a unified Lebanon should be. Although the war has now officially ended many political critics speculate as to how the new nation will survive since it ritually ignores, in its nation-state discourse, the elements that should make Lebanon unique, its pluralistic characteristics. Perhaps, because of the heavy association of pluralism with war, Lebanon re-writes history by trying to ignore a sectarian past, focusing on nationalist allegiance. Once again, intellectuals fear that by ignoring this history as Lebanon tries to re-build itself, it risks falling into the same destructive chain of events.

The works of fiction that deal with the Lebanese war have been documented as a substantial volume of work that reflects all of the war's diverse political and social pluralistic components. Women's literature in particular, whether written in Arabic, French or English has tried to come to terms with the question of not *who* was responsible (a difficult question in the context of the Lebanese war as emphasised above) but to remove the question of individual responsibility in an obviously guilty society. Thus, interestingly, the women's literature is not concerned with factions and religious groups and the rights and wrongs over the reasons for the war. The early war literature has been thoroughly studied to reveal the positions of women and men vis-à-vis their war experience. This literature often emphasises the 'non-violent struggle aim[ed] at fighting against injustice and oppression.'[80] The novelists and artists discussed by Cooke in *War's Other Voices* and Accad's *Sexuality and War* emerge as creators who 'produce[d] cogent renditions of a war that entered every nook and cranny of life [...] [and] by concentrating on the individual they come closest to elucidating the nature of a war that had no moral

beginnings, no moral limits.'[81] Writing made the act of waiting, understood as not being militantly active in the war, a way of participating in the war. Confusion, self-delusion, the inability to understand as well as the inability to take sides in the war became a main theme for the women writers. Commitment lay in the destruction of the binary structures that conveyed the meaning of war, such as "us and them", "good and evil", "east and west." Literature of the war 'undermined the private/public dichotomy revealing the private to be public and the personal to be universal' which made it valid for women to write of the private and to be accepted for it.[82] By undermining this dichotomy it seems inevitable that the ideological debates upon which war is based are corroded and everyone has a role to play in the horror. Through dealing with the social aspects of war, one cannot help but ultimately personalise the experience. To this role comes the writer 'to give survival meaning.'[83] Although fiction managed to question the war and its effects, ideas related to concepts of honour and shame, indecipherable from woman and morals (as the discussion below hopes to prove) persisted; old and traditional binaries concerned with women managed somehow to survive.

As Miriam Cooke surmises, women began to question male or 'men's roles' and found them at odds with what the war story told; where was this patriarchy, who was the father, the brother, the son? What was this war and what did it signify in terms of who played which roles?[84] What were women's duties in the war and the war literature and what did the war make them question? How did the war heighten or weaken rigid sexual norms based on honour, virginity, and the will to participate actively in war, and how did women re-interpret or revisit these gender expectations in the writing of the experience of war? It appears that the destruction of one's country necessitates a reappraisal of the need for war. Likewise, Al-Shaykh and Ghoussoub, to whom I shall now turn, re-appraise gender roles as they understand them through the prism of war.

4.6 HANAN AL-SHAYKH: RELUCTANT MASOCHIST[85]

In this section I will concentrate on the novels *The Story of Zahra* and *Beirut Blues* by Lebanese author Hanan Al-Shaykh. *The Story of Zahra* has received some critical attention and I will present the underlying themes of this criticism in order to construct a platform for discussion. Critics that have discussed Al-Shaykh's novel *The Story of Zahra*

engage with what aspects of the main protagonist Zahra's personality are emphasised by the war rather than how she manipulates or makes use of the situation of war.

The novel tells the story of Zahra, a woman whom we meet at the age of thirty. Zahra leads a daily existence that moves between real experiences and memories. A series of failed relationships and a miserable family environment that include an inhibiting father and a mother involved in extra-marital affairs (to the meetings of which she used to take Zahra in order to act as cover) constitute her experience of love and relationships. Her affair with a married man in Beirut and her ultimate marriage to a man that she neither loves nor chooses define her inability to fulfil some unknown desire that she seeks. The outbreak of the war sees her back in Beirut (after a sojourn in Africa) where she begins a sexual affair with a sniper. This relationship offers her the possibility of a fulfilling encounter. It is however cut short by an unintended pregnancy. The sniper kills her and Zahra dies questioning his reasons.[86]

In his article 'The Fiction of Hanan Al-Shaykh, Reluctant Feminist' Charles Larson describes Al-Shaykh's heroines as 'bewildered and passive [permitting] themselves to drift along from event to event (and often from man to man) with little sense of fulfilment or awareness that their situations might be altered.'[87] He continues to define Zahra as a 'pawn' and a 'victim' of the society she lives in and defines her relationship vis-à-vis the war as a vulnerable one. Finally, he concludes that there are 'no positive male-female relationships, nor is there a hint that there can be until women are no longer oppressed.'[88] Miriam Cooke argues that although Zahra seems to 'experience sexual pleasure as she moves from the margins of the war to its centre' she still highlights the moment in the text where Zahra intimates for a moment that she may be saving someone's life by distracting the sniper. This gives Zahra an ulterior motive for pursuing sexual pleasure. In fact, Zahra's actual words are a testimony to this weak excuse,

> What was I here for? Before I came, he would have been picking out his victim's heads as targets, and after I left would be doing the same. Why, every day, did I sneak down that street of death and war and arrive at his place? Could I say I had been able to save anyone, even in those moments when we met and had intercourse? But I couldn't even consider these to hold a reprieve from death for anyone. My visits only replaced his siestas.[89]

Cooke seems to want to impose an explanation that is refused by Al-Shaykh's character. Evelyn Accad also cites this passage in order to make the following conclusion; 'It becomes clear that one of Zahra's motivations for going to the sniper that first afternoon had been to divert and prevent him from killing.'[90] Zahra is here constructed predominantly as a woman who has been taken over by madness brought on by the inability to respond to the rage that comes with unsolicited sexual demands. Accad's chapter on Hanan Al-Shaykh is significantly entitled 'Despair, Resignation, Masochism and Madness.' These words are used to designate the different spaces that Zahra inhabits respectively and in turn they all contribute to Zahra's self-destruction. Accad argues that Zahra's actions with the sniper 'create *only* a temporary, artificial nirvana.'[91] She continues to claim that,

> it seems as though in Zahra's mind the only way to have any kind of control over the elements of death ravaging her country is to become part of this violence through sexuality. [...] deeply wounded in her past by her family and a society that does not allow its individuals, let alone its women, to fulfil themselves, Zahra's 'solution' is to sink even more deeply into sickness and destruction, while thinking she has become 'normal and human.' [...] sex becomes a drug [...] [Zahra] is afraid of it, yet it puts her in a trance that blinds her to everything else.[92]

Accad condemns this sexual encounter as one that does not incorporate love and therefore lacks an equal sexual understanding and fulfilment. I would like to challenge these conceptions of Zahra on the grounds that while I do not seek to prove her actions as enabling, I do see her relationship with the sniper as one that lacks the intense confusions and self-destructive tendencies associated with her other liaisons and disastrous previous attempt at marriage. Zahra pursues relationships according to what her experience has taught her and while this tends to result in self-destructive behaviour, the spatial freedom accorded to her at the time that she meets the sniper (she is left alone in the family apartment for a few months) and the ongoing war "outside" allow her to reorganise her experiences of sexual encounters. I will argue that Zahra moves from a disabling masochistic tendency to a masochism that is more narcissistic. Although her death is a monument to the abstract destruction caused by war, her experience with the sniper forces her to recognise that she is capable of desires and pleasures that she generates and has control over. Her changing ideas about sex teach Zahra that *what has been lacking* in her

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previous sexual encounters has been this space to learn about her body and experience its possibilities. Though both Accad and Cooke reiterate Zahra's supposed ulterior motive (distracting the sniper from his victims) I have read Zahra's actions to be more narcissistic. In fact, a closer examination of the above citation reveals that Zahra dismisses the desire to excuse herself in terms of altruism - 'my visits only replaced his siestas.' Nowhere in the novel is there an example of selfless behaviour, in fact, Zahra is unable to care for anyone but herself, and even this is doubtful at times.[93] That her move towards the sniper should be an act of goodwill towards the suffering multitude seems unlikely. Submission to this argument seeks to place Zahra's sexuality at the service of the war rather than allowing for the situation of war as that which allows her sexuality to be expressed. I will also argue that the war enables Zahra physically to move about freely, enabling her to give herself to a man of her choice, uninhibited by the social norms that prescribed her anterior performances. Zahra becomes aware of her body as a desiring surface and this deserves critical attention. Zahra's will and agency as portrayed by Al-Shaykh make it impossible to view this protagonist as a 'pawn', instead, a meaningful and worthwhile existence and reason for survival becomes a key issue.

In a recent essay, 'Psychic Inceptions: Melancholy, Ambivalence, Rage' Judith Butler engages with the idea that the ego (as understood by the subject) comes into being through melancholia. She uses Freud's understanding of melancholia, as the object that '"turn[s] back upon itself" once love fails to find its object and instead takes itself as not only an object of love, but of aggression and hate as well.'[94] Butler understands the ego as a non-entity until it is forced to meet itself at the moment of melancholia when the self takes this inward turn. Thus, melancholia results in the formation of the ego, or to put it simply, it is with the onset of melancholia that we understand and take issue with an inner self. Thus 'melancholy is precisely what interiorises the psyche, that is, makes it possible to refer to the psyche through such topographical tropes.'[95] I want to argue that Zahra, by turning in upon herself ceases to communicate with the outside world of subjects/objects initially. Her melancholy becomes absolute *until* she finds herself in a position to take action, *through* the inevitable determinants of the war. I will also propose an enabling masochism that Zahra communicates in her relationship with the sniper, as opposed to her destructive masochism elsewhere.

Zahra is initially described as a woman who has little interest in the world around her, who occupies herself by picking at the sores on her face, uninterested in her appearance. The earliest memories of her father are of him beating her because she will not confess to the mother's illicit liaisons. As she witnesses her mother being beaten she dreams of ways of stopping her father yet has little strength to do anything. Her mother escapes to the bathroom, which in turn becomes a hiding place for Zahra in future confrontations. The second chapter opens and Zahra has gone to Africa to meet her uncle who is in political exile. This chapter and the next overlap as similar scenes are re-told from Zahra points of view and then from her uncle Hashem. As Hashem idealises Zahra and considers building a future with her, Zahra reveals to us her true reasons for leaving Beirut. Disgusted by her uncle's advances yet unable to tell him, she begins to subside into erratic mood swings and unpredictable behaviour. Finally, she finds herself unwilling even to get out of bed: 'how many days went by? How many nights? I cannot say. Time had cheated me [...].'[96] In this catatonic state Zahra remembers leaving Beirut after being forced to have a second abortion. The man she was having an affair with seems to have only been interested in a sexual relationship with a complacent Zahra who however acknowledges her disgust with this affair. She meets with him regularly in a garage and has the abortions when necessary but the secrecy, which leads her to take these actions, is as disgusting to her as the actions themselves. In Africa, Zahra persuades herself to marry the first Lebanese man who proposes to her. On her wedding night she is frozen with disgust at her mistake and finds herself forced to admit to her prior sexual relationship when questioned about her virginity. Zahra cannot escape traditional notions of honour and shame and they follow her wherever she goes. Once back in Beirut, she refuses to tell anyone what has happened and lapses into an introverted silence; a state of melancholy.

> I would stay quietly in bed, refusing to leave my room. My mother would open the door
> stealthily and repeat her pleas over and over, each time in a different wheedling tone until
> I became so irritated that I swore at her and at those that tried to visit me. I would shout to
> her face, 'So-and-so has come only to see my madness. They're here to laugh at the state
> I'm in [...] If it so happened that I was in the living room when a visitor arrived, and they
> heard me answer some incidental question, they would look up incredulously, scarcely
> believing that I sounded normal and could speak normal words.[97]

Zahra seems to gain some type of pleasure in shocking others who think she is sick and this space that she creates for herself gives her the freedom to move about unquestioned.[98] Also, making people believe that she is sick frees her from having to conform to expected norms. Aware of the existence of a sniper whom everyone fears she sets out to meet him, thus taking unnecessary risks to her life. Even before meeting him she feels as though she has started to live again and the anticipation of the meeting fills her with an energy she cannot ignore: 'as I mounted the stairs, life slowly flowed back into me [...] was it a normal thing that I was doing, closing all doors of escape behind me?'[99] The sniper is only interested in knowing if anyone has seen her come to meet him, as soon as he is secure that she has come alone her pushes her against the stairs and has sex with her. Although this is not a particularly violent scene there is no initial pleasure for Zahra who feels uncomfortable. However, once she reaches home she describes her feelings,

> As I arrived at the entrance to our block, I breathed a sigh of relief, ran up the stairs and opened the door, as relaxed as if I had just heard the war had ended. The apartment was empty. A thread of happiness ran through me. I took off my clothes in the bathroom, then washed and dried myself, thinking of my father and mother and how their absence had made things easier.[100]

Likening her experience to a 'war that has just ended' suggests that some other conflict has just ended for Zahra, a conflict that is as destructive as any war. Her behaviour seems to invoke a negotiation between two types of masochisms; one that enforces her melancholic behaviour and one that enables her to receive and experience pleasure (her death, I can only conclude, acts as a symbol of the impossibility of this pleasure to continue, a kind of 'axing' of desire and its fulfilment). Since the language and presumptions of masochism are imbedded in the discourse of the death drive, I will refer to this here briefly yet will come back to it in more detail in the analysis of the next two novels.

Masochism, as discussed by Freud, seems to be imbedded in a death instinct/drive that is directed towards the self, a pain that is felt to be necessary in order to achieve any type of pleasure (described by Krafft-Ebing in Pontalis and Laplanche's *The Language of Psychoanalysis* as a 'pathological outgrowth of feminine psychological elements' thus, a trait or condition that feminises he/she who develops it).[101] However, Bruce Fink, in his

work *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis* elaborates on this explanation. Fink argues that though,

> it may appear that the masochist devotes himself to giving his partner's jouissance [...] while asking for nothing in return - in other words, that he sacrifices himself by becoming the instrument of the Other's jouissance, obtaining no enjoyment for himself - Lacan suggests that this is but a cover: the masochist's fantasy dissimulates the true aim of his actions.[102]

Zahra, in her relationship with the sniper, seems to develop an excitement of a type that is not initially linked to her ability to orgasm (though this soon becomes a very important achievement) but to the freedom that allows her to visit a man of her choice. Her visits to the sniper symbolise her ability to be free from regulatory norms that restrict her movements otherwise. Fink goes on to explain that in order for the masochistic encounter to come into being the masochist needs to push the partner into 'declaring limits, into expressing his will that things be one way and not another, that things go no further.'[103] 'I felt no pleasure' Zahra says and yet she continues to visit the sniper for no other apparent reason than the fulfilment of *his* pleasure. However, she declares herself happy (thereby consenting to a pleasure of sorts). Zahra seems drawn to the limits of the sniper; he cannot talk to her or tell her his real name yet in turn she need not reveal herself to him. His apparent advantage over her (sexual pleasure) is weakened in the light of the satisfaction she gains from their involvement. Her masochism, as described by Accad is engineered in order that she may create the space for her sexual encounters. Zahra's experience informs her that 'giving herself' is the way to understand sexual love and this is the way that she views her connection to the sniper. However, since she gives herself over to a man of her own choice whilst risking her life at the same time, this dangerous act is unique in that she is its initiator. As she achieves orgasm for the first time with the sniper she thinks these thoughts:

> the war, which makes one expect the worst at any moment, has led me into accepting this new element in my life. Let it happen, let us witness it, let us open ourselves to accept the unknown, no matter what it may bring, disasters or surprises. The war has been essential. It has swept away the hollowness concealed by routines. It has made me ever more alive, ever more tranquil.[104]

Zahra does not appear to be a self-sacrificing masochist. Rather, I think the necessity of an exchange (she pretends initially to be experiencing pleasure in order for the sniper to continue to want to see her) underscores an agency even in this troubled scene. The masochist 'never become[s] someone with symbolic status who can see himself as valued for social, cultural, or other symbolically designated achievements' yet in the moments of exchange there is a desire and a jouissance achieved that gives the masochist a role.[105] Zahra is able to achieve something outside of the social and cultural by investing a libidinal energy into what seems to be the masochistic tendency towards death. She is thus able to understand and experience herself as a woman who can desire and receive pleasure, a feature unknown to her and impossible outside of the war situation. In *Bodies that Matter,* Butler quotes Spivak's dilemma and difficulty in speaking of the body as material, as physical state. Spivak says,

> The body, as such, cannot be thought, and I certainly cannot approach it.[106]

And yet, surely, there is room to experience the materiality of the body through sensation (the above distinction seems to be repeating a masculine metaphysical distinction: mind separate from matter), surely there is some space for awareness and consciousness? Indeed, Butler's first question in *Bodies that Matter* is 'is there a way to link the question of the materiality of the body to the performativity of gender?'[107] Zahra seems to follow the expected norms (vaguely shifting from man to man, unable to create a role for herself that is not a 'giving' one) and yet through the pleasurable sexual encounter and the choice that leads her to it, she re-figures herself as a living person who has broken out of the routine that she herself recognises. A recognition of performative acts and the sense of tearing away from these in the sexual experience allow Zahra a reformation of the codes that propel her actions. One more significant point of engagement with Butler is the argument that,

> 'sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialised through time. It is not a simple
> fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialise
> 'sex' and achieve this materialisation through a forcible reiteration of these norms.[108]

Since it is not a static condition of the body then each reconfiguration of sex (outside of the regulatory norms) as an experience informs the subject and allows him/her to glimpse

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what came before. In other words, Zahra's pleasurable encounters allow her to finally realise the "routine" that she has lived so far. Though I am not sure that we can discuss sex uninformed by 'regulatory norms', I do think that the moment of experience exceeds what Butler would term a performative/enabling moment. The moment of sexual pleasure for Zahra reconfigures her *entire* sexual/gendered life. Her decision to involve herself in a dangerous and life-threatening affair without the guarantee of pleasure or desire is magnanimous in its possibilities. When she does achieve both desire and pleasure these moments pedagogically inform her life thereby exceeding the results of a performative moment. Zahra seems to move into a state of narcissistic masochism. Knowledge of the danger she is involved in only heightens the pleasure that she seeks and this makes her actively happier. Fear of male violence is transformed into a will to take risks. This idea of a narcissistic masochism will be elaborated on in a discussion of Al-Shaykh's novel *Beirut Blues.*

4.7 SURVIVAL: *BEIRUT BLUES* AND *LEAVING BEIRUT: WOMEN AND THE WARS WITHIN*

War questions everyday imperatives such as justice, love, life and death, in a new and unexpected way. In Hanan Al-Shaykh's novel *Beirut Blues,* the protagonist Asmahan remains 'absorbed with the trivia of love and sex' while bombs pour over Beirut and her home.[109] What becomes increasingly obvious in this war fiction is that one cannot always care about the war, and by extension, one gets used to the strangeness. The war offers another reality and thereby questions the norms. Asmahan preoccupies herself with things that remind her of a different norm and takes pleasure in them, yet it is only a strange type of pleasure since she knows that these norms have been devalued by the war and can only survive if one chooses to make them survive; for example thinking of where to get a certain conditioning oil for her hair rather than seeking shelter from the bombs. *Beirut Blues* is a story set a little later than *The Story of Zahra* in the Lebanese war and is made up of Asmahan's letters that she never sends; each of these make a chapter. She addresses a letter to the war, another one to her exiled friend, one to a beloved, one to Beirut, and even one to Billie Holiday whose melancholy singing voice expresses her emotions (hence the title *Blues*). These unsent letters chronicle a life that she cannot fully share with anyone else as the experience of war becomes personal. Asmahan remains satisfied with

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the fact that she remains loyal to trivia that mean little to everyone around her and these find a home in the letters. In an interesting way, this diminishes the power of the war as an event that usurps the quality of life. She says significantly, 'although I've stayed in Lebanon I've still got some taste. I know what's going on in the outside world. I'm not standing still, and they haven't got me wearing a veil yet.'[110] This personal understanding of the war only serves to remind us that it remains difficult to explain and transcribe the experience of war, even if one uses the tropes linked with the usual war talk. Hanan Al-Shaykh's work displays the fact that sexual awareness and being attractive can be more significant to the private sufferer than trying to make someone else understand the war. The individual experiencing the war cannot always be involved in the loftier discourses of justice, freedom and political mobilisation. In fact, preoccupations with features that one would not expect to be part of the preoccupation with the war are sustained because they remain distinctly important for the non-combatant woman. As we shall see further on, sometimes these pre-occupations become usurped by the desire to involve oneself militantly, thereby giving the war experience yet another dimension.

Asmahan tries to deal with an absurd situation that has divided Beirut into East and West. This makes it difficult for her to conceive of herself as belonging to one or the other on the basis of an enforced religious Muslim/Christian divide. The war does however allow her more sexual freedom as people are "not looking" so to speak. The division also allows her to have her sexual affairs and remain relatively unnoticed. Asmahan voices these concerns as she considers an affair with a young man she has met at a wedding party,

> I can't open my heart to you. Just for one night? It's not because you're a Christian but because tomorrow we'll be separated, and you won't be in a hurry to visit the western sector. Perhaps you've convinced yourself that I'm from here, because you've been drinking and I'm a friend of Hayat's and probably, like me and Hayat, you don't think of yourself as being from the east or the west [...] [Others have] taken sides. The time may come when I do the same! Who knows? Perhaps then I'll be happy. Belonging to the same faction, however extreme or outlandish, might be preferable to this [...] where I come from they hate everyone from your sector, even the men at the checkpoint. But I always want to have a chat with them, make them laugh and flirt with me. I seem to need reassurance and affection from your people. I want things to be like they were years ago.[111]

Asmahan requires attention from men in order that she can make the war less painful and somewhat more "normal." Religious and political affiliations become yet another norm that now further complicates this. People become afraid to cross barriers, political and religious ones, though sexual barriers seem easier. Threats to one's life are immediate and overrule most people's other concerns such as love and passion. However, I hope to show that as the war (and the story) progress, love and passion become a reason for Asmahan to risk her life (love and passion displace concerns over the war and become entwined with the threats of war).

Mai Ghoussoub's *Leaving Beirut: Women and the Wars Within* is a fragmented work that consists of memories, historical information, television broadcasts and news headlines.[112] It allows Ghoussoub to move from one event to the next and to create a story of the Lebanese war infused with personal observations and data that may be known to the reader. This allows an unparalleled involvement in the events that occur because we are not allowed to concentrate on one voice for too long but are constantly shifting focus. Ghoussoub's work also displays similar themes to *Beirut Blues*; namely that war acts as a catalyst for the emergence of other themes. Both Ghoussoub and Al-Shaykh's female protagonists have sexual relations, as they describe them, to escape (understand, experience) the numbing process that is war. Risk (as with Zahra) adds a certain thrill that enhances (or replaces) the fear that they already feel for their lives. Asmahan describes her risky meeting with her lover Simon,

> I was queen of the road and I nudged and pushed and kept my hand on the horn until I reached Simon's building. The trembling in me surged ahead of me as I ran to find him. I was happy. My meetings with Simon gave me a feeling of warmth and excitement, snatching me right out of the city as it surged back and forth between uproar and fragrant calm. For Simon was the noise at the heart of events and at the same time he was like me, outside them. Our eyes shone and our breathing grew faster whenever we were close to one another. I waited until we lay down naked on the sofa. Then the drugged sensation and the love took over and the feeling that I wanted to have my pleasure whatever happened. It was only when we got up and dressed that I knew I didn't love him.[113]

Love is irrelevant, as it is the excitement and thrill of reaching the object of desire that supplants the constant preoccupation with the war. Feeling like a 'queen', these meetings

with her lover 'snatc[h] [her] right out of the city' of war and ensure a complete involvement in something else. Likewise, in *Leaving Beirut* the unnamed protagonist remembers a dangerous affair that she had when doing volunteer work at the Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut. The man with whom she is having an affair is of some rank in the military and she tells us that,

> this was the beginning of a passion that was immersed in war and danger, fired by its secrecy and its proximity to death and destruction. [She] had plunged into an adventure of perilous abnormality, knowing its dangers but doing nothing to resist them.[114]

By uniting with a representative of the war, the narrator fools herself into thinking she has joined the revolution where in fact she claims to be using him to 'harvest energy from the fear of death that was spreading around.'[115]

> I suppressed the fear in my body beneath the warmth of his embrace. There was the night when I could not let go of his body and kept drawing him back into me with the rhythm of the shelling that was pounding relentlessly, violently shaking the building where we met in secret. I gladly repressed questions about the meaning of what was happening, about its contradiction with the ideals we had all started from. I kept moving and doing things instead of stopping and questioning. I lost any sense of normality and called on his body to take me deeper into the dizziness of the unknown […].[116]

Again, fear is replaced by the risky affair that the protagonist pursues. Although the physical existence of the war is acknowledged, its effect is debilitated by the sexual encounters. It is apparent that the sexual encounter does not offer a full and total means of suppressing the war but it does offer a welcome distraction from its inevitability. However, this affair ends quickly and suddenly. When the protagonist's brother is wounded as a result of his involvement in the war, this war's reality becomes too strong a figure to contest. When her lover comes to the hospital the narrator is shattered,

> you should not have come into those corridors, into the reality of my family. You should not have become real. We could only belong in abnormality; we were only real inside an actuality that was aberrant; we made love frantically and grew more passionate only because of it.[117]

The configuration of what is real and what is not can only be understood in terms of how the individual's experience is perceived. As Asmahan is frantically trying to reach her

lover she is caught in a shelling episode; as the narrator in *Leaving Beirut* experiences a consequence of war, her brother's injury, she ceases to realise that her experience is also a consequence of war. Both women do not experience a love that is emotional as well as sexual. The war and the sexual experience are both too immediate and pervasive as well as physically invasive to be understood critically while one is actively involved. It is only after getting dressed that Asmahan realises that she does not love Simon. It is only after her brother is wounded that Ghoussoub's protagonist is struck with the futility of her sexual relationship. Both realise that the event is meaningless, yet it gives them both an understanding of the norms and matrix of war. The protagonists escape "regulatory norms" as they risk their lives to reach sensual pleasure (though they may later understand this pleasure differently).

This energy that enables one to risk one's life for sexual pleasure and fulfilment yet simultaneously reject it, begs the question of how this can be associated with the experience of war. I will elaborate on the ideas prowling behind this energy, or as we shall call it, drive, to try and understand this paradox. Laplanche has been very useful to me here in clarifying some of the problems that Freud had in explaining the energy behind the death drive. Laplanche himself goes on to elaborate a theory that would seem to bring the death drive in line with the sex drive (as opposed to Eros/the love drive) thus giving the death drive a libido that it lacks in Freudian psychoanalysis. I hope to show that the situation of war constitutes, for Asmahan and the protagonist of the particular section entitled 'A Kind of Madness' in *Leaving Beirut*, a possibility of a female life drive understood as a sexuality fuelled by the imminence of death. This can help explain why the heroines experience no love and yet continue to seek sexual fulfilment in situations of great danger.

In *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* Jean Laplanche elaborates on the possibility of uniting the sex drive with the death drive thus providing the death drive with an energy or compulsion that it does not have in Freudian psychoanalysis (symbolised as it is by inertia).[118] Laplanche situates sexuality as different to Eros yet as part of the same economy as the death drive.

Primary process   Secondary process

Free energy   Bound energy

Unbinding   Binding

Sexuality   Ego
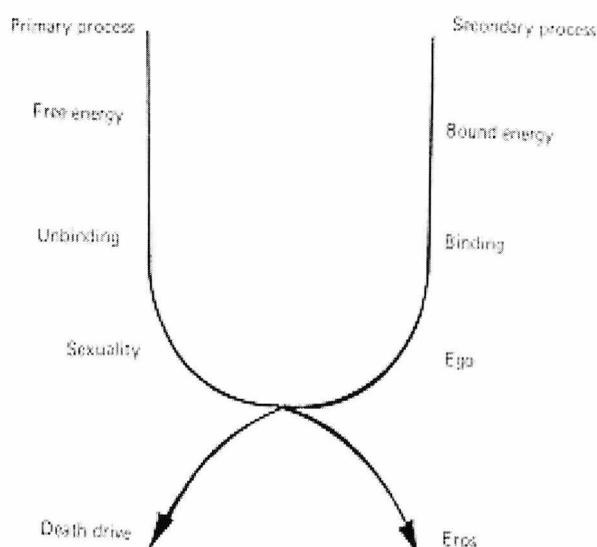
Death drive   Eros

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Since Freud did not admit to the death drive as having any energy or pressure of its own (though Laplanche does point out that Freud admits in *Civilisation and its Discontents* that the death instinct 'eludes our perception [...] unless it is tinged with erotism') Laplanche concludes that it must derive this energy from somewhere.[120] He argues that the death drive must therefore get its energy from the 'energy of the sexual drive', the 'libido.'[121] Eros, something totally different to sexuality,

> seeks to maintain pressure, and even augment the cohesion and the synthetic tendency of living beings and of psychical life. Whereas, ever since the beginnings of psychoanalysis, sexuality was in its essence hostile to binding - a principle of 'un-binding' or unfettering (Entbindung) which could be bound only through the intervention of the ego - what appears with Eros is the *bound and binding form* of sexuality brought to light by the discovery of narcissism.

Laplanche seems to posit Eros as something completely at odds with the idea of sexuality. Eros here seems to be some type of love that is not immediately connected to an image of the body, an ideal that is constrained by ideas of 'binding.' In this way, Laplanche is free to conceive of sexuality as that which has no responsibility because it embodies a 'free energy.' This way, it becomes a pleasure seeking drive that, in its reluctance to take responsibility, in its unbindedness, becomes associated with death. The war gives the women the space within which to experience this unbinding, responsibility-free pleasure though it may be tied up with the experience of death. The unpredictability of war gives

sexual pleasure little meaning and function *outside* of its role as a source of pleasure and a temporary yet instructive distraction from the war. Thus, in serving no social function, in failing to bind persons to each other, sex becomes linked with a narcissistic death drive kept alive through libidinal energy. However, this involvement with the death drive invokes a risk of total destruction. It is here that Laplanche's diagram, whilst illuminating, poses significant issues. Sexuality for Laplanche is bound through narcissism (understood as the ideal ego). The narcissism that I refer to in this specific situation is other than this since I align it with free sexuality. Ultimately it is important to wonder whether there is a fundamental difference between masculine narcissism and feminine narcissism. That is, it may be that woman comes to value herself though the experience of an unbound sexuality (whereas in the case of a man, this may pose a threat to his narcissism). Interestingly, Laplanche's diagram is ungendered and it is difficult to try and impose a gender onto it as I have intimated above. It seems that if the female characters where to be read according to this model, then they would appear to emerge as self-destructive, whereas if we allow for them to escape the model and the trap of the so-called death drive, then we allow their sexuality to be unbound. For these women, these sexual experiences are crucial as through them they understand the futility of war and their capacity to pursue and obtain fulfilment at the same time as a result of war. The notion of "unbinding" remains an enabling one in terms of the unbinding of social and gender norms in wartime.

When Asmahan gives in to a short night of passion, her friend, Hayat, who has left Beirut yet who is back on a visit claims that what Asmahan has done is not 'normal' and suggests that she sees a therapist. Asmahan does not argue but reminds herself that those who are not around cannot understand and criticise unknowingly. When Hayat leaves, Asmahan is relieved; she can go back to her 'daily routine.'[122] Pursuing a sensual impulse provides a relief to the threatening situations and simultaneously allows her to experience the threat that is war. Whereas her upbringing would have disallowed such a sensualist release, here, the excitement of sex replaces or conflates with the terror of war. She vacillates between regulation and non-regulation. What we have here is a feminine appropriation of the death drive that would seem to give it a new meaning outside of war by investing it with libidinal energy. This complicates the issue further as we now need to address whether this remains a death drive as such. What is significant is that this

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touching upon the death drive possibly rekindles the will to live. I will address this further in my conclusion.

Ultimately, what acts as a constant opposition to this sensualist release is the constant reminder by others of the pain and suffering that they should be experiencing as part of the war. This contrasts well with what the women experience in their lives and how they understand and manipulate the war situation. Both Al-Shaykh and Ghoussoub refer to this "concerned outsider" or "Westerner" to somehow re-validate their personal experience vis-à-vis the experience that they are supposed to be having.

4.8 CONCERNED OUTSIDERS

The "concerned outsider" or "Westerner" appears as a contrast to how the protagonists view and understand their role as women at war. Ghoussoub's narrator tackles the figure of a Danish woman who has married a friend of hers and lives with him in Copenhagen. Al-Shaykh's outsider is divided into three different personalities. One is the Lebanese ex-pat who has come back to collect material for his books. Another is a woman who provides unwanted sympathy when Asmahan is abroad. The third is Asmahan's friend Hayat who has gone to live in Belgium with her children. All these four figures remain unaware of their frustrating actions and phrases, their unwanted words that both categorise and humiliate. All four believe in the structures of justice that have now collapsed for the protagonists. A gap is created between *them* and *us*, fuelled by ideological discourses of what is right and wrong, and who and what serves justice. Asmahan describes a scene when she is abroad visiting friends that illustrates this problem:

> Minutes later a woman called Vera came in and asked which of us had just arrived from Beirut.
> I collapsed on to my seat. Beirut came back to haunt me, paralysing my hands as I tried to eat, making me forget how relaxed I'd been here, in a country which still existed, and was free from the chaos of warfare. I was used to the idea that there were places where people led normal lives and, although the reality made me uncertain and jealous, it had helped me forget what I'd seen and heard in the times of violence and siege [...] I retreated into silence, waiting for their questions. They weren't questions, but statements. The emotion

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in them was genuine but they were in a hurry to let the trivia take over the evening again.[123]

Likewise, Ghoussoub's narrator of *Leaving Beirut,* paints the portrait of an over-concerned European in the chapter entitled 'Kirsten's Power.' The narrator finds herself on a trip to Copenhagen for the purpose of the funeral of an Iranian friend of hers (now killed) married to the Danish woman, Kirsten. Hashem, once a refugee in Beirut, had since been a refuge in Denmark: 'He ended up in Denmark and there he settled and quickly fell in love with the very good Kirsten.'[124] However, Kirsten is too 'good', and had even 'proclaimed her willingness to wear the veil if they ever went back to live in his country.'[125] This relationship plays on various tropes that the narrator reflects on as she reads Hashem's old letters that tell her of the angel that he has found:

> he was teasing me about his luck in having found her. Hashem had never really accepted what he described as my 'inauthentic' feminism. He used to say that I'd been influenced by the Western values that had invaded my city and my group of friends. The more I read his catalogue of praise for Kirsten, the more I realised how much Hashem was missing his country, and also how much Kirsten idealised the 'Third World'. She obviously loved the Third World and it seemed that Hashem was her way of gaining herself access to it […].

> *the truth was that I was fed up with the sweet smiles that appeared on the faces of good hearted Western liberals and leftists when they found out where you'd come from, and 'what you must have gone through.' I found myself always wanting to tell them about the fun we had too, and the nastiness we can be capable of, just like anybody else on this planet.*[126]

What angers the narrator in *Leaving Beirut* and Asmahan in *Beirut Blues* is that all the people involved in the war are perceived as one-dimensional and idealised, victims and sufferers of the war. I cannot be sure of this ambivalence in other war-ridden societies, but what seems to emerge from this particular conflict is this need to dis-identify and to no longer be either idealised or pitied. In a sense the protagonists are anti-politically correct though I would argue that they are voicing their opinion on imprisoning discourses of pity. Ghoussoub's narrator continues her interior monologue and re-iterates a gnawing thought:

> Worst of all I knew that for her [Kirsten] I had to be good, since I was from the Third World. Therefore she would not only tolerate me, but would actively like me. With her I

felt like a specimen. And feeling like a specimen does not serve your ego right, believe me.[127]

In fact, a presumed common war experience serves actively to diminish the individual experience of the trauma of war and the coping facilities and norms. What these two novels show is *how* war creates *another* reality, albeit a hyper reality, that does not urge idealisation or pity and that in fact enables its survivors to experience and forge another reality.

Similarly, Al-Shaykh questions her friend Hayat's decision to leave at the beginning of the war rather than waiting to see how it would evolve. The unsent letter that she writes to Hayat expresses her disapproval at her friend's decision,

> so as soon as war broke out you packed your bags without stopping for a moment to ask what was going on or who had unleashed this violence [...] as time went by the tone of your voice changed. You'd been in exile longer and you must have found out that you were only on the fringes of life in this western country; its politics didn't concern you and its social problems had little effect on you.[128]

Asmahan emphasises the fate and burden of exiled immigrants to be forever preoccupied with their homeland. This idealised past does not coincide with the reality that those who do not go into exile have to live with. A heightened sensual and emotional tie with the lost past stalls or sometimes prohibits the exiled person from immersion in the new culture that would result in a successful hybridisation. Consequently, though Hayat continues to care for the political and social concerns of Lebanon from an outsider's perspective, it is difficult for Asmahan to retain the correct level (whatever this may be) of enthusiasm or concern over these issues as well as norms associated with a pre-war Beirut.

Likewise, Asmahan's friend Jawad also lives in France and writes books about Lebanon. He visits Asmahan's village and bemoans the destruction of the land that has given over to the growing of hashish and poppies, no longer the agricultural haven it once was; 'Look what they're doing to these plains. See how everything's calm and still on the surface, but underneath it's seething with intrigues, drugs and party politics.'[129] Asmahan's reaction is violent and unleashes the complex reactions to these romantic

notions of the village that are expected to house the components of a lost and idealised place,

> You carry on and I listen, but remain unmoved by your lecture about drugs and corruption. You've arrived late with your theories. There's nothing wrong with a little enthusiasm here and there, because you will soon forget and leave our reality behind for the European way of life. Your diary is crowded with appointments: publishers, magazines, dinner invitations, parties, broadcasts; all of them written in your neat, clear hand. You prescribe laws as if you were in a normal country with citizens who still glory in that title and all it stands for. It's easy for you to propound these views, when you haven't hidden in a shelter, had friends and neighbours killed in bread queues, returned home to your apartment block and found it has vanished, and realised after a moment that the rubble under your feet is all that remains of it.[130]

Jawad's expectations and preoccupations are too far removed from the reality of the Lebanese people surviving the war. His view of Lebanon cannot but be a romantic and ideal one. By reminding us that all these issues are at stake, Al-Shaykh reinforces the chaos that is war and that the norms that regulate behaviour are no longer norms that exist for those surviving the war. Angry with Jawad for his incessant photographing, Asmahan retaliates and tells him that he is belittling the feelings of the people with his inquisitive, artistic curiosity.[131]

War then only opens up the wound that we suspect but cannot accept is always already present; that social and political structures are not bound to any logic. Rather, war begs the question, what structures are secure? What remains that can constitute an/other reality beyond the one defined as normal and understood as such by Al-Shaykh and Ghoussoub's "westerner" and "outsider?" Ultimately, a reality that seems different and abnormal thrives because it is suffered and experienced. It seems, from my readings of the above works, that the suffering individual re-negotiates and re-understands this relationship with what is meant to be real and normal. The human body can become the centre of war experience and its figuring and reconfiguring makes us aware of the versatile understanding of the body at war and its subsequent signification.

4.9 BRIDE MARTYRS AND SERVANT HEROINES

In contrast to the intruding "westerners" or "outsiders" yet in line with the previous discussion of female empowerment, Mai Ghoussoub in *Leaving Beirut: Women and the Wars Within* describes two interesting protagonists of war; one, a social phenomenon who uses the war to explode her gendered status and becomes a war hero, and another who uses the norms of her femininity to excess in her self-sacrifice as a martyr of the war. These two figures again question ways of being a woman and what options they exploit as well as what options exploit them. The narrator, herself seemingly surprised that women should choose these two supposedly male understandings of action, describes how the two women seem to find a unique way of interpreting the war that is intrinsically linked with death and with re-defining one's femininity through active participation in death; looking at death through oneself rather than seeing it only as the reality of the other.

Ghoussoub introduces a figure that comes to signify another possibility of war; the role of the female martyr in the chapter entitled 'Noha's Quest and the Passion of Flora.' A martyr is a 'person who suffers greatly or dies for a cause or belief'(Collins English Dictionary), but this particular description of a female martyr is peculiar because her reasons for sacrifice are bound within the terms in which she chooses to sacrifice herself. Through this it becomes apparent that there is little personal liberation in her act as it is intrinsically linked to her understanding of herself as a woman that is in turn bound up by certain regulatory norms. Unlike the war heroine who seeks to reconfigure the perception of herself as non-woman (to be discussed subsequently), Noha the martyr dies for nothing except a re-affirmation of her gendered status and her equally desirable submissive nature. Although Mona Fayad in her essay 'Reinscribing Identity: Nation and Community in Arab Women's Writing' writes of a symbolic sacrificial role that women are endowed with in fiction, her comment can also apply to the negative and disempowering way that Noha sacrifices herself, as I shall discuss below. Fayad notes that,

> Several Arab women writers have explicitly denounced the 'martyrdom' role into which
> Woman has been cast [they reject] the representation of woman along allegorical lines that
> reduce her to a signifier of nationalism.[132]

Although Ghoussoub describes a literal act of martyrdom, she does question the 'role' or presentation that shrouds the female martyr and deflates her possible (though unknown) political involvement and commitment. Ghoussoub tells the story of a young woman martyr of the Lebanese war whose death speech was publicly televised. Noha, the prospective martyr, speaks these words before blowing herself up,

> Don't think of me as dead, but as an undying symbol of sacrifice and combat against evil.
> You dreamt of seeing me in a white dress. Look at me. I am wearing the white dress. My
> virginal blood I offer to my cause, our cause: the best and most honourable suitor. My
> blood is not mine alone, it belongs to my people […] My people, my people, don't feel
> sad. Dance, sing and rejoice in my funeral. Prepare yourself for the feast. This is my
> wedding day. I have written the word Martyr with my blood on the sheets of my wedding
> night. [133]

Noha seems to be redefining the role of martyr by making it excessively feminine as she links it to the ideal of matrimony. Although this would *seemingly* make a perfect example of a parodic statement or performance; one that diminishes the importance and necessity of a traditional marriage as a social convention, its connection to an ultimate death changes this possibility. Noha does not go out and fight wearing a wedding dress; she instead prepares to die wearing one. The memory will be of Noha giving herself up to God and the cause *as a woman* and not as a free person with political and moral choices. This diminishes and demeans her bodily sacrifice. After making her statement Noha dies. This act signifies a defeat that stands in opposition to the protagonists' actions in the three novels. Noha's description of her own death has a macabre erotic undertone to it ('I have written the word Martyr with blood on the sheets of my wedding night') that does not allow the incident to emerge in any way as an empowering one. Instead of sacrificing her virginity to her husband, she "sacrifices" it to the cause. This reflects the possibility that the character's idea of sexuality is already tied up to the idea of sacrifice and concepts of honour (a type of internal war). Political engagement is an impossibility and a sexual experience is annulled in one seemingly heroic and mobilising action. The Sheikh's words of approval provide a juridicaly sanctioned approval as quoted below,

> The martyr reaches a happiness that the ordinary believer does not know. The believer
> does not want to kill, for he is on this earth to glorify God. But if he has to die defending
> his religion then he is a martyr, and he will know the pleasures of Paradise. No pleasure is

higher than that of worshipping God. And if this worship means that the believer should die or kill the enemies of God, so be it, for if death is inevitable, let it be honourable. The martyr's blood is of beautiful red and its smell is that of musk [...] The world exhibits plenty of attractions, it has many wonders that can attract the eye and steal the heart. Money and gold and pretty women, they all play with man's soul and reason. But when the knowledge of God is well rooted in a man's heart, all these attractions turn into ghosts.[134]

It is worth engaging for a moment with Spivak's essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' and asking what is gained through the act of self-destruction: sati, or widow sacrifice, will here momentarily act as a parallel to the idea of martyrdom. Spivak argues that within the *Dharmasastra*

the profound irony in locating the woman's free will in self-immolation is once again revealed in a verse [...] As long as the woman [as wife: *stri*] does not burn herself in fire on the death of her husband, she is never released [*mucyate*] from her female body [*strisarir* - i.e., in the cycle of births] [...] Even as it operates the most subtle general release from individual agency, the sanctioned suicide peculiar to woman draws its ideological strength by *identifying* individual agency with the supraindividual: kill yourself on your husband's pyre now, and you may kill your female body in the entire cycle of birth.

In a further twist of the paradox, this emphasis on free will establishes the peculiar misfortune of holding a female body.[135]

Death is presented as a proud act that can lure woman into self-immolation with the empty promise of an existence without the burden of the female body. Whether by misfortune or not, the scene of martyrdom that Ghoussoub describes invokes these same ideas, replacing the *Dharmasastra* with the Muslim Sheikh who gives his approval to the martyrdom of a young girl, invoking and manipulating the language of the wedding ceremony to paint a more pleasant and accepting picture of this act of destruction. The arguments for sati within the *Dharmasastra*; that it can disengage one's constraints to one's body are comparable to this specific example of martyrdom as Ghoussoub engages with the same issues concerning the 'misfortunes of holding a female body.' Ironically, the woman in the tradition of sati is given the opportunity to rid herself of the misfortune of being a woman (the idea here seems to be that since you are only a woman, you should be glad of the

opportunity for a metaphysical promotion!). In the act of martyrdom, the woman is supposedly also given the opportunity of ridding herself of a body that is in turn sacrificed to a cause. Both these acts, in return, generate the idea and desire for a sexless existence of women that can only develop a meaningful existence outside of their body, but ironically, they have to be dead to enjoy this existence. The experience does not enrich their personal understanding of themselves as women in any way. Instead, this sequence of events ensures the perpetuation of a heavily discriminatory and gendered society where the methods and the choices available that make self-sacrifice possible are enshrined in gendered terms that re-enforce the lack of choice behind these acts that *seemingly* seem to be self-chosen. For example, woman is encouraged to immolate herself because this can lead to a material-free existence. This argument again re-enforces woman's body as *burden*. Noha can only die as a bride for her country. This again re-enforces her womanhood, always already entwined in a language of marriage, the marital bed and blood, and the possibilities of being politically active are lost. Even in the act of self-sacrifice it would appear very difficult to escape gendered norms and expectations. Although Noha's personal ideals may be honest and understood by her as actively engaging in war, the method that she chooses to manifest her loyalty only undermines its effect and once again re-iterates the norms of a society and what it expects from its female members. Socially acceptable and sanctioned actions are allowed only after they have been cloaked in a seemingly loftier purpose; the unattractive prospect of self-sacrifice, be it martyrdom or sati, is made to seem desirable as it is given a spiritual interpretation and otherworldly possibilities. The woman who performs sati will be free from her material burden, the woman martyr will marry the land and nurture it (thus although Noha is released from her physical constraints as woman, she does retain her symbolic characteristics as nurturer and carer, as well as, uncannily, a sexual partner to the fertile land). Similarly, women preparing to undertake sati undergo an enormous sacrifice that adds to their respectability and loftiness. The description of Noha's death is likened, supposedly positively, to her wedding night. She is marrying and spilling blood for the cause as she would on her wedding night. This complex set of events begs the question of whether it is in this capacity that she can be a martyr and whether is it only in the capacity of a marriageable woman that she can *be* at all? Her act could also be seen as a comment on marriage - marriage as a form of martyrdom. A 'modern nationalist militant' in the text

tries to answer this dilemma on a television programme about her death. He claims that Noha was beautiful,

> she did not decide to die because life held nothing for her. She had many suitors dreaming of having her as a wife. She died because she loved her country more than her own life, and because her soul was even more beautiful than her face.[136]

The representation of Noha's death in the guise of a bride sexualises and makes male the land that she is dying for and that will receive her (God is at this receiving end as well). Though the promise is slightly different between sati and this sexualised martyrdom, the idea of fulfilment that the subject is not yet aware of appears as a gift that is worth giving one's life for. In order to cement the decision within the norms and moral encouragement of the church, the sheikh recites praise to the martyrs of the land and stamps his seal of encouragement on this seemingly wasteful act (see above). In response, Ghoussoub writes that,

> The sheikh was speaking as if we still lived in the era when martyrs perished with a sword in their hands. And he speaks as a heterosexual man. No trace of Noha would ever be found among the rubble and the fires left by the blast of her car-bomb [...] but since the sheikh is charismatic and the atmosphere is so loaded with tension, nobody notices such details.[137]

Tradition blurs the ugliness of the acts of the modern day martyr as exposed by Ghoussoub's narrator. No skin or bones will be left of Noha, nothing physical to remind us that she was a beautiful girl who 'had many suitors.' The essence of what she had, her womanhood and virginity, is what she willingly gives away as she remains caught up in the frenzy of war (interestingly, the important difference between sati and the women martyrs is that the women martyrs are doubly blessed because of the "gift" of the "commodity" of their virginity; in a sense, the widow in sati has "less" to bargain with). Her experience brings out the martyrdom in everyday femininity. This idea of womanhood remains sealed as it provides the only way of speaking of martyrdom. Noha's actions re-establish and confirm the gendered codes by linking her death to a wedding with the land to which she will give up her precious blood. Rather than a marriage that will lead to the birth of a new generation, Noha will die and marry Lebanon, or the version of

Lebanon that she believes is worth dying for. Ironically, viewers and television announcers anxiously wait for Noha's mother to forgive her brave daughter. The narrator finally tells us that [she] 'heard through a televised medium that this forgiveness has occurred and that,

> what's more, she was very proud of her, and she was preparing candy boxes with pink ribbons for the funeral. It would be a celebration. One well known patisserie that specialised in wedding cakes placed adverts in the paper, announcing that they were sending a multi-layered wedding cake which would have an icing-sugar heart on top, half in pink for Noha, and the other half in blue, representing her *fiancé,* the South of Lebanon.[138]

Noha's mother reacts as though she has finally consented to her daughter's suitor. In keeping within the limits of a traditional wedding, she finally gives in to her daughter's wishes and accepts her choice. This conflation of marriage and death strikes me as a morbid and violent one. In the attempt to glorify martyrdom and excuse the waste of a young girl's life, her death is turned into an unsuccessful parody, a joyful wedding; grotesquely revealing what weddings might in turn be parodying. Simultaneously however, the parody is a dismal failure as the martyr must die and cannot thereby see the results of her parody, if indeed it can be defined as one. The sacrificing of her body is interpreted physically as dismemberment for the cause. Dismemberment contradicts the idea of unity on one level, yet on a violent level Noha's body parts will be non-existent so that they can physically become one with the land and air. Yet again, on a symbolic level, Noha's act is praised because she keeps it within the acceptable borders. The nationalist militant continues in his praise for this peculiar act: 'Noha gave her pure blood and her beautiful youth to what she believed in, to our fight for sovereignty and national pride. Against the enemy and his Western allies.'[139] After Noha's wedding/funeral, her photo appears pasted all over Beirut. As with any war, martyrs' reputations are quickly replaced and all that remains are bits of old posters under newer ones; 'often you would see her lips, or half her face, still visible under a new photo that had been hurriedly plastered over the top.'[140] Noha remains fragmented, even in her photos, never attaining individuality and experience, always a symbol and a fixed signifier to an arbitrary notion of nationalism that provides no space for her individual sacrifice.

In contrast, Ghoussoub's tells the story of a young militant, Umm Ali who explodes gender constraints. Although her methods stand in an uncomfortable relationship to the argument for a "passive activism" (as they represent the exact opposite of this), the war hero Umm Ali does however contribute to a way of *being* active in the war. The chapter entitled 'The Heroism of Umm Ali' is about Latifa, a poor young virgin brought to work in Beirut by her father as a maid in a flat at the age of nine. Exploited and raped, Latifa uses the war to escape her predicament and becomes a war hero. The story is told after her death; after her heroism is but myth. The chapter opens with the following poignant lines,

> When Hayat told me that the famous Umm Ali was none other than Latifa, the little maid who used to live in their home, I found myself feeling confused and depressed [...] the image of Umm Ali, the new born legend on the fighting streets of Beirut, the ruthless fighter who knew neither fear nor compassion, 'the sister of men' as they named her, was already well sketched in my mind, and I could find no way of relating this ferocious, aggressive character to the frightened, evasive little nine-year-old Latifa that I had known. Umm Ali was large and powerful in my imagination, whereas in my memory Latifa was still victimised and vulnerable [...].[141]

Ghoussoub masterfully sets up the scene for what is and what is not possible within her imagination and ours and juxtaposes it later on in the narrative with what is possible in war and thus what new avenues are available for a redefinition of one's capabilities that does not take social gender norms into account. Thus, war functions at an unexpected level. After eight years of confinement and slavery, Latifa is determined to prove to the soldiers that congregate on the street that she can be part of them; that she can dodge the sniper's bullets and so be an asset to the army and recreate a place for herself in this new reality. Ghoussoub tells us that

> she had learn[t] that if she wanted to fit in with these men she had to build her image as the girl who knew no fear - always the first to confront the enemy and the last to flee danger. She knew that the only way for her to belong was by turning herself into a legend.[142]

As Mona Fayad has noted in her article 'Reinscribing Identity: Nation and Community in Arab Women's Writing', traditionally, women in nationalist narratives are

'posited as begetter, inspirer and protector of male subjectivity. The disembodiment of Woman in the national narrative and her mythification render it impossible to position her as an agent of change.'[143]   However, Ghoussoub foregrounds a way in which the self-mythification process does in fact act as a counter to the enclosing and foreclosing world that is Latifa's.   Military action does allow and give her the space to have control and power over a self-image that has always been controlled and manipulated by others; by the family that sends her to Beirut, by the family she works for and who exploit her and by their son who rapes her.   Latifa uses the available discourse of war, that is the control over death, to create for herself a place and a reputation that it outside and beyond that which is already socially inscribed as part of her identity based on her gender and her social class. By becoming a legend, Latifa blurs reality and hyper-reality and,

> crosse[s] the sacred line that separates the sexes and defines their difference […] Umm Ali was neither woman nor man.   Latifa was no longer the vulnerable little maid.   The perplexed confusion that her name evoked fitted well with the tumult and chaos that was everywhere. Life and death were now closely bound together, and it was as if they created another reality.   Why should not Latifa the girl, now become Umm Ali the very manly woman, be present simultaneously in places that were widely distant?[144]

She is a legend, and legend, something that can only exist as a by-product of a confused war, is sexless and genderless. Latifa/Umm Ali succeeds in bringing together aspects of both genders, thus making the issue of gender unimportant.   Ghoussoub tells us that 'Latifa, the young maid had crossed the sacred line that separates the sexes and defines their difference.'[145] She creates herself using the available tools and this creation becomes a living thing of its own, an artwork that is revered by others, poised somewhere between life and death:

> People who knew her, and those who only knew her by repute, were happy to inflate her legend. In their terrified lives only monsters and saints made sense, and only heroes and martyrs seemed cut for survival.[146]

Thus Latifa/Umm Ali turns herself into someone that can be appreciated for her role in the war as a survivor and she foregrounds an active role for the female militant that is not grounded in a discourse of gender.   Ghoussoub explores this genderless space where attributes of myth come to replace the individual's reality.   Umm Ali leaves no photograph

behind yet she has succeeded in 'stepp[ing] into another reality' and thereby defying and redefining reality.[147] Her body, something that has only experienced misery and suffering, here disappears and becomes an imagined sexless and genderless space.

> Umm Ali was neither woman nor man [...] her head was always covered in a *keffiya* (head covering) and her body flattened and anonymous under heavy military attire.[148]

War can support this myth/legend within its discourse as it needs such legends and myths in order to survive. Umm Ali works with the stuff of heroes to turn the focus away from herself as woman, as gendered. The war can offer this space and relieve Latifa/Umm Ali from her demeaning existence as we can see in this example of a scene at the start of Latifa's empowering decision:

> It was inevitably Latifa who got sent to fetch bread from the bakery when it was too dangerous to face the shelling and when snipers has emptied the busy street of shoppers. When Farid's [her employer's] family rushed down to the basement, alarmed by the closeness of battle and the wheezing criss-cross of the gunfire, it was she who was sent back to the flat to fetch the blankets, or the grandmother's prayer *masbaha* (worry beads), or Farid's medicine, or sometimes even the box of stale biscuits. As it happened, Latifa did not mind. On the contrary, she took her time as she went upstairs, savouring the silent emptiness of the flat. She even enjoyed being sent to the bakery, because from there she could watch the movement of the fighters as they crossed the street in zigzag formation [...] she felt no fear, but breathed an air of freedom in the new shape that the streets had acquired. She would soon be seventeen, which meant that she had been confined for almost eight years in this same street, with the narrow, unchanging view from the kitchen on the second floor where she lived. She found the change that was now transforming this familiar, monotonous sight welcome and exhilarating. The threatening flash and thunder of the falling shells did not effect her; they were just a secondary backdrop to her newly acquired spaces.[149]

Again, there is a sense of freedom in danger. Umm Ali feels no fear towards the sound of the falling shells, only an exhilarated freedom. The memory of the *woman* Latifa is blurred over by the powerful qualities of the *legend* Umm Ali. Umm Ali does indeed relieve herself of what she considers female constraints and understands that she does have other possibilities and realities in the new space created by the war.

4.10   TARAB

Ghoussoub documents a reply by a Lebanese novelist to a French t.v. programme on life in Beirut after the war:

> We looked as if we Lebanese had exchanged war for *tarab*, the sensual pleasure of music. In this programme they showed us preparing the material for our *tarab,* in the same way as we had previously prepared the materials necessary for the pursuit of war. The public watching the concerts is always an intrinsic part of the festival, for anarchy is the order of the day: some sit, some stand, some dance between the tables and the seats [...] the audience does not differentiate between one singer and the next [...] it is as if the artist is just a mouthpiece for the songs that are stored inside the audience [the author of this piece recalls the crazy parties and singing sessions that were often held inside homes during the war]. It was as if our fun at night could match the intensity of the violence that was occurring during the day.[150]

In light of the previous chapter on Umm Kulthum, here tarab is invoked as a pleasure that is so intense that it can subsume the terror that is the war. Tarab is described as a emotion that can unite the audience in that it allows them to experience together something that is already 'stored' within them. Again, it is a pleasure that is enhanced and highlighted because of the situation of war, a peculiar enjoyment because it is savoured whilst emotions of confusion, anger and relief are played out. This reference to tarab emphasises the dual problem examined throughout this chapter, that of discovering pleasure at the site of intense danger. In this chapter I have tried to show that individual experience is what defines reality in the hyper-reality that is war. It appears that ideological norms are subject to revision in situations where these norms no longer remain acceptable. War, and in this specific context the Lebanese war, which cannot be explained in terms of a clear dichotomy between two opposing armies, becomes a site where religious, national and ethnic diversities are pitted against each other. In my examples, I have purposely avoided sign-posting the religious identity of the characters in the novels or the novelists themselves. As I have stated in the introduction, the purpose of this study is to see how the added element of gender re-configuration adds yet another dimension to the war that allows for an expression of femininity that cannot be pinned down to any regulatory norm. I began by providing an outline of the criticism that has been undertaken thus far of war literature and its consequences and achievements. This criticism has also highlighted the

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instances of war literature, for example Algerian and Palestinian, where the instance of war was not used to make specific comments about women's participation or their needs as women thereafter and where supposedly feminine types of resistance were undermined (the Intifada). I have also suggested that this may not be a deficiency in the literature itself but a deficiency in the interpretation given to the literature that does not recognise active participation as political engagement. The example of the recent essay by Rajeswari Mohan has, I hope, opened up the beginning of a new way of talking about female resistance that actively applies issues of context. In this way, militant activity is seen as a way for a woman to engage with her political and moral beliefs. Although I cannot accept or condone this activity within the parameters of this thesis, I can defend the idea that being actively and militantly involved in defending political ideals does not immediately suggest a non-feminine activity. The war situation creates a space for the re-articulations or re-understanding of one as a woman. What does this mean and how does the war experience produce new understandings of gender?

4.11 CONCLUSION

The reading of Al-Shaykh's *The Story of Zahra* highlights a potential for even the most disturbing of war victims. I have argued against the available criticism of this novel in order to demonstrate that Zahra's actions can be viewed as masochistic yet narcissistic, an experience which enriches her in that it makes her content and healthy for the first time in her adult life. The fact that it is the confused physical situation that is war that enables her to seek the sexual gratification of her choice is significant. Rather than perpetuate her introvert nature, the war allows Zahra to escape confines of home and family. I do not believe that the madness of the war becomes one with the madness of Zahra and that the two experiences are conflated. Rather, the state of war allows for Zahra's relative physical and sexual freedom that she covets. In a normal situation, women are supposed to subdue themselves (out of fear of the moral law) with war, collapse of a moral law ironically removes this fear. Hence, in spite of the violence there is respite from the fear of the law as well as a liberation of the libido (see the previous argument on Laplanche: I am suggesting here that perhaps women can identify themselves with this liberation of the libido).

Al-Shaykh's *Beirut Blues* and Ghoussoub's *Leaving Beirut: Women and the Wars Within* both offer examples of how women use the outlet of sex to keep a hold over their understanding of the war and also to enrich their understanding of themselves and their roles. Al-Shaykh's protagonist uses her sexual escapades to sustain an understanding of woman that may no longer be important in the situation of war but that remains significant to her in terms of a quality of life. Thus, the sexual experiences that Asmahan has of which her friend disapproves, and her excessive interest in her appearance, all provide a means of survival. Thus, traditional gender codes and norms loom out from behind the destructive war and Asmahan re-uses them to create her own reality of the war. Ghoussoub's protagonist uses her sexual experiences to understand fear and destruction as she parallels the two experiences of sex and war. These surprising parallels reshape the ideas of what the war is. Through the war these two women experience sexual awakening which in turn they use to understand the futility or destructive reality of the war. As they begin to realise that their sexual liaisons are based on sexual drives rather than the drive for life and Eros, so they seek these liaisons that seem capable of erasing the war that keeps them out and marginalises them as observers. The liberation of sexual energies could be seen as a new lease of life away from deadly norms. The problem here remains that it would seem as though I were advocating a "living feminism" that can thus only flourish in the context of the destruction of ethical and social norms. Instead, I argue that a "living feminism" is possible through the "transformation" of ethical and social norms. However, what remains significant and interesting is that war shows that normal society is deadening for women and so the challenge becomes one of how to create new forms of social binding after the war that will allow women the same kind of access to desire that they have had in the war.

The vivid examples of the martyr and the war heroine illustrate how different attempts to become an active participant of the war can result on the one hand in excessive manifestations of imposed norms related to gender and on the other hand an attempt that professes to be free of gender norms altogether. The martyr described by Ghoussoub does not escape her traditional expectation as woman and bride (though of course, she does in the sense that she dies and does not have to undergo them). Instead, she becomes a martyr using the tools of this expectation and spills blood for the land that is symbolically transformed into the lover that she will never have. On the other hand, Latifa/Umm Ali,

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by becoming one of the fighters of war and turning herself into a legend, thus unrecognisable, carves a place for herself that is not fully contingent on her being a woman. Mai Ghoussoub describes her as genderless and a 'myth'; a construct that Umm Ali has ensured will outlive her. Umm Ali recreates herself as a genderless being by remaining unseen and turning herself into a myth for other people. In this way she manipulates her reputation and dismantles the humiliation that she had undergone until that point as a result of her femininity and poverty. By becoming an active militant she reminds us that there are other ways of being that become available to her because of the war; ways of being that are not tied up in the discourse of rape and servitude. The martyr gives in to absolute powerlessness; the militant acquires power regardless of gender; the others accede to their desires as women (but where this is traditionally a male prerogative that is, the right to desire).

This chapter has given an overview of some of the criticism behind women's writing of the Lebanese war as well as an examination of the works of Mai Ghoussoub and Hanan Al-Shaykh. I hope to have shown that a feminine resistance that is active but non-violent cannot always be the norm for all those who suffer the war. Although writing is primarily an act of non-violent resistance, the incidences within the writing itself sometimes disclose situations that reveal the difficulties of defining feminine resistance as always a non-violent one. In fact, through the readings I have offered, it seems that war provides a space for the reconfiguration of gender norms and expectations that make the issue of context even more significant. The issue of performativity which assumes that there are certain fixed regulatory norms against which we perform our own resistance becomes more complex once we begin to consider the differing regulatory norms that are created during a situation of war. Here, sexual and militant resistances are understood as paving a way for understanding oneself and one's capabilities based on personal choice rather than non-feminine or destructively masochistic tendencies. The situation of war blurs and redefines ideas of reality and the women in these three texts each react differently yet understand their actions as active ones fuelled by a desire to reconfigure what it means to be a woman in a war in which they are not expected actively to participate. They either use the tools available to them (the martyr Noha) or create new tools and rules of their own (Zahra, Asmahan, Ghoussoub's narrator, Latifa/Umm Ali).

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Finally, the situation of war is what allows these women to manipulate their own experiences in order to understand themselves as women and to re-interpret what they are capable of *outside* of the previous regulatory norms. These norms lapse or lose centrality to an extent. In the situation of war there seems to be an inversion of norms. For example, in some ways, masculinity is enforced but at the same time men become vulnerable and also have to struggle for power and need to be prepared to sacrifice themselves (here the soldiers resemble the bride martyr). Simultaneously, there is less time for the surveillance of women who, ironically, acquire greater social freedom in a situation of danger.

Ultimately, it appears that in normal society, women are forced into deadly repetition compulsions/performances that serve to deprive them of their desire out of fear of male power and violence. This results in the masochistic depression and anti-narcissism as well as lack of the libido, as I address in *The Story of Zahra*. Thus, woman's supposedly normal sexuality is akin (strangely so) to the Freudian death drive as a tendency towards inertia or extreme passivity (this is in keeping with the fact that feminine desire is encoded in terms of passivity and masochism). What occurs in war is that inhibiting fear seems to give way to the necessity of active risk-taking. This risk taking may expose one to possible death, but it also removes the inhibitions of fear (the ethical law of the father for example) and thus it frees the repressed libido. So, oddly and strikingly, war for women can be about "coming alive" again, a resurgence of "aliveness" and "desire" (hence the seemingly antithetical equation of the violence of war and sexual enjoyment). If in normal society, women's sexuality is a kind of death drive (as opposed to pleasure principle), then in war, a supposedly destructive tendency (that is, risking death) turns out to be the rebirth of libido and the will to live and thus ultimately, a move against the destructiveness of war.

Importantly, I want to argue that it is with destruction of the old social fabric that women may achieve a liberation of their desire. However, this particular desire is asocial or anti-social and with the cessation of hostilities the regulatory norms can always re-target this "asocial", "amoral" desire of women. Lastly, I want to emphasise that we cannot always take a consoling "feel good" view if we are to reveal the contradictions at work. The experience of war is not the same for women as it is for men and it is not only writing

as an activity that is the sole domain from which women can resist or re-write the war. The examination of the war narratives has shown that certain events within the narratives are themselves often controversial. To confront these events as possible and probable is to give women an active role in the understanding of their position in the situation that is war.

ENDNOTES

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[1] The idea for this title came from an essay by Nawal El Saadawi entitled 'Dissidence and Creativity' in a special issue of *Women, A Cultural Review*, 6:1 (1995), 1-17, entitled 'Gender, Islam and Orientalism.'

[2] Faqir, Fadia, ed, *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers* (London: Garnet Publishing, 1998), p. 46.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 118.

[4] Cooke, Miriam, 'Arab Women Arab Wars', *Cultural Critique,* Winter Issue (1994-1995), 5-29 (p. 6).

[5] Accad, Evelyn, *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East* (New York & London: New York University Press, 1990), p. 41.

[6] Hottell singles out Accad's words from her study entitled *Sexuality and War* and cites it in her essay. Hottel, Ruth A, 'A Poetics of Pain: Evelyn Accad's Critical and Fictional World', *World Literature Today* 71:3 (1997), 511-516. I shall be using the on-line version and all references shall be out of /10.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 8/10.

[8] By traditional I mean overly interested in being conciliatory.

[9] I will give specific examples of these later on in this study, especially of Algeria and Palestine.

[10] Faqir, Fadia, ed, *In the House of Silence*, p. 31

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[12] Rashid, Fawzia, 'Writing and the Pursuit of Female Identity', in Faqir, Fadia, ed, *In the House of Silence,* p. 125, pp. 128-129.

[13] Cooke, Miriam, *Women and the War Story* (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1996), p. 4.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

[16] This notion is reminiscent of Virginia Woolf in *Three Guineas* (London: Hogarth, 1986) who uses the onset of the Second World War to deflect an analysis of war onto an analysis of masculine society and capitalism, reading the former as an outcome of the later.

[17] Cooke, Miriam, *Women and the War Story*, p. 293.

[18] Cooke, Miriam, '✖man, Retelling the War Myth' (there is a 'wo' under the cross) in Cooke, Miriam and Angela Woollacott, eds. *Gendering War Talk* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 178.

[19] Cooke, Miriam, 'Arab Women Arab Wars', p. 25.

[20] Evelyn Acaad, Miriam Cooke, and Margot Badran, amongst others, have written extensively on Arab women's war literature. An interesting work on Arab literature and its treatment of sexuality in general is Allen, Roger, Hilary Kilpatrick and Ed De Moor, eds. *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Saqi Books, 1995). Also, see Kassab, Suzanne Elizabeth, 'The Paramount Reality of the Beirutis: War Literature and the Lebanese Conflict', *Beirut Review*, at

http://www.lcsp.org.lb/pub/breview/br4/kassabpt1.html1. Leila Fawaz has also written on Women and the Lebanese war in Spagnolo, John, ed. *Problems of the Modern Middle East in Historical Perspective (Essays in Honor of Albert Hourani)* (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 1992), pp. 63-79.

[21] Accad, Evelyn, *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East*, p. 11. This work actually deals with Lebanon specifically and I shall engage more thoroughly with its arguments when analysing the Lebanese war. Accad has written two interesting articles that I think reflect her viewpoint in the book cited above. These are 'Excision: Practices, Discourses and Feminist Commitment', *Feminist Issues*, 13:2 (1993), 47-79 and 'Assia Djebar's Contribution to Arab Women's Literature: Rebellion, Maturity, Vision', *World Literature Today*, 70:4 (1996), 800-812.

[22] Accad cites a section of this quote from Mai Ghoussoub's essay 'Feminism - or the Eternal Masculine in the Arab World', *New Left Review*, 161 (1987), 3-18, (p. 8).

[23] Accad, Evelyn, *Sexuality and War*, p. 12-14.

[24] When I say 'difficult to determine' I am referring to facts such as the re-veiling of women in Algeria during colonisation in order to maintain some authority over one's household. It seems to be that moments of reclamation of 'Islamic [Arab] values' does not only occur in revolutionary cases though I do agree that the most fundamental and extreme of changes do occur in post-colonial regimes (Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt are some of the countries that have experienced this phenomenon). Again though, as with the issue of re-veiling in Egypt it is often impossible to determine cause and effect. Please see endnote 60 in chapter three.

[25] Accad, Evelyn, *Sexuality and War*, pp. 19-22. Accad cites Moroccan psychiatrist Ghita El Khayat-Bennaï at the 1983 University of Illinois conference entitled 'Common Differences: Third World Women and Feminist Perspectives', and Tunisian Ilham Ben Milad Ben Ghadifa at the 'Quel féminisme pour le Maghreb?' conference in Tunisia in 1985 who was exiled from her country after speaking out on these issues.

[26] Faqir, Fadia, ed, *In the House of Silence*, p. 164 makes this point clear in her conclusion. She stresses that until suppression related to the act of writing as a women is removed, it will be difficult to write on wider issues.

[27] Accad, Evelyn, *Sexuality and War*, p. 23. Accad summarises this from the two conferences mentioned above.

[28] Religious as well as political factions make it even more complicated.

[29] In her work *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (London: Routledge, 1993), Gayatri Spivak compares the work of Mahasweta Devi to that of Marie-Aimée Hélie-Lucas. She writes that '[Lucas' material] often contains problematic representations of decolonization after a negotiated *political* independence.' (p.77). She then quotes Lucas herself: 'In Algeria, many of us, including myself, kept silent for ten years after independence, not to give fuel to the enemies of the glorious Algerian revolution [...]. I will certainly admit that the Western right-wing forces may and will use our protests, especially if they remain isolated. But it is as true to say that our own rightist forces exploit our silence' (p. 77).

[30] Accad, Evelyn, *Sexuality and War*, p. 25.

[31] Cooke, Miriam, 'Arab Women Arab Wars', p. 6. This is important to Cooke as she argues against the essentialising aspects of the war myth that marginalise women (because of a lack of feminine war myth that she later writes about in *Woman and the War Story* - cited above)

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 8. Cooke interestingly explores notions of good and bad war literature. Many of the Arab intellectuals that she has conversed with (Taufiq Awwad - Lebanese novelist - and Iraqi critic Basim Abd al-Hamid Hammudi) argue for a necessary period of time between the event of war and its literary

representation; a 'takhzin' or storage (literally meaning 'to put in a cupboard). Cooke cannot wholly agree with this contention without ignoring all the significant literature produced during and straight after the war.

[33] The lack of faith in an objective history amplifies the significance in individual unifying stories.

[34] Cooke, Miriam, 'Arab Women Arab Wars', p. 10.

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] Fayad, Mona, 'Reinscribing Identity: Nation and Community in Arab Women's Writing', *College Literature,* 22:1 (1995), 147-159. I am using the on-line version so all citations will be out of /13.

[37] *Ibid.,* p. 3/13.

[38] Cooke, Miriam, 'Arab Women Arab Wars', p. 16.

[39] Wearing the chador (heavy garment that included a head and face covering) would also to some degree ensure that you were not searched at checkpoints.

[40] This citation and previous from Cooke, Miriam, '✖man, Retelling the War Myth', p. 184. 'Touma' is a girl's name.

[41] *Ibid.,* p. 185. Cooke's investigation of some of the male literature produced during and after the Algerian revolution reveals this.

[42] *Ibid.,* p. 186.

[43] Cooke, Miriam, *Women and the War Story,* p. 123. Even in works that dealt with social problems, whether related to the war or not were condemned by the nationalist cause if they did not directly refer to it.

[44] Cooke, Miriam, '✖man Retelling the War Myth', p. 183 writes that 'sociologists like Marie-Aimée Hélie-Lucas and writers like Assia Djebar are now correcting the estimates of women's perceived importance to the Revolution, even if at the time some of them may have concurred.

[45] A wording of Edward Said's and the title of his work *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage, 1980).

[46] Cooke, Miriam, 'Arab Women Arab Wars', p. 18.

[47] Cooke mentions many of these in her specific chapter on the question of Palestine in the chapter entitled 'Talking Democracy' in *Women and the War Story* (cited above).

[48] Miriam Cooke has intimated as much.

[49] *Ibid.,* p. 18. Cooke goes on to make comparisons with other countries where 'mothers' specifically 'have recognised the power of the spectacle.'

[50] *Ibid.,* p. 19.

[51] Cooke, Miriam, '✖man, Retelling the War Myth', p. 195.

[52] *Ibid.* This phenomena creates a new 'battlefield.'

[53] Cooke, Miriam, *Women and the War Story,* p. 219.

[54] Mohan, Rajeswari, 'Loving Palestine; Nationalist Activism and Feminist Agency in Leila Khaled's Subversive Bodily Acts', *Interventions,* 1:4 (1998), 52-80.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 54.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 71.

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 73. Mohan continues to give an example of a poem that Khaled composed where she 'address[es] Palestine as her lover.'

[58] *Ibid.*, p.78. Mohan here refers to Butler's and De Lauretis' academic feminism among others.

[59] In Butler's terms, any political act that would seem to be speaking for a large number of people potentially closes of other fields of experience that these persons may have in the future.

[60] Mohan, Rajeswari, 'Loving Palestine; Nationalist Activism and Feminist Agency in Leila Khaled's Subversive Bodily Acts', p. 78.

[61] Accad, Evelyn, *Sexuality and War,* p. 25.

[62] These terms are used in relation to Lebanon by various authors and critics to designate the fact that Lebanon consisted of persons belonging to various religious groups as well as groups based on what can be termed 'kinship.' This shall be elaborated on in the main text.

[63] For particular details concerning the civil war in Lebanon, there are numerous documents and texts such as Salibi, Kamal, *A House of Many Mansions: History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988) and Gilsenan, Michael, *Lords of the Lebanese Marches: Violence and Narrative in an Arab Society* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996).

[64] Accad, Evelyn, *Sexuality and War*, pp. 29-30. Accad here cites Halim Barakat, a Lebanese writer and social critic.

[65] Makdisi, Ussama, 'Reconstructing the Nation-State: The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon', *Middle East Report,* (Summer 1996) at http:/www.merip.org/mer200/makdisi.htm. All page references are from this version out of /7. Makdisi's unpublished thesis is entitled 'Fantasies of the Possible: Colonialism and the Construction of Communalism in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon.' This is a much needed work that I hope to read soon.

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 2/7

[67] Fisk, Robert, *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) p. xvi.

[68] Makdisi, Ussama, 'Reconstructing the Nation-State: The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon', p. 2/7.

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 3/7.

[70] Fisk, Robert, *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War*, pp. 56-58.

[71] Makdisi, Ussama, 'Reconstructing the Nation-State: The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon', p. 3/7.

[72] *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 4/7.

[74] The government was split as such, Maronites for the presidency, Sunnis the prime ministership and Shi'a the speaker of parliament. Thus, all major factions were represented.

[75] Makdisi, Ussama, 'Reconstructing the Nation-State: The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon', p. 4.

[76] Eisenhower's 'doctrine of resistance' to 'international communism' obliged him to send US Marines to intervene, in Fisk, Robert, *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War,* p. xvi.

[77] Makdisi, Ussama, 'Reconstructing the Nation-State: The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon', p. 5

[78] Collelo, Thomas, ed. 'Lebanon's History - Civil War' at The Federal Research Division - Library of Congress, The Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State (1997). I am using the on-line version at http://www.rimbaud.freeserve.co.uk/lebanon_civwar.

[79] For an elaboration on the civil war please see sources mentioned above in endnote 63.

[80] Evelyn Accad has written extensively on this literature in her work *Sexuality and War*. Another seminal work is Miriam Cooke's *War's Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[81] Cooke, Miriam, *War's Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War*, p. 23

[82] *Ibid.,* p. 87

[83] *Ibid.,* p. 119.

[84] *Ibid.,* p. 137. Cooke has also discussed the Lebanese war in terms of it emerging as a postmodern war because of its inconclusiveness that effects constant dialogue with it. ('Women, Retelling the War Myth', pp. 179 - end).

[85] This title is a reworking of the titles of two articles that I have read on Hanan Al-Shaykh. One is by Larson, Charles, R, 'The Fiction of Hanan Al-Shaykh, Reluctant Feminist', and chapter three in Accad, Evelyn's book *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East*, entitled ' Hanan Al-Shaykh: Despair, Resignation, Masochism, and Madness.' Both these articles are cited in detail.

[86] Zahra's death is told from her perspective and she tells us that it is the sniper that has killed her. I have had a few discussion with persons who have studied this book that are puzzled by the ending (that is, not certain of who killed her). I am not entirely certain what to make of this and so retain the important fact that Zahra *thinks* she has been shot by the man she has been secretly seeing.

[87] Larson, Charles, 'The Fiction of Hanan Al-Shaykh, Reluctant Feminist', *World Literature Today* 65:1 (1991),14-18. I am using the on-line version so all citations are out of /7. This citation is from 1/7.

[88] *Ibid.,* p.2/7.

[89] Al-Shaykh, Hanan, *The Story of Zahra,* trans. by Peter Ford (London: Quartet, 1986), pp.136-137.

[90] Accad, Evelyn, *Sexuality and War,* p. 55.

[91] *Ibid.,* p. 62.

[92] *Ibid.,* pp. 56-57.

[93] There are two examples of this. In one scene she does not offer aid to people hurt at the 'Karantina' disaster when she is given the opportunity to do so (Christian massacre of a Palestinian refugee camp in 1976). She says on page 124 of the novel that 'It never occurred to me to think how these people where homeless, cut off from their past and carrying bitter memories so vivid they could never be forgotten. It never occurred to me that, with my parents away and me living by myself, I could have taken in at least one

family. It never occurred to me to offer my services, no matter how limited they might have been.' Also, she is unable to work at a hospital for more than a day

[94] Butler, Judith, *Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 168.

[95] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

[96] Al-Shaykh, Hanan, *The Story of Zahra* , p. 30.

[97] *Ibid.*, p. 109.

[98] I am reluctant to call Zahra 'mad' as this has been the context within which she has been discussed so far.

[99] Al-Shaykh, Hanan, *The Story of Zahra,* p. 126.

[100] *Ibid.*, p. 128.

[101] Laplanche, J. and Pontalis, J.B., *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac Books, 1973), pp. 244-245.

[102] Fink, Bruce, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 186.

[103] *Ibid.*, p.187.

[104] Al-Shaykh, Hanan, *The Story of Zahra,* p. 138.

[105] Fink, Bruce, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique*, p. 187.

[106] Butler, Judith*, Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 1.

[107] *Ibid.*

[108] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[109] Al-Shaykh, Hanan, *Beirut Blues,* trans. by Catherine Cobham (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 2.

[110] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[111] *Ibid.,* p. 9.

[112] Ghoussoub, Mai, *Leaving Beirut: Women and the Wars Within* (London: Saqi, 1997). It is interesting that I do not see the book as an amalgam of the above. I have used these terms to facilitate the understanding of how it is put together (as described on the dust jacket). This remains, to me, the most significant work written on the Lebanese war to date. It combines unique observations with profound questions asked about the nature of the fifteen year hostilities. Ghoussoub has also recently edited an important work on masculinity in the Middle East that I hope to engage with soon, Ghoussoub, Mai and Emma Sinclair-Webb, eds. *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East* (London: Saqi Books, 2000).

[113] Al-Shaykh, Hanan, *Beirut Blues*, p. 30.

[114] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[115] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[116] *Ibid.*

[117] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[118] Laplanche, Jean, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

[119] *Ibid.*, p. 124.

[120] There is difficulty in tying the death drive to experience: in this way, we find a possible method of doing so. Also see Thomas, D.M, *The White Hotel* (London: Phoenix, 1981). This novel addresses the complex issues of the libido and the death drive.

[121] Laplanche, Jean, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis,* p. 124.

[122] Ghoussoub, Mai, *Leaving Beirut: Women and the Wars Within,* p. 14.

[123] Al-Shaykh, Hanan, *Beirut Blues,* p. 33.

[124] Ghoussoub, Mai, *Leaving Beirut: Women and the Wars Within,* p. 85.

[125] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

[126] *Ibid.*

[127] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

[128] Al-Shaykh, Hanan, *Beirut Blues,* p. 243.

[129] *Ibid.*, p. 165.

[130] *Ibid.*

[131] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

[132] Fayad, Mona, 'Reinscribing Identity: Nation and Community in Arab Women's Writing', p. 2.

[133] Ghoussoub, Mai, *Leaving Beirut: Women and the Wars Within,* p. 102.

[134] *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

[135] Spivak, Gayatri, Chakravorty, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, Williams Patrick and Laura Chrisman, eds. (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p. 99.

[136] Ghoussoub, Mai, *Leaving Beirut: Women and the Wars Within,* p. 103.

[137] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

[138] *Ibid.*, p. 105.

[139] *Ibid.*, p. 103.

[140] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

[141] *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

[142] *Ibid.*, p. 71.

[143] Fayad, Mona, 'Reinscribing Identity: Nation and Community in Arab Women's Writing', p. 2.

[144] Ghoussoub, Mai, *Leaving Beirut: Women and the Wars Within,* p. 74.

[145] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

[146] *Ibid.*

[147] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

[148] *Ibid.*, pp. 71-73.

[149] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

[150] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has engaged with the intricacies of contemporary Western theory in order to consider the possibility of cross-cultural intercommunication based on a detailed understanding of contexts that may embody useful and exciting possibilities. I have chosen several theorists from disparate fields to tease out several underlying similarities between cultural productions of the Arab world and contemporary gender theory; in particular as elucidated by Judith Butler. I have discussed ideas relating to the understanding of gender as a performance or sequence of learned acts and questioned how these "performances" may be re-configured in order to break with a constitutive, constricting past, and become "performative." In the context of the Arab world, I have located performative acts of gender that attempt (albeit sometimes outside of a theoretical or political framework) to understand the forces that impose a strict understanding of gender and to evaluate how these forces can best be challenged. Oftentimes, and it is here that the various theories have been invaluable, I have had to impose a theoretical viewpoint in order to understand how these performative actions are achieved when they seem to pass unnoticed or are misinterpreted within the culture in which they are produced (see chapters three and four). At other times, I have dealt with texts or events that were written or produced to shock and so contained a performative element a priori (see chapters one and two). In all the above circumstances I have had to accept the possibility that the performative actions I locate may not be politically effective. However, Judith Butler's arguments concerning the individual's capacity to reconstruct their past through performative acts has allowed me to read these events as subversive in that they re-configure fixed gender attributes for the individual. Butler's shortcomings in terms of Arab Feminism and to what extent the above assertion can be successful have been examined in the introduction to the thesis as well as throughout the work as a whole. I have argued that although Butler's theories can be liberating at the non-political site, they are also debilitating if we do not re-introduce agency into the debate; that is, we have to agree on some level that an individual needs to believe in the authenticity of experience in order to find a performative moment liberating (in speaking of authenticity I am aware of the controversial nature of this word but want nevertheless to retain it in terms of how an experience can remain significant). In other words, I have proved that in the context of the

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Arab world we can only introduce this important injunction that is performative theory into our system of thought if we accept that the individual's role, will, and agency play an important part in the bringing about of the performative moment. Thus, we re-allocate a central role for the subject who would otherwise remain a receptacle of social constraints, occasionally involved in subversive performative moments that do not however inform the quality of life. Moreover, I have wanted to argue that particular events or texts from the Arab world can help rework and clarify certain theoretical assumptions. In aid of this I have drawn widely from psychoanalytic theory (Copjec, Bersani, Cowie, Laplanche), post-colonial theory (Spivak), feminist theory (Cornell, Nussbaum, Gubar, Nicholson), medical theory (Gadamer, Biesel/Floyd), cultural studies (Adorno, Benjamin), ethnomusicolgy (Shepherd/Wicke, Danielson) among others, to strengthen my viewpoints. In each chapter I have taken various instances of what I consider "performative situations" and interpreted them using relevant theories to elaborate on specific points.

In the introduction to this thesis I undertook an investigation of the current critical debates surrounding Arab feminism and its relationship to Western feminist intervention. I have shown that to an extent there is much to be gained from an investigation of local contexts through the perspective of particular theoretical inclinations. Thus, it becomes possible to imagine a condition where these contexts can inform and perhaps infiltrate ways that we understand the construction of impeding gender categories, how they might be established and in what ways they can be overcome. Also, I have looked at the negative criticism of Judith Butler's work in order to understand better what it is about her theories that might seem lacking or enfeebling. However, I have also shown that Butler's work is versatile at points where she does admit that agency and personal will are imbricated in the notion of survival. Therefore, to an extent, it is possible to locate some type of "authentic" self that is the basic individual from where these performances spring. The introduction also emphasised the significance of imposing a feminist postmodern outlook on the Arab world. This outlook, I have argued, can be a dangerous one because we risk not detecting what other women's experiences have to offer us. I propose a back and forth system of communication where experiences are transmitted and theories are tested for efficacy in other local contexts, thus rendering them globally available.

Chapter one has tried to realise Judith Butler's theory of performance in its unveiled state in the event of the late nineteenth century Salpêtrière clinic in Paris. I have shown how the clinical decree of "hysteria" brings to the forefront the possibility that women can be and are punished for not conforming to prescribed gender expectations. My example of the hysterics at the Salpêtrière has shown that gender expectations can be made to materialise at will, in particular at the command of a figure of authority. Thus Charcot, the "authority that brooked no argument" was capable of evoking incongruous representations of gender attributes in the performances that he induced. In this way, he was able to supposedly study "hysteria." In this chapter, I have also discussed the possible social necessity of the hysterics due to the rise of the "femme nouvelle" who threatened the traditional role of women. This possibility emphasised the fact that understandings of gender that do not conform to the dominant discourse cannot escape punishment. However, I have shown that in their collaboration, the hysterics and their performances of hysteria rendered the physicians unsure of their authenticity. This notion, that there can be an authentic way to be a woman, is questioned by the performances of gender that the hysterics undertake. Issues of interpellation, repetition and uncertainty have been clarified in order to indicate how gender expectations may be fractured, thus rendering the "authority" debilitated and challenged.

Chapter two has dealt with the early fiction of Nawal El Saadawi. I have touched on her polemics but have found that her fiction, as she herself asserts, is better indicative of how a girl/woman perceives of herself as feminine in a highly gendered society. Saadawi's works come across as performative since they try to change, through the experiences of their characters, the ingrained understanding of what it is to be a woman as informed by a discourse on medicine. Through examining the novels that confront the role of women as informed by medicine, I was able to come to an understanding of how constricting this discourse is and how difficult it is to ask questions such as "how is it that I am woman" within its confines. These petitions and other similar ones plague the three texts that I have dealt with and highlight the importance of the production of these highly controversial narratives in terms of bringing to the fore obstacles that impede personal growth regardless of strict gender boundaries. Also, I have shown that the texts cannot always sustain the knowledge that comes about through the performative moment. The

intensity of the knowledge that gender may merely be a sequence of performances with no recourse to a natural truth and the inability to embody this knowledge into everyday life, is a profound problem that cannot always be solved. In the novels *Firdaus: Woman at Point Zero* and *Two Women in One*, the protagonists are not fully able to overcome the authorities that incorporate them; thus the performative moment remains an isolated one that can help with personal growth. In the text *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, the protagonist is able to combine her new-found respect for herself as a woman into a compassionate practice of medicine not imbedded in questions of gender. Ultimately though, I have shown that Saadawi submits her heroines as symbols of the possibilities of an equal society where all women and men can live as human being not separated through sexual make-up or discursive gender division.

In chapter three I have looked at the potential of music to re-configure social gender expectations. Through exploring the repertory of Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum I have shown how careful appropriation of the category of the "authentic" from official discourse can aid in re-structuring the experiences of men and women alike. I have argued that Umm Kulthum's music constitutes a feminine experience for all that is not entrenched in the official discourse on love and sexuality. Instead, her repertory allows for the expression of passion and sexuality whilst exonerating her from a dangerous image. Umm Kulthum, as I have plausibly argued, cultivated and manipulated a maternal image that would in turn house the unexpressed desires of the nation. This chapter has required some background material on cultural production in the Middle East as well as several diversions into the theory of music in order to lay the foundations of the importance of music to society. Using Shepherd and Wicke's enabling and mobilising proposition of music as that which creates, rather than merely represents, emotions, I have been able to further elaborate theoretically on how this was achieved by Umm Kulthum. An examination of the differing views vis-à-vis the culture industry as discussed by Adorno and Benjamin has allowed me to moderate what may be interpreted as a disabling view of Umm Kulthum's repertory; a repertory that confines experience. I have suggested that her "aura" was recreated with every performance and that she allowed for the expression of an emotion otherwise unachievable through any other form of cultural production. This chapter has primarily tried to show how it is possible to constitute an experience where it

would normally seem impossible and dangerous to do so. That Umm Kulthum sustains this possibility whilst retaining honour and respectability is testimony to the fact that there is a way to manipulate the rules that impose or constrain. In Butler's terms, this is a performance that is not political and a performance that accepts its limitations within a patriarchal system. However, it is still an enabling performative situation as it allows for a "feminine" experience; a secret that cannot be defined or an imaginary domain where a psychic reality can be lived.

Chapter four has looked at some of the narratives produced as a consequence of the Lebanese war. Hanan Al-Shaykh and Mai Ghoussoub's work has been examined alongside experts in the field of Arab women's war literature. Although I have engaged with several points emphasised by thinkers such as Miriam Cooke and Evelyn Accad, I have also had to go beyond them in order to formulate a fresh way of looking at this war literature and not just in terms of "writing as a liberating ideal." I have suggested that the experiences undergone by the protagonists of these authors' texts are experiences heavily implicated in re-configurations of gender expectations. I have argued that the situation of war creates an atmosphere where regulatory norms are more enfeebled and so paradoxically and involuntarily pave the way for a re-evaluation of those norms. Norms such as those related to sexual relations and marriage as well as active military participation in the war are challenged through the texts at hand. All the women presented in the novels endure the horror that is the war yet this selfsame war allows them the space from which to pitch their respective struggles and create engaging situations for themselves through initiating experiences that have been forbidden to them thus far. The performative situations also allow these respective female characters to position themselves against inquisitive western or westernised outsiders to present what types of interventions can be considered fruitful. A sympathetic but ignorant attitude towards third world women, as described by the characters in *Leaving Beirut: Women and the Wars Within*, *Beirut Blues* and *The Story of Zahra* is as disabling as no attitude at all. What these texts intrinsically suggest is that whilst we may find the suggestions within them disturbing we can still look to the experiences to understand the changes that need to be instigated outside of war situations. Though arising from the destruction of war, as represented through the lives of these women, these creative experiences need to be

understood as enabling symptoms of war. Thus, we accept the performative moment as that which seeks to break with the disabling past and imagines an enabling future.

In chapter two I presented the early work of Saadawi and demonstrated how her critique of medicine showed up the severe shock that young women experience when it comes to understanding the gender matrix. However, all the women in the novels, as I have shown, question this received understanding of gender and reveal the inadequacy of medicine to offer an alternative, seeped as it is in the politics of gender. However, Saadawi's characters do become empowered and do understand their experiences as transformative. Though they cannot always use this knowledge to change their circumstances, their performances are more than nominal. They retain their experience and understand it as constitutive of their identity. In other words, they take these performances seriously and believe them to be capable of great transformations for society in general and women in particular.

The example of Umm Kulthum revealed how widespread the idea of performativity can be. In this case, it is a performance as understood in theatrical terms yet it makes an impact on the everyday and the social. Umm Kulthum's manipulation of repertory disputes the frequent claim that feminism in the Middle East is not challenging enough, that it does not search local contexts and compare them with other local contexts in order to test efficacy. Butler's paradigm would suggest that Umm Kulthum subverted certain expectations within her singing; I want to elaborate on this and suggest that Umm Kulthum's singing re-worked gender stereotypes during her performance. This suggests to me that there is much work to be done on the role of performers in Middle Eastern fiction and cultural studies in order to study their methods of performativity. Umm Kulthum manipulated her repertoire to protect herself but also to allow her to offer a service to her people. In this context, conscious performativity offers immediate and tangible results.

Lastly, the fiction of Al-Shaykh and Ghoussoub operated to show that the situation of war shows up performances of acquiescence in 'peace' time. In contrast, during war time the protagonists reveal that they are able to constitute new sites of experience through engaging in non-traditional and even risky performances that would

not ordinarily form part of their daily experience. Rather than simply enjoy the benefits of their renegotiated experience, they use the experience to redress their ambiguous position within a patriarchal world. Again, their experience forms a part of their struggle for a renewed outlook on gender and sexuality, one that is not inextricably linked with power and fear. While Butler is content to poke fun at the expectations of her gender through identifying performances, the women I have discussed use the idea of the performative in their strategy of survival.

To conclude, I want to argue that this thesis has attempted to merge theories of performance and particular contexts of women's cultural experience in the Middle East in order to occasion a fruitful alliance. In the absence of a grounded Arab Feminism yet in the presence of a rich plethora of cultural production dealing with issues of gender, I have tried to suggest that a theory of performativity, with its non-compulsory political commitment, can re-formulate certain local contexts and render them consequential and effective if we re-introduce the concept of the willing subject. This will, in turn, inform western contemporary feminist and cultural theory and ensure a cross-cultural understanding of feminism that can learn and be influenced by other contexts. Also, through the imposition of certain theoretical directions I hope to have shown how these can be moulded to suit the context at hand and how in turn the context can re-inform the theoretical standpoint. In this way, theoretical and practical cross-cultural influence can flourish and pave the way for the investigation of other "radical ruptures" and a non-victimising outlook on other local situations. Taking this into consideration, we can keep alive notions of creativity and participation if we are open to the possibilities of the other's willed performances. Although we cannot always be certain of the political effectiveness and certitude of the performative episode, it is nevertheless a provocation to the prevailing official discourse as it continues to question the normative regime and regulatory norms, understood respectively in this thesis as medicine (in both chapter one and two), social honour codes (chapter three) and war (chapter four). An examination of how women in other cultures may re-configure the way that they have been accustomed to conceive of their gender is invaluable to feminist and gender theory. Research into transformative practises addressed in this thesis has proved to be useful as it has revealed the impossibility of using a fixed notion of gender as a mobilising tool; a common ground for

all women. Rather, this thesis has sought to examine the complicated issue of how we perceive, understand and re-work our respective attitude towards our gender through creative participation. I propose that this type of work continue in order to broaden what we call feminist theory today, a theory that should enable differing voices to be heard and considered in a non-discriminatory and tolerant environment; a theory that accepts as valid any performative moment that has proved effective to a performing agent.

HYSTEROEPILEPSY:
A YOUNG WOMAN WITH A
CONVULSIVE ATTACK
IN THE AUDITORIUM
February 7, 1888

Setting

Throughout his career at the Salpêtrière, Charcot dealt with the complicated diagnosis of hysteria, and much of his research effort, especially in the 1880s, was directed at the definition, analysis, and treatment of this disorder. The mechanism whereby emotions could determine disorders of neurologic import, including paralysis, blindness, anesthesia, and convulsions, continued to fascinate the professor until his death. Of all forms of hysteria, hysteroepilepsy was by far the most extraordinary and was often called *la grande hystérie.* Charcot divided the attacks into discrete phases, each detailed in this lesson, as a typical attack unfolded before the audience.

Lesson

(A female patient on a stretcher is brought into the amphitheatre.)

CHARCOT: Here is a patient whom you saw last Friday. After a fall she developed a lower extremity contracture with a deformity of her right foot. Nothing is more frequent in hysterics than posttraumatic contractures. What could one make of such a case? I told you last time how important it is to treat and cure these contractures as soon as they appear. But now here we have an exception to this rule, and we have waited and watched this woman three or four days without interfering. I told you why we did this - with cases like this woman's, you may, in fact, be able to treat this through provoking a second sort of attack. Often with such attacks, a change occurs in the patient and a contracture that

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seemed permanently fixed before can completely disappear. You may say to me, "Isn't there something immoral about waiting and provoking such crisis?" Surely not, if one can offer a treatment for a disorder that otherwise has no cure.

And I have shown you how there is a parallel relationship between transient hysteric attacks and the forms of hysteria like this one that last longer, five or six months. Often, those patients with contractures are not those who have fleeting hysteric attacks and vice versa. It is because of this doctrine, so soundly described by Dr. Pitres, that we can make use of hysterogenic points to provoke a transient attack as a form of therapy in the treatment of static hysteric signs. Now, this patient will be useful for demonstration. I will tell you, however, that although I am practically certain of the outcome of this experiment, man is less predictable than machinery, and I will not be totally surprised if, in fact, we do not succeed. I have also heard that animal experiments performed before an audience often give different results from those seen in the laboratory. This may be the case here, since this is, in fact, a comparable clinical experiment. If we do not get the desired result, it will still be a significant lesson for you.

This patient has a hysterogenic point on her back, another under her left breast, and a third on her leg. We will focus on this later one. If the attack proceeds as I believe it will, I will want you to focus on all its phases. This is not an easy task, and it took me many years to analyze the phenomena you will see. I first came to the Salpêtrière 15 or 20 years ago and inherited the well-run service of Dr. Delasiauve. From the first days I witnessed these hysteroeplieptic attacks, and was very circumspect in making my early diagnosis. I said to myself, "How can it be that such events are not described in the textbooks? How should I go about describing these events from my first-hand experience?" I was befuddled as I looked at such patients, and this impotence greatly irritated me. Then one day, when reflecting over all these patients as a group, I was struck with a sort of intuition about them. I again said to myself, "Something about them makes them all the same." Indeed we have a particular disease before us - primary hysteria beginning with an epileptic attack that resembles so closely real epilepsy that it may be called hysteroepilepsy, even though it has nothing to do with true epilepsy. The epileptoid phase can be divided into a tonic and clonic portion. Then, after a brief respite, the phase of exotic movements begins, under one of two predominant forms, either vocalizations or extreme opisthotonus (*arc en cercle*). Then, the third phase supercedes, and suddenly the

patient looks ahead at an imaginary image - indeed a hallucination, which will vary according to setting. The patient may look with great fear or with joy, depending on what she sees. You saw this in a woman the other day when I touched the abdomen in the ovarian region. She rose from her bed, hurried into the corner, and said the most distressing things.

But I want you to appreciate especially the unfolding of an attack. I tell you all this beforehand so that you can mark each phase, since they are hard to appreciate without preparation. Importantly, the attack is not a series of individual attacks, but a single event that unrolls sequentially. I use here the method of describing an archetype with the most complete and fully developed features described. This system is essential for all neurologic diagnosis; one must learn to identify the archetype. The epileptoid phase can be lacking and the attack begins with the movement phase, either vocalizations or back arching. Sometimes the movements never appear, and one only has hallucinations. There are as many as 20 variations, but if you have the key to the archetype, you immediately focus on the disease at hand and can say with confidence that in spite of the many possible variations, all these cases represent the same disorder. So, here we have this contracted foot that reportedly cannot be reduced either during the day or night. I have not specifically examined it at all times, but I surmise that this is in fact true. We are not dealing here with simulation, one of the greatest obstacles to neurology. (*The intern touches the hysterogenic point under the left breast.[1] Immediately, the attack begins.*)

CHARCOT: Now, here we have the epileptoid phase. Remember this sequence - epileptoid phase, arched back, then vocalisations. The arched back that you now see is rather pronounced. Now here comes the phase of emotional outbursts, which fuses with the back arching, and now there is a contracture phase. Such contractures can persist occasionally, and if this occurs in our patient, we will hardly have helped her. Now the epileptoid period starts again. Focus your attention this time on the two distinct epileptoid movement phases - first, the tonic, then the clonic. Note how this resembles true epilepsy. Now let us see if she is ovarian. (*The intern comes forward and compresses the ovarian region.*)

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[1] Charcot specifically said he would concern himself with the hysterogenic zone on the patient's leg, but the intern has proceeded otherwise.

CHARCOT: Do this in a real epileptic and nothing will happen, showing you immediately the difference between epilepsy and hysteroepilepsy.   In contrast to this situation, epilepsy has no direct link with the ovary.   See how the attack is momentarily suspended by abdominal compression.   Is it true that ovarian compression actually aborts the attack?   This manoeuvre is contested in a number of textbooks, where the authors act as if they know what they are talking about.   In both England and Germany there are some people who say they have never seen ovarian compression work, but these same people are those who are all too eager to generalise from their limited experience.   In that the phenomenon has been unequivocally demonstrated to occur in Paris, I find it only reasonable to believe it also occurs elsewhere.

Now we will release the compression, and you will see how the attack promptly recommences.   Here comes the epileptoid phase again.   Often outside of France, epileptoid behaviour is still called epilepsy.   I disagree with such terminology and distinctly call this hysteroepilepsy or hysteria major.   Here now comes the arched back.   Note the consistent pattern, always predictable and regular.

Her contracture persists throughout the entire period.   If we do not succeed in relieving it, we will try another tack later.   A therapeutic crisis like this one will have primed her for her next one, which is likely to be beneficial than if we had just tried it alone.   These attacks can last quite a time, perhaps all day.   But the patient recovers curiously without being the least bit tired or spent.   This represents another distinction between hysteroepilepsy and epilepsy itself.   When true epileptic fits merge with one another, this is called status epilepticus.   This is a severe disease often with a fatal outcome.   With hysteroepilepsy , on the one hand, attacks can follow one another and fuse together for one, two, or even three days and still be of no danger to the patient.   Status hysteroepilepticus is entirely different from status epilepticus.

Let us press again on the hysterogenic point.   Here we go again.   Occasionally subjects even bite their tongues, but this would be rare.   Look at the arched back, which is so well described in the textbooks.

PATIENT: Mother, I am frightened.

CHARCOT: Note the emotional outburst.   If we let things go unabated, we will soon return to the epileptoid behavior.   Now we have a bit of tranquillity, of resolution,

followed by a type of static contracted posture. I consider this latter deformity as an accessory phenomenon to the basic attack. (*The patient cries again: "Oh! Mother."*)

CHARCOT: Again, note these screams. You could say it is a lot of noise over nothing. True epilepsy is much more serious and also much more quiet.

I do not know what will be the final outcome for this woman's contractures, but I am glad to have been able to show you a rather typical attack. Let us review for emphasis: an epileptoid attack with two parts, tonic and clonic, followed by a phase of exotic movements, and then a phase of high emotional pitch, which, in this patient, is sad. All these are then followed by these strange contorted postures.

This patient was just a minute ago quite stiff, which is unusual. Most patients look quite natural and assume realistic poses during all of this. A final phase is quite rare and not seen in this patient - a period of delirium.

Here, after the phase of effective change, the cycle starts over and may continue for several days. Ovarian compression is effective only for some patients - these are called ovarian subjects. Clearly, all subjects are not ovarian. I can only emphasise again my stand on this, even though others have misquoted my opinions. From such misquotes, I have been said to advocate surgical operations in the form of ovarian ablation for hysteroepilepsy, such as are performed in America.[2] I am absolutely opposed to this. What I have said is still true; there are certain patients who have ovarian tenderness and in such patients, ovarian compression can stop an individual attack, although not the disease. When I say stop an attack, I mean that you can provide your patient with a respite. We will place around this patient's abdomen a compression belt, and she will temporarily be controlled. But some day she will have to remove it - she can't wear it forever, and she may well start her spells all over again. Ovarian compression is a preventative method and also a means to assure temporary peace. But I emphasise again, it is not a cure. Nor is

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[2] His comments on this unnamed American physician were even more venomous in his lesson from December 13, 1887: 'This colleague casts doubt on my sanity....Rather than campaigning that I would be better off keeping quiet, this New York associate would do best to read what I have written." The reference here is obscure but may relate to the discussion by Dr. E.C. Spitka at the American Neurological Association meeting of 1884 after G.L. Walton presented a paper called "A contribution to the study of hysteria bearing on the question of oophorectomy" (23). No printed condemnation of Charcot can be found in this meeting's notes, but Spitzka's vehement disdain of oophorectomy for hysteroepilepsy was evident in his reminding the audience of a case from Dr. Israel of Breslau. The latter demonstrated a postoperative cure and then said, "You have seen this patient, and have seen that she has been cured; but I will now say to you that only a superficial incision was made in the parietes of the abdomen, and that the peritoneum was not even touched. A sham operation was performed, and the ovaries are there yet, and the patient is cured" (p. 491).

ovarian resection. Do not be fooled, the ovary is not the only spot that can be compressed for effective control. The hysterogenic point itself has the same property. There are other body points where compression leads to spasms or even laughter. Now, this patient has a hysterogenic point beneath the breast, and firmer compression than that used to induce the attack would have worked to control it. It would never occur to anyone to remove a hysterogenic band from the patient to cure her hysteroepilepsy. I have never professed what has been attributed to me in this regard. I again have nothing to do with American practice and wash my hands of this entirely. I have always maintained that there are ovarian female hysterics, just as there are testicular male hysterics, but that these are mere subcategories of patients, Not all hysterics are ovarian or testicular. This is the truth, and I have never said otherwise. I am not of the type to suggest things that cannot be demonstrated experimentally. You know that, as a principal, I pay little attention to abstractions and have no use for preconceived notions. If you want to see clearly, you must take things exactly as they are.

It would seem by some accounts that hysteroepilepsy exists only in France; in fact, it has been said that it exists only at the Salpêtrière, as if I have created this condition by my own willpower. What a marvel this would be if I could, in fact, fabricate illnesses according to my whims or fantasies. But in fact all I am is a photographer. I describe what I see. And it is all too easy to show you that such phenomena have indeed occurred outside the walls of the Salpêtrière. First, the descriptions of possessed victims from the Middle Ages are full of similar behaviours. Dr. Richer,[3] in his monograph, showed how in the fifteenth century, the same syndrome occurred just as it does today. Furthermore, I have received numerous contemporary personal reports, primarily from North American sources, that have no inherent relationship to the Salpêtrière. These letters were inspired by my reports of hysteroepilepsy and demonstrate that elsewhere cases exist that are exactly comparable to our cases here.[4]

In England there is a highly distinguished physician, Dr. Gowers, who does not believe my descriptions. He sees things quite differently. In his treatise on epilepsy he

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[3] Paul Richer was both artist and neurologist and always a close collaborator of Charcot. The reference is to Richer's *Clinical Studies on Hysteroepilepsy* (with 105 drawings and 9 engravings), Delahaye et LeCrosnier, Paris, 1881.

[4] Shipps, W.H. (1883): Hysteroepilepsy as a complication of pregnancy. *NY Med. J., 38:699.*

uses the term "hysteroid conditions" after epilepsy. He considers the first "epileptic phase" that we have seem today as true epilepsy and agrees that all the subsequent phenomena you have witnessed occur, but he calls them postictal. Why? Because the patient's crisis always starts with what appears to be epileptic. We are seeing the same thing and calling it by different names. I maintain that the sequence of events is a single process and is fixed in stepwise relationship of each phase. It forms an entity called hysteroepilpsy, and I will not be convinced otherwise.[5]

Prior to my becoming director of this service, my predecessors introduced terminology to distinguish patients with these mixed attacks (*attaques à crises mixtes*) of hysteroepilepsy from those with distinct attacks of alternating hysteria and true epilepsy (*attaques à crises separées*). What does this latter term mean?

Let is look at another patient. (*Another woman comes in*). From time to time, this woman has various attacks. She is hysterical but also truly epileptic. By this I mean she has two distinct and essentially different diseases, both belonging to the same general family as would be, for instance, gout and rheumatism occurring in the same patient. Now the two conditions are separate and remain so throughout the patient's life. They do not fuse or evolve one into the other. Let us not incorrectly create a Darwinism of such events. The pivotal feature in the doctrine of evolution is time, meaning multiple generations, and when I speak of two separate disorders, I speak of them in the context of one person's brief life.

In the case of separated crisis, you have first an attack of hysteroepilepsy and then an attack of real epilepsy.[6] In such a case, after a hysterical outburst, a patient may be found to have bitten her tongue. When the staff gets the patient back to bed and examines her, they will say, "No, she has had a real seizure" if she has bit her tongue, and "Yes, it was a hysterical spell" if there was no tongue biting. The point here is that the two are entirely different types of events, although they may occur in the same patient. If one reports that a patient had a real seizure, this behaviour is taken seriously. If the same patient is said to have had a hysterical fit, even lasting six days, there would be no major

[5] Sir William Gowers (1845-1915) was younger than Charcot, although the two great neurologists' careers overlapped. The two were well aware of each other's work, but Charcot's references to Gowers in the *Tuesday Lessons* were often cool or negative. It is not clear whether they ever actually met or were even friendly.

concern. If she has a real seizure, she could progress to status epilepticus, so the physician is immediately notified. The temperature could rise. Life itself would be at stake. Therefore, the distinction between the two is paramount. In hysteroepileptic patients with a known hysterogenic point, you could compress it, not only experimentally, to induce hysterical attacks, but more importantly, to stop them; whereas, if the attack is really a seizure, such compression will serve absolutely no purpose.

I will add that whereas potassium bromide has a palliative effect on true epilepsy, it will not help hysteroepileptic events. You can give tons of it without changing these patients. Primary hysteria is not epilepsy. Only in the patient's family tree will the two link together. By this I mean that a hysteroepileptic parent can have a child with true epilepsy and vice versa. But to be truthful, they could just as well give birth to manics or other forms of psychosis as well. I have told you before that the neurologic tree has many branches, and each one bears different fruits.

Commentary

Charcot's work on hysteria can be divided into two phases, from 1870 to 1877, when he concentrated on its descriptive features, and after 1877, when his focus changed to the origins of the disorder. In the first period, Charcot submitted hysteria to the same vigorous examination he had made of other disorders. He studied all the patients available to him and descriptively isolated the patterns and the phases of a disorder that had so intimidated his colleagues and predecessors. In discouragement, the psychiatrist, Lasèque, wrote in 1884, "Hysteria has never been defined and never will be. So variable are its symptoms in terms of onset and character, duration and intensity that no single description can capture hysteria in all its forms".

To meet this challenge, Charcot used his method of careful observation and the principle of archetypes described in this lesson to develop a workable definition of the clinical hallmarks of hysteria. He recognised how anesthetic borders in hysteria split the body in the midline and how tunnel vision differed from other visual defects. These descriptions and distinctions have remained valuable clinical tools more than 100 years after their definition. This Tuesday lesson on hysteroepilepsy, although dating from 1888

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[6] The two states are further distinguished in that, in French, the word *attaque* is reserved for a hysterical fit

and hence long after the first period, was delivered in the spirit of the pure nosographic lesson of earlier years.

The critics of Charcot, however, remembered little of the first period and focused on the second, in which he attempted to penetrate the origins of hysteria. After 1877, when Charcot's famous "experiments" in the auditorium began, he made a number of extraordinary conclusions that deviated further and further from the anatomic logic of his earlier works. Today, Charcot is perhaps most associated with the issues of hysteria and hypnotism, and this association, although not directly dealt with in this lesson, is an important backdrop for these Tuesday lessons.

Charcot's famous clinicanatomic method was already firmly established as the hallmark of the Salpêtrière school when Charcot began his second period of work on hysteria. In this method, clinical phenomena were described in exhaustive detail and separated into the archetypes and variations and further understood by analysing their anatomic lesions. Charcot was forced to look elsewhere for this second important step. Although his fundamental conclusion - that the origin of hysteria was emotional - was in the end substantiated, his curious methods and intermediate conclusions were so labyrinthine that they marked a striking contrast with the remarkable clarity of thought in the rest of his work. The exotic allure of these studies, however, brought such celebrity to Charcot that his other work was rapidly obscured in the public and medical eye.

Trillat elegantly synthesised a large number of papers and lessons. In brief, Charcot began to conduct regular hypnotic experiments in the amphitheatre in order to study hysteroepilepsy, reversible contractures, and other signs of hysteria. He found that hypnotism could be used to induce at least two distinct mental alterations - catalepsy (eyes open) and lethargy (eyes closed). The relationships between hysterical neurologic signs in these two states became a seeming key for Charcot in his quest to understand the basis of hysteria. Charcot's statement in this lesson that if the hysteroepilepsy did not improve her contracture, another therapy would, was likely an allusion to hypnosis.

Charcot noticed that during the somnambulic trance, he could induce contractures or alter maintained postures that disappeared when the lethargy lifted. On the other hand, contractures could be made to persist if the patient passed into the cataleptic phase (eyes

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and the word *accès* connotes a real epileptic seizure.

open) without lifting the trance. This "awake" state but with hysteric signs could become the model of hysteria. By passing the patient back into lethargy, Charcot could therapeutically remove the induced contracture.

This remarkable sequence was apparently repeated and embellished on innumerable occasion and gave rise to Charcot's tenet that hysteria and hypnotism were irrevocably linked. To be suggestible to hypnosis became synonymous with hysteria, an issue that would polarise French neurology in the coming years between the Paris (Charcot) school and that in Nancy (Bernheim). In this regard, Charcot lost favor, and hypnotism and hysteria again became established as independent but sometimes associated issues.

In retrospect, Charcot's methods for penetrating the mysteries of hysteria seem particularly forced and indirect. In attempting to impose on hysteria the clinicoanatomic strategy he had used previously with success, he faltered. Whereas in the other conditions he studied Charcot found significant information through a careful interview, little could be gleaned from the hysteric. As Havelock Ellis wrote:

> He was primarily a neurologist , the bent of his genius was towards the investigation of facts that could be objectively demonstrated...For purely psychological investigation he had no liking and probably no aptitude. Anyone who was privileged to observe his methods of work at the Salpêtrière will easily recall the master's towering figure, the disdainful expression, sometimes, it seemed, even a little sour. The questioned addressed to the patient were cold, distant, sometimes impatient.....One may well believe, also, that a man whose superficial personality was so haughty and awe-inspiring to strangers, would, in any case, have had the greatest difficulties in penetrating the mysteries of a psychic world so obscure and elusive as that presented by the hysterical.

In spite of his enormous effort, in the end Charcot regretted his work on hysteria and planned to rework his basic tenets. In speaking to Guinon a few days before his death, he said: "Our conception of hysteria has become obsolete. A total revamping of this area of neurologic disease is required." He also regretted and feared the role he had played in making hypnotism so widely recognised. As Gilles de la Tourette recalled,

> Alas, he never actually said it, but I know positively that he regretted his victory, for after all this, the studies on hypnotism so completely disdained before his time, now expanded much too far in his opinion. Doctors who before where unknown in Paris or their

community now appeared before the public as grand healers, as first rate hypnotists....The scientific path followed by Charcot, that of the physical determinants of hypnotism, was completely abandoned.

With the errors and unanswered puzzles from this period in mind, one should not, however, forget the pragmatic impact that Charcot's conclusion had on hysteria. Indeed, his methods and curious reliance on magnets, electricity, and metals today seem exotically paramedical, but Charcot nevertheless succeeded in categorising the symptoms and establishing the emotional origin of this mysterious illness. These contributions opened the way for Charcot's successors and students, including Freud, to address the questions of therapy. As Gilles de la Tourette remarked, "The discovery....gave hope or a cure for an entire category of patients who up to now had been considered incurable and treated as such."

Although Charcot studied hysteroepilepsy in the greatest detail, his introduction to the disorder was not altogether voluntary. Charcot was forcibly introduced to the vast population of institutionalised hysterics primarily because of administrative revamping at the Salpêtrière. The Saint Laure building by the mid-1800s became so dilapidated that the hospital administration decided to vacate it. In this building, Dr. Delasiauve's service combined a chaotic mix of insane patients intermingled with some epileptics and hysterics. One can only smile at Charcot's allusion in this lesson to a "well-run" service. As part of the administrative reorganisation, this conglomerate was finally analysed and patients were assigned new quarters, depending on whether or not they were psychotic.

The nonpsychotic hysterics and epileptics, as representatives of *néuroses,* were this left together in immediate proximity of one another. Charcot, as senior physician at the Salpêtrière, inherited the newly formed service. Pierre Marie wrote of the consequences of this decision:

> The results of such a change could not fail being noticed. While the fits of the unfortunate epileptics were not in any way modified, it was quite different as far as the hysterics were concerned. Living in this way amongst epileptics, seeing them fall and taking care of them during their seizures after they had fallen, the young hysterics became susceptible to powerful impressions, and because of their tendencies to mimic, which is so characteristic of their neurosis, they duplicated in their hysterical fits every phase of a genuine epileptic seizure. The tonic phase, the clonic phase, then a phase of hallucination, sometimes

terrifying to behold, but more often agreeable and pleasant to which they added their bizarre postures, pictures of which have been so skilfully drawn by the agile pen of Paul Richer.

The three major phases of the classic hysteroepileptic spell were elegantly draws by Paul Richer (Fig. 23): the epileptoid phase; the acrobatic (clownism) phase, either with elaborate rocking motions or the famous back arching (*arc en cercle*); and the emotional phase with sad, happy, or frightened affect. After these, partial consciousness was regained, and the patient sometimes wandered in delirium. Strange contorted postures could occur in any phase. The delirium was variously termed the forth period, or an aftermath, of the hysteroepileptic spell. Average durations of each phase summarised by Richer were as follows: epileptoid, 1 to 3 min; emotional, 5 to 15 min; delirium, several minutes, sometimes even an hour (21).

As this lesson indicates, the frequency of hysteroepilepsy at the Salpêtrière became a heated topic in neurology, and offensive accusations against Charcot's scientific and personal character resulted. In retrospect, one can only wonder whether the Salpêtrière staff saw hysteroepilepsy so much more often than their English, German or French colleagues outside the Salpêtrière, not because of medical, scientific, or cultural differences among populations, but because of the curious whims of early hospital administrators.

Hysteroepilepsy, as a term, was disliked by Charcot, and always left him uneasy. Grammatically, "hystero" is left as an adjective and the noun is epilepsy, whereas Charcot's meaning was that the disease was in fact fundamentally hysteria with an epileptoid presentation. In the lesson of Tuesday, March 19, 1889, he admitted, "My respect for tradition has made me use the term hysteroepilepsy in the past, but I must confess it bothered me because it is absurd." Gilles de la Tourette
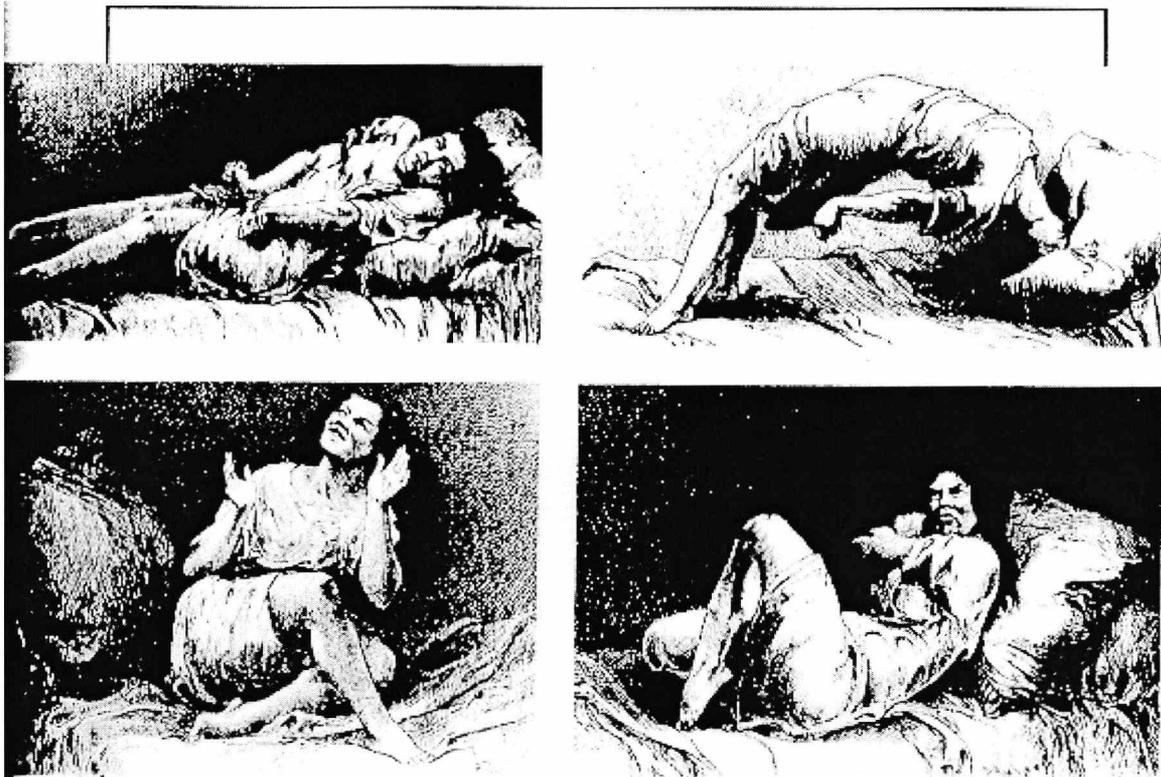
Figure 23. The phases of a typical hysteroepileptic spell, drawn by Paul Richer for his textbook (21): Phase 1 (**top left**), epileptoid period with predominant tonic spasms; phase 2 (**top right**) exotic postures, characterized by back arching (*arc en cercle*) or rhythmic body rocking of elaborate intensity (*clownisme*); phase 3 (**bottom left** and **right**), emotionally expressive postures that could be happy, even ecstatic, or sad, frightened, and distressed. During this third period the patient often spoke or shouted.

wrote that Charcot later revised his attitude still further and quoted the professor as having said, "One must no longer use this term. It can only lead to confusion, as hysteria and epilepsy are in no way related."

Charcot stressed in this presentation, first that hysteroepilepsy was only one of many manifestations of hysterical behaviour and, second, that it was distinctly different from true epilepsy seen in association with hysteria. These were new concepts at the time, and his patient demonstrations were first attempts at differentiating true epilepsy from pseudo-seizures:

Epilepsy would only be the visible form of the illness, but would have nothing to do with the actual foundation of the disorder. In other words, in such cases, we are dealing always and exclusively with hysteria, but hysteria taking on the appearance of epilepsy.

Unfortunately, the same terminology, hysteroepilepsy, was used by other authors to mean epilepsy in association with exotic behaviours. Hammond colorfully wrote in his *On Certain Conditions of Nervous Derangement* that

the combination of hysteria with epilepsy has long been recognised as one of the most frightful affections to be found in the whole range of neurological medicine. It is the condition which more frequently than any other led to the idea in former times....that demons entered the body.....This is the formula which exorcised the devils who had entered the body of the hysteroepileptic girl whose case I have just detailed: R. Zinci bromidi 3I; sodii bromidi 3I; aqua; 3iv; M.ft.sol.Sig. A teaspoon in water 3 times a day. Demons of the present time have a great antipathy to the bromides, and in most cases, they refuse to dwell in any body into which any one of the saints of that company obtains a lodgement.

Charcot was emphatic that hysteroepilepsy was not a new diagnosis and that it should be viewed as a manifestation entirely within the repertoire of ordinary hysteria:

Is the appearance of tonic movements something new or unheard of in the classic description of ordinary hysteria? Certainly not. It is not at all exceptional in an ordinary case of hysterical behaviour, where no one seriously would suggest epilepsy, to see stiffening similar to the tonic movements of a true epileptic attack. Such stiffness can occur at the beginning of a hysteric episode. Everyone agrees on this point....From this, it is likely that hysteria in the guise of epilepsy is only an exaggerated form, the highest development of this tonic variety of ordinary hysteria.

The seemingly high frequency of hysteria in all its forms in the Salpêtrière of Charcot's time may seem remarkable to a twentieth century neurologist. In the biography of the professor, however, Guillain compared the number of cases of hysteria seen and diagnosed in the Tuesday clinics (244 out of 3,168 consultations) under Charcot and the number he himself diagnosed at the same institution over a comparable period in our century. Substituting the diagnosis of hysteria with psychoneurosis or "functional troubles," he calculated the same number of cases in both instances: "These patients had exactly the same symptoms as those who saw Charcot in consultation. In fact, the patients have not

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changed since Charcot's time, but the terminology applied to them has." While it is unlikely that Guillain's patients were so flamboyant as Charcot's, with the exotic sequences described so vividly in this lesson, the change in diagnostic terminology may account for some of the differences in diagnoses over such short periods of time.

Charcot described himself in this lesson as a photographer whose charge was to record the remarkable phenomena he saw. In fact, this metaphor is particularly appropriate for Charcot, whose fascination with photography induced him to develop a special section of medical photography at the Salpêrtière. Duchenne, when he came to Paris and started collaborative work with Charcot, shared his secrets of photography, and Charcot in turn shared his knowledge of microscopy. The medical photography laboratory was directed by Londe, and all medical illustrations and sculptures were under the direction of Paul Richer, formerly an intern on Charcot's service who eventually became Professor of Creative Anatomy at the National School of Fine Art in Paris. The drawings, sculptures, and photographs that recorded the scientific material available to the Salpêtrière staff were used as active teaching aids in the Charcot presentations. Some of these are still at the Salpêtrière, but many have been kept by Richer's descendants. Charcot was amongst the first teachers to use projection aids in teaching.

The integration of art and medical science was especially developed in two books by Charcot and Richer, *The Demoniacs in Art* and *The Deformed and Diseased in Art.* In both volumes, the authors collected works of art, paintings, mosaics, and tapestries depicting medical illness. Of the former work, Charcot said, "This retrospective study demonstrates that hysteria is in no way, as some claim, a sickness typical of our century an that in the archives of the past there is also proof that hysteria attacks the male as well as the female."

In this regard, Charcot argued tenaciously against the prejudice that hysteria was a disease confined to women. He gathered male cases for the Tuesday classes and devoted full lectures to male hysteria in the Friday course. In introducing six such cases, he said:

> Male hysteria is not at all rare, and just among us gentlemen, if I can judge from what I see each day, these cases are often unrecognised even by distinguished doctors. One will concede that a young and effeminate man might develop hysterical findings after experiencing significant stress, sorrow or deep emotions. But that a strong and vital worker, for instance, a railway engineer, fully integrated into the society, and never prone to emotional instability before, should become hysteric-just as a women might- this seems

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to be beyond imagination. And yet, it is a fact - one which me must get used to. Such was the case for so many other ideas which are today universally accepted because they are based in demonstrable evidence, but which met for so long only skepticism and often sarcasm - it is only a matter of time.

Freud recounted how disturbed Charcot became when the German school of neurology resisted the idea of male hysteria and suggested pejoratively that if it occurred in males, it occurred only in French males. He was especially delighted to diagnose a Prussian grenadier as hysteric when he had formally been termed reflex-epileptic.

Male hysteria was fundamentally the same as seen in women but differed in some clinical respects. Whereas variety and fluctuation of signs typified the disorder in females, male hysteria usually involved one or two signs that were static in the individual. Examples included hemianesthenia, tunnel vision, or static bizarre contractures.

Of all Charcot's contributions on hysteria, his idenitification of male hysteria and its frequent relation to minor trauma may have been his most important. As the industrial era progressed, the number of unexplained work-related illnesses increased enormously, and Charcot demonstrated how these could often be explained as hysterical. These observations laid the foundations for understanding the innumerable peculiar syndromes encountered during World War 1 after seemingly healthy soldiers experienced minor trauma in an emotionally pitched situation. Charcot suggested that the trauma created a transient hypnotic state in the midst of which an autosuggestion induced the paralysis. As such, the word "hysteria," with its etymologic link to the uterus, was scorned by Charcot: "Keep in mind - this should not require much effort - that the word 'hysteria' means nothing. Little by little you will acquire the habit of speaking of hysteria in men without thinking in any way of the uterus" (Tuesday, October 30, 1888).

As he stood in front of the patient and audience, Charcot cautioned that the induction of the hysteroepileptic event might not succeed, likening the setting to an animal experiment. This seemingly crass comment comparing a human to a laboratory animal should not be misconstrued. Charcot was a passionate lover of animals and abhorred vivisection and cruel animal experimentation. Reserved, and with little time for inane, but polite conversation, he was known to caress, play, and talk incessantly to his many pets, which included several dogs and a South American monkey. This playful monkey in fact ate in a high chair in the dining room with the austere professor and caused great

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delight reportedly when he snatched bananas from his master's plate. Above Charcot's laboratory entrance was a famed plaque that read, "You will find no dog laboratory here."

Hysteria was altogether distinct from malingering, and although the two disorders could occur simultaneously, Charcot felt equipped to separate the two in any individual patient. He, however, marvelled: "How sly, clever and unexpectedly tenacious these women can be when in the midst of their mental disorder, they try to fool people, especially when the would-be victim is a doctor." In the face of this challenge, Charcot conducted experiments to separate by objective data the malingerer from the hysteric. For the latter, he chose a patient with hypnotically induced catalepsy. He monitored chest excursion and the ability of a patient to maintain muscle posture during prolonged arm extension. Whereas the hysteric maintained a smooth muscle contraction and quiet smooth respirations throughout the task, the malingerer showed muscle fatigue and wavering of the extended arm along with progressively laboured breathing.

Even with these studies, however, many medical and nonmedical contemporaries of Charcot remained unconvinced that malingerers did not pollute the Salpêtrière roster of hysterics. Surely the format of the presentations before a high-pitched and attentive audience must have encouraged some added flamboyant behaviours. Whether these crises had a therapeutic effect in themselves, as Charcot suggested in this lesson, can only be conjectured. In fact, usually Charcot advocated isolation as the proper treatment for hysterics. While accepting credit for this innovation, he remarked in a footnote that Jean Weir (1564) had also urged the removal of possessed girls (in Charcot's opinion, hysterics) away from parents and friends to suitable religious homes away from society's influences. In this way, they could be purged and cured of their "demonical possession."
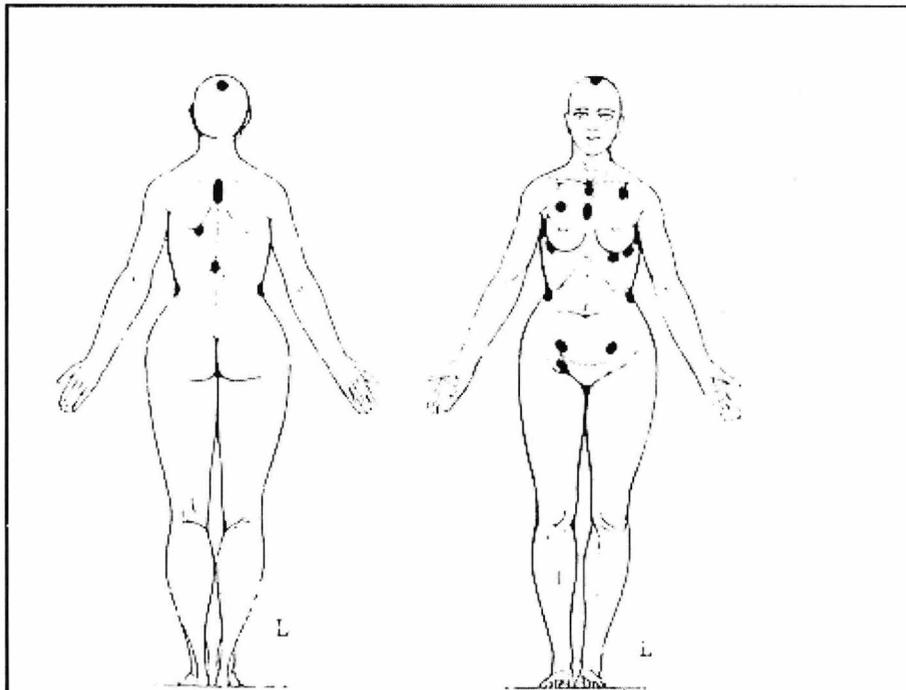
Figure 24. The mapping of a patient's hysterogenic zones, showing that she was ovarian but also sensitive in many other body regions. (From *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière*, 2:182, 1878).
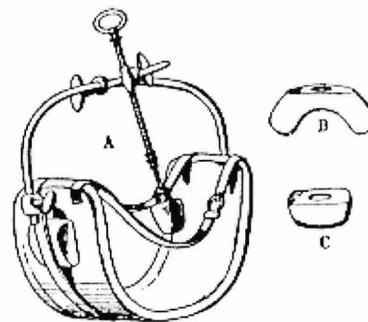
Figure 25. The ovarian compressor belt, used to prevent hysteric attacks in ovarian patients. The compressor was directed at the hysterogenic point and then tightened. (From *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière*, 2:165, 1878.)

Another treatment for the subgroups of female patients with ovarian tenderness was the ovarian compressor belt. In figures 24 and 25, typical hysterogenic zones are mapped, and

the belt used by Charcot to avert major paroxysms in susceptible patients is shown. After seeing the apparatus, one can better appreciate Charcot's comment from this lesson: "But someday she will have to remove it - she cannot wear it forever."

Charcot commented with a certain severity on W.R. Gowers' opinion of hysteroepilepsy. Charcot's interpretation of Gowers' view as transcribed here, however, was not entirely fair. The Englishman maintained that in true epilepsy, hysterical behaviour could be a postictal phenomenon, but he quite distinctly distinguished these seizures from the hysteroepilepsy events described by Charcot. He recognised the same disorder, commenting that the contortions and spasms often had a willed look and that consciousness was "changed" but not lost. The clinical stigmata of hysteria and sequence of events in hysteroepilepsy, however, seemed to differ when once crossed the English channel, as Gowers' wrote:

> In this country, the attacks rarely correspond closely to this description; they present similar phenomena, but in less regular sequence, and often in isolation form. The initial stage seldom presents any close resemblance to an epileptic fit. There is often initial tonic rigidity, and this is sometimes followed by a form of clonic spasm, succeeded by the co-ordinated movements, but the clonic spasm differs from that which occurs in epilepsy, and not unfrequently the patient passes at once into the violent co-ordinated movements, in which tonic and clonic spasm occurs from time to time.

Since Charcot admitted that fragments of the sequence could appear isolation and that phases could be skipped and sequences reversed, the two authorities' views were probably not nearly so antagonistic as Charcot insisted.

The icy tone used in reference to Gowers is found not only in this lesson, but recurs and suggests that the two clinical neurologic giants of the day may have been strongly competitive. No documentation or letters of correspondence shed ready light on the topic. Perhaps it is important that Gowers was younger than Charcot, and the professor had never surrounded himself with overly independent thinkers from the younger generation of his own institution. His son and H. Meige wrote a "Song of the Salpêtrière" in 1890 that today lines, in its handwritten version, the intern portfolio at the Salpêtrière Library. Even in jest, it undoubtedly captured the ambience that surrounded the professor and the expected requirements of working on his service:

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In (the Salpêtrière) is the famous unit of

Old man Charcot, our leader

The man cannot utter a word

Without the whole universe repeating it.

Rows of hysterics, amyotrophics,

Those with Menières disease or multiple sclerosis,

Fill the wards of the , Salpêtrière, the Salpêtrière

After Charcot's death, students continued to pursue his theories of hysteria. In France, Janet, Gilles de la Tourette, and Babinski followed the dictums of Charcot, although to some extent they abandoned much of the extreme ideology of their teacher. The most significant of Charcot's students in the history of hysteria, however, was Sigmund Freud. In 1885-86 he came to Paris briefly and was quickly inspired by the French professor's masterful teaching. Whereas several French and American reports of Charcot's behaviour emphasised his cold, severe attitude towards his patients, Freud found him refreshingly warm in contrast to the "severe superficiality" of the Viennese professors with whom he had studied.

After his brief sojourn, Freud returned to Vienna, presented the ideas of the Salpêtrière to his colleagues and began a career that would lead him to study hysteria, hypnotism, and the development of the human psyche. He never forgot his French professor and always kept the lithograph of Brouillet's 1887 oil painting, "A Clinical Lesson at the Salpêtrière." He treasured this souvenir of his studies, as his eldest daughter recalled:

It held a strange attraction for me in my childhood, and I often asked my father what was wrong with the patient. The answer I always got was that she was "too tightly laced," with a moral of the foolishness of being so. The look he would give the picture made me feel then, even as a young child, that it evoked happy or important memories in him and was dear to his heart.

To find out what happened to the exotic hysterics of the Salpêtrière after Charcot's death, Baudoin searched the hospital roster in the 1900s. He never studied directly with Charcot but trained at the Salpêtrière several years after the professor's death and hence had direct access to some of the same hysterics Charcot had studied so intensively. He was particularly interested in the famous Blanche (Marie) Wittman of the Brouillet painting whose spells were the archetype of Charcot's description. Baudoin remarked that

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Blanche ceased to have her spells in the early years after Charcot's death when the hypnotic experiments passed from favour. She became a radiology technician with the Salpêtrière system around 1900 and was one of the first victims of radiation-induced cancer. She lost successively her fingers, hands and arms during this protracted and painful disease but never had another hysterical spell. With time, Baudoin became close to the dying victim, he finally asked her the pivotal question:

> "Listen Blanche, I know there are topics that you do not like to discuss. But as long as you have known me, I have never been one to joke. I want you to tell me something about your episodes in the past." After a moment she replied, "Allright, what do you want to know?" "It has been said that all these spells were simulated, that the patients just pretended to sleep and thereby made fun of the doctors. Is there any truth in that?" "None whatsoever; those are lies. We had these spells and were in these lethargic states because we could not do otherwise. Besides, it wasn't a bit of fun." And she added, "Simulation! Do you think it would have been easy to fool Dr. Charcot? Oh yes, lots of fakes tried; he gave then one look and said, 'Be still'."

APPENDIX B

UMM KULTHUM, *AROUH LI MEEN*, CASSETTE, SIDE A, 15 MINUTES

APPENDIX C

UMM KULTHUM, *YA MSAHIRNI*, CASSETTE, SIDE A, 30 MINUTES

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